WhatsApp-Based Speaking Test in EFL Context

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Article Info

Abstract

Prior studies had reported that the speaking test was quite troublesome. WhatsApp-based speaking test was one of the technology-enhanced assessment methods that became an option for more practical assessment. It was a descriptive qualitative study that was conducted by investigating 145 non-English university students in Indonesia. Data collecting instruments were observation, documentation, and open-ended questionnaires. Then, the data analysis used descriptions on each category. The result exposed that 50.3% of the overall student was somewhat satisfied with the implementation of the WhatsApp-based speaking test. The study reported five significant students' positive responses to the test. Those positive responses were that it was considered as a fun-based test. It created an opportunity for the students to improve their language performance, it was also a time-saving test and it built a test environment that was less pressured and less anxious for the students. Then, the test was more appropriate for the students who belonged to the post-millennial generation. Also, the next finding of this study revealed three students' negative responses towards the implementation of WhatsApp-based speaking tests in English classes. Those three prominent responses were the students disturbed by the noisy atmosphere during the test, the students encountered some technical problems on the test, and the students were still quite nervous during the test due to it was their first experience in doing the WhatsApp-based speaking test.

INTRODUCTION

English teaching process must sharpen the four necessary skills in English. The process of language assessment in Indonesia generally does not encompass all aspects of language skills. Speaking skill is the less commonly assessed skill in English teaching in Indonesia that is due to many reasons. Some prior studies have investigated the issues in speaking assessment.

Speaking is considered as the most complicated skill to assess among the four language skills since it requires direct observation of the oral production and instant judgment from the language testers (Ginther, 2012). Moreover, lecturers are not only reluctant to assess the speaking ability, but also they are doubtful of the validity of the test results (Knight, 1992).

The non-technology-mediated speaking test faced a challenge dealing with the allotted time to conduct the speaking test (Briffa & Xerri, 2013). It is reported that non-technology-mediated oral testing involves a time-consuming process (Ludenberg, 1929 as cited in (Isaacs, 2016). The direct oral test is more unworkable than the semi-direct test on a large scale English class. In these modern days, teachers undertake the technology-mediated oral test in the semi-direct testing through a computer or online platform (Sinwongsuwat, 2012). This assessment process enables the teachers to assess the students' recorded responses, not in the immediate time for further detailed evaluation. On the consequence, teachers have more flexible time in assessing their students' performances.

As a solution to that problem, some lecturers apply a semi-directed assessment method. The test does not require the presence of the lecturers as the test administrators. The oral evaluation works through the pre-recorded questions, and the students' answers or responses are recorded for further assessment (Ginther, 2012).

The enhancement of oral testing is not only limited to the computer-mediated test but also the online mobile applications-based test. One of the online mobile applications that both the teachers and lecturers use in the daily basis in WhatsApp (Han & Keskin, 2016). It provides the features of sending text messages, voice messages, video, images, document files, location and link address (WhatsApp Official Webpage, 2020).

Prior studies have reported a significant impact of WhatsApp integration into English learning. A study revealed that WhatsApp enhanced vocabulary mastery in EFL learning in Iran with 130 research participants (Hashemifardnia, Namaziandost, & Esfahani, 2018). A research conducted by (Mwakapina, Mhandeni, & Nyinondi, 2016) by investigating 120 first-year undergraduate students in Tanzania found out that WhatsApp was recommended for the EFL learning due to its success in creating an interactive

learning environment. Another study illustrated that WhatsApp was the potential tool to assist English writing learning (Susanti & Tarmuji, 2016). Besides, another research finding showed that WhatsApp was an acceptable and appropriate application for distance learning that was the result of research based on the interview of 100 university students in turkey (Nawaila & Bicen, 2018). Nevertheless, there are a few to no studies investigating the use of WhatsApp for learning assessment, particularly for English speaking.

Thus, this study endeavors on filling in the research gap that has not been explored yet by examining the English speaking assessment that utilizes the technology of WhatsApp application. This study aims at answering two objectives: (1) How does the lecturer conduct the English speaking assessment that is based on WhatsApp? (2) What are the students' perception of the WhatsApp-based English speaking test?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was a descriptive qualitative study. It set a goal to portray an intervention or occurrence in the real-life context (Yin, 2003). This research was conducted in the 2019/2020 academic year. The subject of the research was 145 non-English students in one of the universities in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, who were currently in their third semester. There were 94 female students and 51 male students. The research subject was selected by using purposive sampling. It was due to their experiences as being the test takers of the WhatsApp-based speaking assessment.

The data collecting technique employed direct observation, documentation, and open-ended questionnaires. Direct observation and documentation were done to examine the implementation of the WhatsApp speaking assessment in the real class setting. Then, open-ended questionnaires created a chance for the research participants to express their views (Crotty, 1998 as cited in (Creswell, 2017). The result from administering the open-ended questionnaires yielded data in the form of phrases and sentences which become the qualitative data sources.

The questinaires and observation sheet were designed based on the research questions. The researcher formulated the questionaires by listing questions related to the implementation of WhatsApp-Based English speaking

assessment and the students' perception towards it. The researcher created the questionare by regarding the characteristics of valid questinaire proposed by (Kazi & Khalid, 2012). Those characteristics were simplicity and viability, reliability and precision in the words, and reflect underlying theory or concent to be measured. The observation sheet was also created by listing some categories that were needed to be observed during the process of WhatsApp-Based English speaking assessment. The framework of analyzing the relevant documents was conducted to answer the two research questions. The relevant documents   that supported the social representation of WhatsApp-Based English speaking assessment and the students' perception towards it were taken into account.

Afterward, the researcher analyzed the data through the categorization process as it was proposed by (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) that was commonly known as content criteria analysis. The categorization was determined by the distinctive feature of each students' responses. Then, the classification was made based on the similar theme of the responses. Moreover, the researcher continued the analysis by describing each category and drawing correlation with some supporting or even confronting theories.

The data that were obtained from the direct observation and open-ended questionnaires were validated through the triangulation process. This triangulation aimed at ensuring all data were in line and supported each other. The triangulation of data was done to ensure the credibility of the data. The verbal responses from the questionaires were triangulated with visual data and also the data from observation sheet. The linking of those three types and data presents the value of credibility of this research (Flick, 2004).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Implementation of WhatsApp-Based Speaking Test

The results from direct observation and documentation showed that the implementation of the WhatsApp-based speaking test in three English classes was run as planned. Several stages of implementation were divided into three stages which were preparation befor the test day and implementation in the test day.

There were three actions taken by the lecturer before the test day. The first action was he lecturer set the schedule for the speaking test. Then, the lecturer informed the students about the test rules: closed-book test, bring their smartphones (with internet data & WhatsApp application installed in it, sufficient battery, and better to bring earphone). The last action for preparation process was the lecturer created a group for each question. For each class, since there were five questions, so the lecturer created five WhatsApp groups for question 1, question 2, question 3, question 4, and question 5. The number of WhatsApp group was created based on the number of questions. It was conducted so that the students' answers for each question were gathered in one platform.

On the day of the speaking test, there were seven actions that were implemented. The first one was he students were asked to be ready with their mobile devices. Then, the lecturer counted the total number of the students who took the test at that time. Afterwards, the test started with question number 1. The lecturer sent the WhatsApp group link/ QR code to invite all the students to join the WhatsApp group for question 1. Next, all students must join the group, and the lecturer counted the number of participants in the WhatsApp group. It must be the same with the number of the students who took the test (excluding the lecturer as the admin). When the number of the WhatsApp group participants was the same as the number of the students who took the test, the lecturer sent the question by typing it in the group.The students were then given 1 minute to prepare their answers. Finally, it was the time for the students responded to the questions by recording their voice directly and sending it to the group as a voice note. The maximum duration of the voice note was 3 minutes. After the students completed in responding, all the students were asked to leave the group so that they could not modify or delete their responses. Having done with question number 1, then the lecturer administered the test with the next questions until it finished.
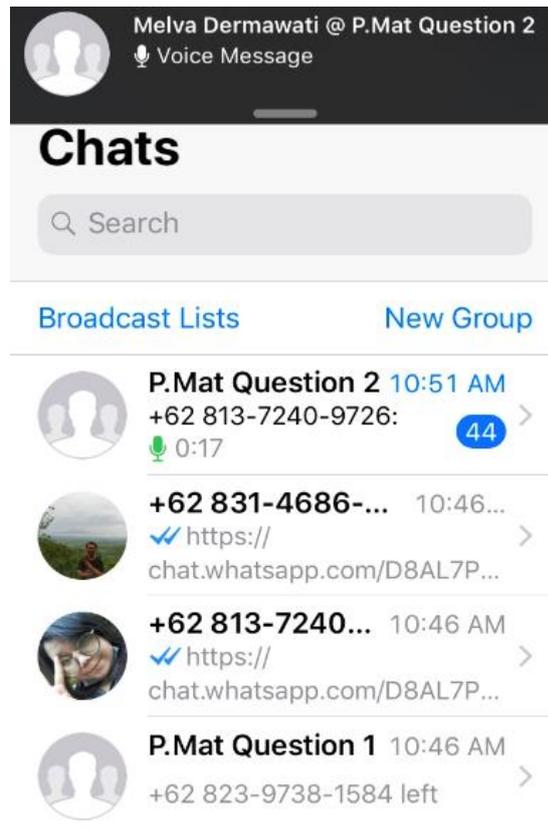
Figure 1. Screenshot of the answering process in WhatsApp

Figure 2. The students were giving responses by recording their voices

The results from the observation of the test implementation showed the efficiency and also time and cost-saving features compared to the traditional direct speaking test. It was in line with the research conducted by (Ginther,

2012) who explained that semi-direct speaking tests might reduce the time and cost so that it was considered to be a more efficient speaking assessment method than the traditional ones.

The Students' Positive Responses on the WhatsApp-Based Speaking Test

The findings from the open-ended questionnaires yielded three categorizations, which were students' positive responses, students' negative responses, and students' satisfaction on the WhatsApp-based speaking test. Table 1 presented the data of students' positive responses towards the WhatsApp-based speaking test in English class.

Table 1. Students' positive responses

Students' Responses	Quantity of the Responses
Fun, cool, exciting, challenging	33
Improve pronunciation, speaking, grammar	29
Time-efficient	24
Less Pressure/ less anxiety	21
Match with millennial characteristics	19
Paperless	7
Self-correction	6
Not complicated	3
Less opportunity to cheat	3

Table 1 showed 11 classifications of students' positive responses towards the speaking test that they had experienced through WhatsApp. The most significant responses expressed by 33 students revealed that the test brought fun, cool, exciting, and challenging atmosphere on the test. It was because this method of testing was new for all of the students. This finding of students' fascinated feelings during the test was in line with a study on 350 university students, of which the results indicated that the use of technology-enhanced the students' motivation (Ilter, 2009). Moreover, (BintiMistar & Embi, 2016) added that the application of WhatsApp in the students' academic matter had successfully improved motivation.

The second most significant number of data stated by 29 students indicated that the WhatsApp test enabled the students to improve their pronunciation, speaking, and grammar. This fact was similar to the study conducted by (Alemi et al., 2012; Çavuş & İbrahim, 2009, Lu, 2008 as cited in (Han & Keskin, 2016) reporting that WhatsApp enhanced the students'

pronunciation skills and other language skills. Moreover, it was also reported that the use of WhatsApp in the classroom contributed positively to the students' language performance (Han & Keskin, 2016).

The other students' responses dealt with the efficiency of the WhatsApp-based speaking test. Twenty-four students stated that the duration of the test was quicker and more efficient compared to the traditional one-on-one direct speaking test. A research argument stated that WhatsApp assisted either students or teachers to share many things in a short time (Hamidin, 2015).

Twenty-one students expressed that WhatsApp-based speaking test created less-anxiety and less-pressure on the testing process. They felt that this type of test was more enjoyable than the face-to-face speaking test. It was due to their fear of making mistakes and negative responses from their lecturer or their friends were decreased. It is similar to the study that revealed social media, WhatsApp, one of which provided a chance for the students to get rid of their doubt and fear since they do not have to meet the test administrator in person (Zayed, 2016). Moreover, the feature of voice note that was selected as the form of test submission was considered to be more effective in establishing a less anxious testing assessment. (Han & Keskin, 2016) supported this finding by explaining that the feature of voice recording in WhatsApp was less embarrassing for the students compared to the video recording. Also, other studies conducted by (Burgucu, Han, & Engin, 2011; Han, Tanriöver, & Sahan, 2016 as cited in (Han & Keskin, 2016) described that the application of common application into the classroom environment supported the students to handle their anxiety problem.

The fifth most prominent finding from this category was the appropriateness of WhatsApp application with the characteristics of post-millennial students as the test takers. Nineteen students claimed that the test was appropriate with their preference since all of them were technology literate. Moreover, WhatsApp application was one of their most-used application in their daily life. This finding was in line with (Zayed, 2016) who stated that in these days, students were so keen on using the most updated application so that it established a trend of utilizing the online mobile application in the English classes. Moreover, a study discovered that WhatsApp application in English class was one of the creative and innovative teaching

techniques which attracted the students' interest and established fun-based activity (BintiMistar & Embi, 2016).

The next finding revealed that the students considered that the WhatsApp-based speaking test was better in terms of its paperless feature. The students did not have to write anything like the standard test that they usually had. This finding was yielded from the responses of the seven students. Six students said that they liked the ability to modify the answer on the WhatsApp-based speaking test. They said that compared to the direct speaking in which the answer was once made and directly assessed by the test administrator, the WhatsApp-based test gave them the possibility to modify the answer. It was easy beacuse they could listen again and made a self-correction to the recorded voice that they sent in the test. Audio recording device served a modification so that the recorded audio could be replayed and altered to improve the linguistics features that would be assessed (Isaacs, 2016).

The other students' positive responses illustrated that the students found that the WhatsApp-based speaking test was simple and not complicated. It was worthwhile so that the test could run well without any obstacle in practical use. The last finding in this category showed that the students perceived that the WhatsApp-based speaking test was excellent since it provided less opportunity to cheat. The direct voice recording in the class created a situation in which the students had no chance to cheat since the test administrator monitored the process of voice recording.

The Students' Negative Responses on the WhatsApp-Based Speaking Test

The next finding of this study portrayed the students' negative responses toward the WhatsApp-based speaking test. There were five categories in this discussion that were illustrated in table 2.

Table 2. Students' negative responses

Students' Responses	Quantity of the Responses
Noisy	66
Technical issues dealing with smartphone and internet connection	46
Nervous	24
Advance cheating	5
Not private	4

The data in table 2 showed that the most significant negative aspect of

the WhatsApp-based speaking test was the noisy atmosphere during the test. It happened due to the test was conducted in the same room, with approximately 40 students in the test room. All students spoke at the same time to answer the question and recorded their voice by using their smartphone. Some of them used earphones, but the others did not. Thus, some students faced difficulty in concentrating while taking the test. This occurrence could be overcome by dividing the students into some group with different timing of test so that there were a limited number of students only in the test room.

The most significant number of responses in table 2 illustrated that 46 students found the obstacle during WhatsApp-based speaking test that dealt with the technical issues. Some students admitted that their smartphone speaker qualities were not pleasant so that it made them into trouble in recording their voice to get a clear and good quality of sound. Some students said that they had a problem in sending the voice note in the WhatsApp group since some other students were sending the recorded voice at the same time too. The next issue dealt with the internet connection during the test. They reported that the internet connection made them worried during the test, but they had a solution for it by connecting their smartphone into a Wi-Fi connection that was provided by the campus.

The third most prominent finding in this category portrayed that the students still felt nervous during the WhatsApp-based speaking test. Although the students did not have to see the test administrator in person, they still felt anxious, doubtful, and nervous during the test. This occurrence was due to their first experience in having such a test like that. The students were worried that something would go wrong during the test. All the test takers could accomplish the test well. The finding on this category was in line with the studies that were conducted by (Burgucu, Han, & Engin, 2011; Han, Tanriöver, & Sahan, 2016 as cited (Han & Keskin, 2016) revealing that when the students used the common application, they would overcome their anxiety. However, in this context, although WhatsApp was a popular application for the students, the speaking test that was conducted through WhatsApp was their first experience. Thus, the feeling of nervousness was inevitable.

The advanced skill of the post-millennial students in using the technology did not always impact positively towards the learning in class. The

finding showed that some of the students did advanced cheating by splitting their smartphone screen into two. Hence, it made them easier in answering the questions just by reading the answer that they had prepared and recorded their voices. In this case, the lecturer, as the test administrator, did not notice it. However, at the end of the class, some of the students reported their classmates as cheating in the test. It was in line with a study examining the negative aspects of WhatsApp in the English classes that were some students who were just copy-pasting their answers, and the instructor must be more cautious about this matter (Hamad, 2017).

The last negative responses in this category that were expressed by four students showed that the students felt it inconvenient due to the privacy of their answer that they had sent in the WhatsApp group. The students felt embarrassed when their classmates could check and listened to their recorded answers. This finding was in line with the study reporting that students were afraid of the judgment and negative behavior towards their mistakes (Zayed, 2016).

The Students' Satisfaction on the WhatsApp-Based Speaking Test

The last finding from the open-ended questionnaire was the students' satisfaction with the WhatsApp-based speaking test. The description of the result was presented in table 3.

Table 3. Students' satisfaction

Students' satisfaction	Quantity
Less than 50%	17
50%	18
60%	12
70%	38
80%	35
90%	19
100%	6

The data in table 3 showed seven classifications of students' satisfaction. Accordingly, the researcher classified it into four degrees of satisfaction as it was adopted from (Morrison, Rudd, & Nerad, 2011) which were unsatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, somewhat satisfied, and very satisfied. The first category of unsatisfied was expressed by 17 students who perceived less than 50% of satisfaction. The number of respondents in the unsatisfied category was as significant as 11.7% of the total respondents. The second

category was somewhat dissatisfied who was expressed by the 30 students stating that they were 50% and 60% satisfied with the WhatsApp-based speaking test. This number of respondents was 20.7% of the total respondents. The third category was the biggest one, which was expressed by 73 students who said that they were somewhat satisfied with the percentage of 70% and 80%. This number of respondents in this category was as significant as 50.3%. The last category in this discussion revealed that 25 students got the satisfaction of the WhatsApp-based English test, which was expressed by 25 students. They admitted that they were satisfied with the percentage of 90% and 100%. This number of respondents in the satisfied category was as significant as 17.3% of all the respondents. Based on the previous discussion, more than half of the students in the percentage of 50.3% of all students perceived that the WhatsApp-based speaking test was somewhat satisfying for them.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The speaking assessment had been a problematic issue due to the process that was considered to be time-consuming. Through the advancement of technology, some solutions had been offered, WhatsApp-based speaking test was one of which. This study investigated the implementation of that test and the students' perception towards it. The results of this study pointed out the students' positive responses, students' negative responses, and students' satisfaction towards the WhatsApp-based speaking test.

The most prominent students' positive responses revealed that the students perceived that it was a fun-based test, and it was time-efficient, Then, the major students' negative responses showed that the students were bothered with the noisy atmosphere during the test. By considering those responses, it can be concluded that the WhatsApp-based speaking test was quite potential as the alternative to assess the students speaking test with the students' satisfactory of 50.3%. Furthermore, it was suggested for the future researcher to investigate the issue on WhatsApp-based speaking test with a better method such as more thorough monitoring during the test to minimize cheating and reducing the number of participants in each test group to

create conducive testing atmosphere.

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