

## Improving Junior High School students' vocabulary achievement by using WhatsApp

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**Abstract.** Mobile messaging applications are increasingly widespread among the new generation of students in Indonesia. They use WhatsApp, Line, and the other messaging applications. This study aimed to improve students' vocabulary achievement by using WhatsApp of VII C students of SMPS Panca Setya Sintang in the academic year 2022/2023. In one cycle, the writer used classroom action research on 19 male and 11 female students. The writer sent vocabulary instructions electronically for two meetings. The multiple-choice test was conducted after each meeting. The results showed that 63,33 % of the students could improve their achievement in the second meeting. It means that the use of WhatsApp in teaching vocabulary can improve students' achievement. Referring to the writer's experience in conducting action research, the writer offers a suggestion. It is suggested that English teachers can use WhatsApp as an alternative application to improve students' vocabulary achievement.

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### INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is crucial to English language teaching because, without sufficient vocabulary, learners cannot be incorporated into all four language skills. It is why students should construct their vocabulary knowledge to enable them in such speaking, writing, listening, and reading activity. Having adequate vocabulary will help the L2 learners communicate actively, produce many texts in the target language, and comprehend the listening or reading text (A'izah, 2020). Someone will not experience a wrong understanding when communicating with others because of their vocabulary mastery. In addition, by having a large vocabulary, it will be easier for someone to get information. Most content on the internet, including educational and academic resources, is written in English. By mastering English vocabulary, one can access the latest information, scientific articles, books, journals, and other resources unavailable in other languages. Reading and understanding English vocabulary will also make learning more about topics of interest possible.

Nowadays, to align with current trends and changes, L2 practitioners have to welcome and incorporate the new technology and its vast possibilities (Safitri, 2021). Gooniband Shooshtari, Jalilifar, and Khazaie investigated the effect of the application of mobile devices on teaching English vocabulary items and found that the use of the application was successful in the performance of the semi-illiterates (as cited in Safitri, 2021). Taki and Khazaei investigated the use of mobile phones to present vocabulary in written and pictorial forms (cited in Safitri, 2021).

Mobile messaging applications are increasingly widespread among the new generation of students in Indonesia. They use WhatsApp, Instagram, Messenger, Line, and other

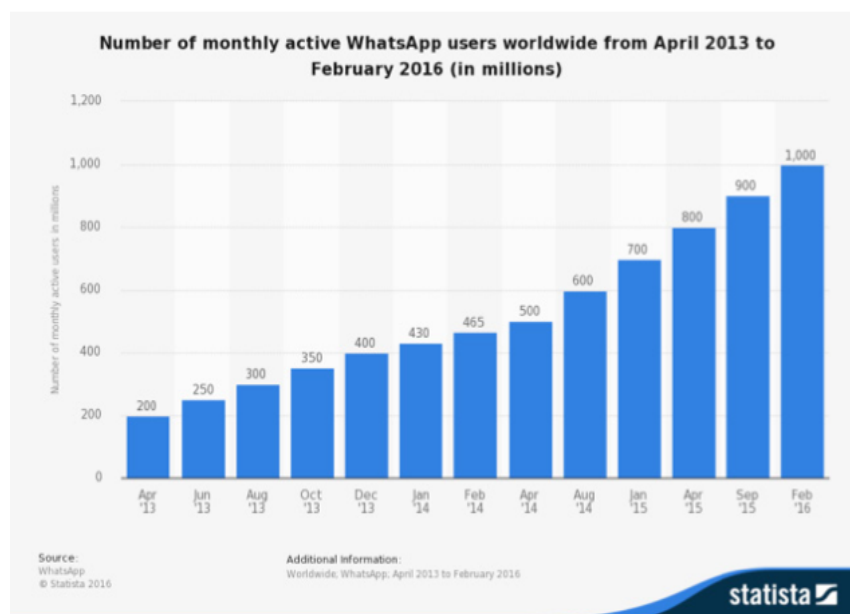
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messaging applications. Mobile phone use has become one of the human needs in this digital era. As one of the messaging applications, WhatsApp allows users to communicate by sending text messages, voice messages, documents, videos, and pictures.

WhatsApp is one of the evolutions in technology that is ordinarily operated on particular mobile phones. As the smartphone became in demand in the community, many messaging services were initiated, but WhatsApp has become widespread among them. Connection through mobile phones, particularly WhatsApp Messenger, has become simpler, faster, and cheaper (Han & Keskin, in Hashemifardnia, Namaziandost, & Esfahani, 2018). A survey analysis by Kumar and Sharma (2017) showed that WhatsApp is one of the most popular mobile applications worldwide. The following graph shows its growth of users in recent years.



**Figure 1.** Number of WhatsApp users  
(Kumar & Sharma, 2017)

WhatsApp is one of the online learning platforms that enhances writing activities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Pebriantini, Hasanahwinny, & Riznanda, 2022). As the application specifically designed for mobile phones, it has not taken much time for WhatsApp, which has become a part of users' daily lives, to be used in education. Consequently, together with the individual and social effects of WhatsApp, the researchers started to examine its usability and effects on education. Smith (in Cetinkaya, 2017) stated that using instant messaging platforms in education can potentially increase learning. Teachers often use WhatsApp because, in reality, all students have WhatsApp on their smartphones, and are always accessed by students, so it is easier for teachers to implement online learning through WhatsApp Messenger (Salsabella, 2020).

WhatsApp Messenger/chat is a cross-platform instant messaging application that allows iPhone, BlackBerry, Android, Windows Phone, and Nokia smartphone users to exchange text, image, video, and audio messages for free. In addition to basic messaging, WhatsApp provides group chat and location-sharing options. WhatsApp Messenger is a proprietary, cross-platform instant messaging application for smartphones. In addition to text messaging, users can send each other images, video, and audio media messages. Riyanto (in Fattah, 2015) claims that WhatsApp can be used not only to socialize with friends but also to study and even learn a new language

(Melda, 2020). The use of WhatsApp as a means of learning can be lined up with the importance of using mobile phones in education because this application can be used on mobile phones. Berger (in Fattah, 2015) states several things obtained when using mobile learning, which is free and can be used anywhere and anytime, including inside and outside the classroom, the collaboration between students who are geographically separated, network connections that are transparent, remote sensing, and information integration.

According to Kheryadi (Afsyah, 2019), the implementation of using WhatsApp is one of the useful tools to help students with communicative language learning. For instance, Amry (in Fauzi, 2021) found that students who were treated using mobile learning through WhatsApp mobile instant messaging performed better on the achievements and attitudes than those who were subjected only to face-to-face instruction in the classroom.

Using WhatsApp can help L2 learners learn more vocabulary items. The indispensable role of vocabulary learning in language learning for all four skills has been declared by many L2 educators ( Taylor, in Hashemifardnia et al., 2018). According to Moghadam, Zainal, and Ghaderpour (2012), vocabulary knowledge plays a significant role in reading exams, and reading investigation has constantly developed a word knowledge element on which vocabulary test load positively. Vocabulary knowledge is fundamental since lexical errors are the most recurring ones, and concurrently, they form an important obstruction to communication (Moghadam et al., 2012).

WhatsApp is a free smartphone messenger application that works across multiple platforms and is widely used by people. WhatsApp uses the internet to send messages, images, audio, and videos. WhatsApp, owned by Facebook, now has one billion users worldwide and is the biggest online messenger application. Founded in 2009 by ex-Yahoo employees, it started as a small start-up and swelled to 250,000 users in just a few months. In 2014, it was acquired by Facebook and has seen continued growth, reaching more than one billion users.

WhatsApp was the most familiar tool, as all subjects used the application for communication (Kheryadi, 2017). Among the subject, 82% of them actively communicated with WhatsApp groups to practice their English, and the same number of subjects agreed that it increased their confidence and bravery to communicate using the target language. While most students (74%) liked sharing new information on WhatsApp, the rest confirmed that they rarely commented on the group's conversation but were interested in reading and following their chats.

Considering the importance of developing vocabulary in language learning, as well as the popularity of WhatsApp as one of the most used messaging applications today, the authors decided to conduct action research to increase students' vocabulary achievement at the junior high school (SMP) level by using WhatsApp as a learning tool. The research reveals a worrying fact in the field that many grade VII students do not master English vocabulary. It is known that vocabulary plays an important role in mastering English. Vocabulary is a foundation in English language learning. Without adequate vocabulary, students will have difficulties comprehending texts, expressing thoughts, and communicating fluently in the target language. It is why systematic and sustainable efforts must be made to overcome the lack of student vocabulary at the grade VII level.

## **METHOD**

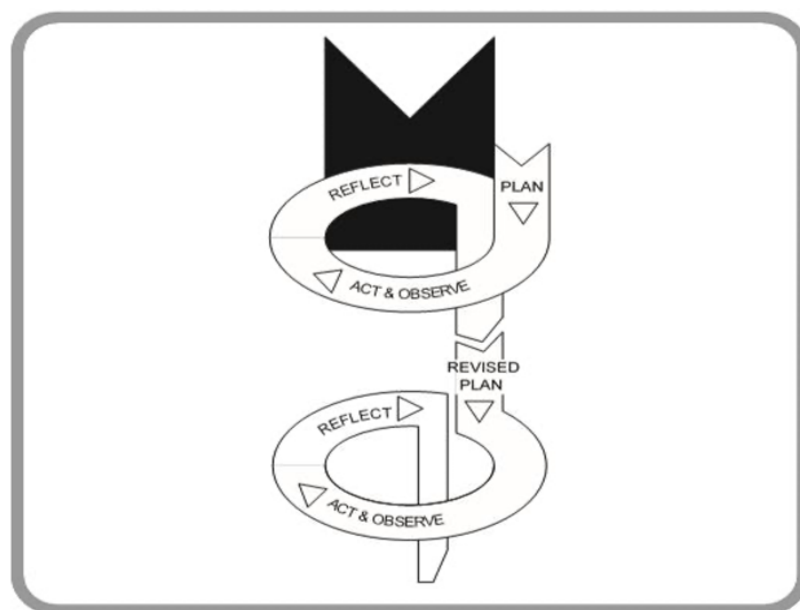
The writers conducted Classroom Action Research ( CAR ). There is some definition of action research stated by some experts. According to Phillips and Kevin (2010), action research is a "practitioner-based" form of research. In other words, it is done by the teacher in their

classrooms' pedagogy and student learning. While Ferrance (2000). Mills ( in Creswell, 2012) stated that action research designs are systematic procedures done by teachers (or other individuals in an educational setting) to gather information about and subsequently improve how their particular educational setting operates their teaching and student learning.

From those definitions, the writer concludes that action research is a method that can be done individually or in a team by teachers, researchers, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching or learning environment to collect the data on the lesson. They then analyzed it to decide the future lesson because the teachers wish to evaluate the success of certain activities and procedures.

The design of this study was practical action research. According to Creswell (2012), in practical action research, the teachers seek to research problems in their classrooms to improve their student's learning and professional performance. The English teacher acted as the researcher, and the other English teacher acted as the collaborator.

Some steps need to be taken in doing this research. The steps in action research mean the way to conduct action research. In one cycle of action research, there are 4 phases. They are planning, acting, observing and reflecting. In this study, the writers conducted one cycle of 2 meetings. The process of action research can be seen in the following figure:



**Figure 2.** The spiral of action research  
by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005)

The writers took VII C as the subject of the research. The subjects were 30 students, including 19 boys and 11 girls. The students installed WhatsApp on their cell phones, tablets or laptop. The teacher formed a WhatsApp group ( Vocab Learners of VII C ) and added participants. They electronically received vocabulary instructions once a week. The students could have a discussion with their friends in the group related the materials given. The materials are in the form of pictures or videos. The materials were taken from the coursebook that they have. The students had a vocabulary test in the form of a multiple-choice test for each meeting.

There are two techniques of data collecting in this research. They are observing and giving a test. Then, the researcher used triangulation to keep the research's validity as Mason

recommended (in Koshy, 2005). Furthermore, he gave the way of establishing validity in action research, such as finding various means of confirmation, such as arranging for a colleague to observe, arranging for audio or video recordings, and asking other participants for their versions.

The researcher used an observation checklist and field notes to guide the observation. The test is also given to check the result of action.

1. Observation checklist, an observation checklist is a form of observation paper that will be used in this research. The observation checklist will be used to observe the condition while teaching and learning in the classroom.
2. Field Note is some notes constructed by the collaborator when the researcher acted as the English teacher who will apply the technique to the students. The collaborator and the teacher will use it to evaluate the process of teaching and learning finished.
3. Individual test, the researcher used test in collecting data to know the students' improvement in each cycle. The test in this research is individual in the form of the multiple-choice test.

After collecting the data, the writer will analyze the result of the data in each cycle. The researcher calculates several points in this research.

1. Students' Mean Score, In this activity, the writer will calculate the mean of students' reading score per cycle by referring to Sudjana (in Indahwati & Abdullah, 2019); the formula is as follows :

$$x = \frac{\sum x}{\sum n}$$

M = Mean

$\sum x$  = individual score

$\sum n$  = number of students

2. Percentage of students who passed minimum passing grade at 75. The writer will use a formula according to Sudijono (in Indahwati & Abdullah, 2019) as follows :

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

P = the class percentage

F = total percentage score

N = number of students

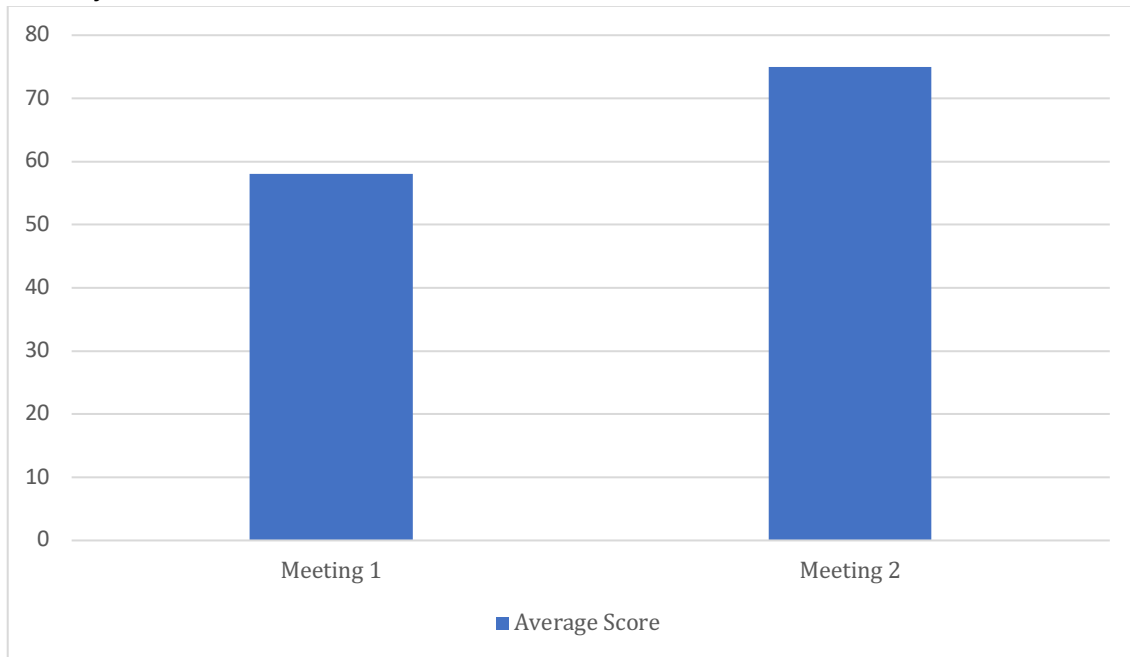
Field Notes and Observation Checklists are valuable data sources in this study. Data obtained through field notes and observation checklists will become the basis for evaluation for researchers to improve the performance of Classroom Action Research (CAR) in the next cycle. The results of field notes and observation checklists provide detailed information about the implementation of learning and student responses to the learning methods used.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted in two cycles to assess the increase in students' vocabulary test scores. The researcher designed a series of vocabulary learning activities that involved using WhatsApp as a platform for communication. All the data is elaborated below.

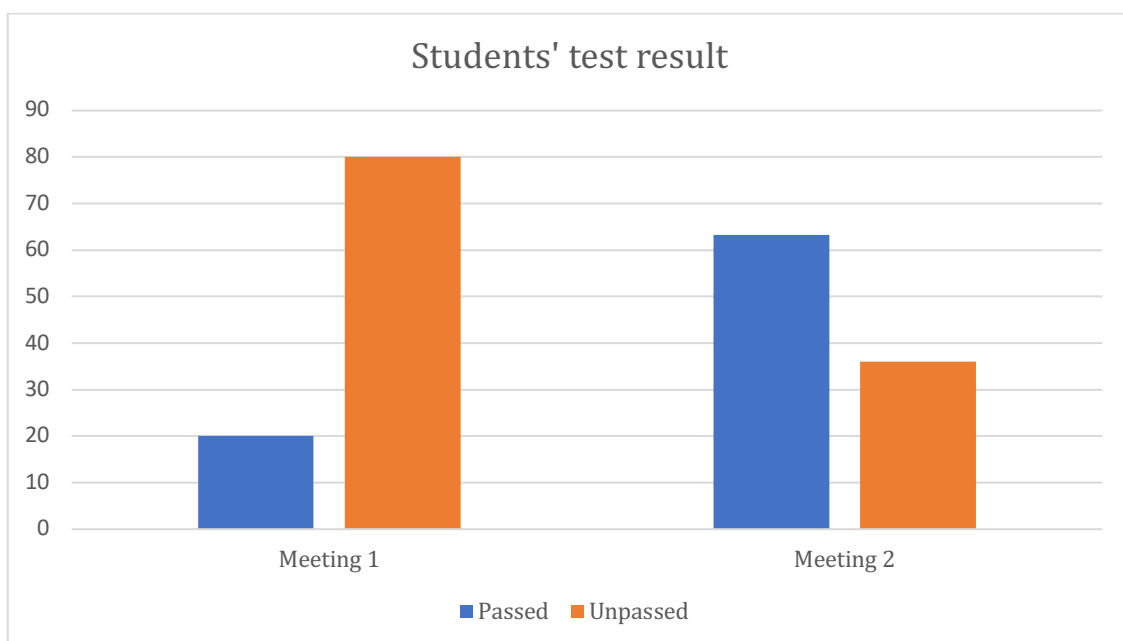
### 1. Results from Quantitative Data

Based on the researcher's activity in the classroom, it gained that the average value of the first meeting was 16.67, and it increased at the second meeting. The following graph illustrates the average scores of the two meetings, showing the progress made by students in developing their vocabulary.



**Figure 3.** The Average Score of First Meeting and Second Meeting

At the first meeting, six students successfully passed the exams, indicating a relatively low pass rate. However, at the second meeting, there was a significant increase in the number of students who successfully passed, with 19 students achieving satisfactory results. The following graph shows the statistics of the passing students for each meeting.



**Figure 4.** The Students' Passing Percentage in the First Meeting and Second Meeting

From the graph, it can be seen that there was a clear increase in the percentage of students who successfully passed between the first and second meetings. This shows that the learning interventions or strategies implemented in the second meeting positively improved students' ability to face exams and expand their vocabulary.

Figure 4 shows 43,3 % improvement in the passing students'. In the first meeting The teachers send vocabulary to students via WhatsApp before the class starts and then use them to find the meaning of every single word, in the next meeting the teachers will ask the students one by one to find the meaning of the word but if one of them don't know what is meaning of the world so teachers will ask another student to find it together in a dictionary but if they didn't get it the teacher will tell them the meaning of it.

Only 20% of the total students successfully pass the test, while 80% of other students fail in facing the test. However, at the second meeting, there was a significant increase where as many as 63.3% of students succeeded in passing exams, while 36.7% were still unable to meet the passing standards. The success target set is that 50% of students can pass the exam, so the writer succeeds in achieving the goals set. These results provide confidence that the learning strategies implemented have positively impacted student achievement. It also indicates that the efforts made to increase students' vocabulary have had a positive impact.

## 2. Results from Quantitative Data

The students show good behaviour during those two meetings. In the first meeting, the participants were still confused about what they should do after watching a video that the teacher sent. In the second meeting, students were more motivated to use WA to learn vocabulary. It could be seen from the interaction of the students in the WA group. Plana et al. (in Cetinkaya, 2017) found that the instant messaging application WA increases students' motivation and willingness to study in immersion programs.

It was observed that there was negativity about the implementation process in the group's messages. Although the students were informed about the group's purpose, there were unnecessary and disturbing messages. In this situation, the researcher reminded the students to avoid sending those unnecessary and disturbing messages. Bouhnik and Deshen (in Cetinkaya, 2017) stated similar problems, but unlike this study, the student's solution was silencing the group.

## 3. Discussion

Teachers need to pay attention to the use of WhatsApp media, considering the results of this research data. The positive response shown by students when using WhatsApp was even followed by increased student scores. It shows the effectiveness of using WhatsApp as a learning platform. It shows that WhatsApp can be an alternative medium to enhance the learning experience, especially for learning vocabulary. The use of alternative media aims to increase student learning interest. Previous research has also classified WhatsApp as an innovative medium that can replace conventional learning media (Rais & Sa'adah, 2022).

The use of WhatsApp as a medium to improve vocabulary skills is considered to have a significant effect in this study. However, this result seems to open something new because similar results were also found in previous studies (Endley, 2018; Hamad, 2017). Using WhatsApp provides an advantage over other media. WhatsApp is a platform that can be used wherever and

whenever it doesn't depend on the room (Berger, in Fattah, 2015). However, the connection becomes another obstacle is the need for an internet connection to operate it. In addition, opinions regarding the use of WhatsApp as a useful medium in learning English were also mentioned by preservice English teachers in Sintang (Rais & Kristiawan, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study provide evidence that WhatsApp is an effective platform for increasing students' vocabulary achievement. The findings show that the use of WhatsApp in teaching English vocabulary positively impacts students' ability to expand their vocabulary. The students also responded positively to using WhatsApp in the context of learning vocabulary. Based on these findings, the authors recommend using WhatsApp as an effective alternative medium for teaching English vocabulary. The use of WhatsApp can be a valuable support in expanding student vocabulary.

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