STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE UTILIZATION OF "WHATSAPP" FOR VOCABULARY TEACHING AND LEARNING

Anita Wijayanti, Yohanes Bambang Gunawan
Academy of Foreign Language of Sinema Yogyakarta
anita@abasinema.ac.id, ybg.email.001@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Society has enjoyed the ease of communication afforded by "Whatsapp", a popular freeware and cross-platform communication application. "Whatsapp"'s popularity has invited educators to experiment with it in various ways to shore up education. This study was conducted to describe students' perceptions on the use of "Whatsapp" for teaching and learning vocabulary. A vocabulary virtual class in the form of a "Whatsapp" group where students needed to enroll was created for that purpose. This virtual class exempted the students from physically attending the physical class as it enabled students to remotely attend the class. Teaching and learning methods of vocabulary in the virtual class included using pictures, translation, and sentence construction. At the end of the class, the students were to inform the researchers about their perceptions of the virtual class. This study used a descriptive qualitative method. Data was collected through a paper-based questionnaire, which was distributed to all students in a face-to-face class, a session taking place two days prior to the research. The virtual vocabulary class that the researchers administered overall received positive feedbacks from the learners. However, teaching and learning vocabulary using "Whatsapp" also had its own drawback.

Keywords: "Whatsapp", vocabulary, teaching, learning, group, student, perception

INTRODUCTION

Lexicon is the heart of a language. Having a sufficient lexicon allows a language user to perform well in his/her attempt to use a language properly. This view is also shared by Wilkins (1972: 11) who writes "... while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed." Thus, learning vocabulary is the most essential part of learning a language.

In Indonesia, learners still heavily rely on conventional textbooks for vocabulary learning. While conventional textbook offers a lot of advantages, as acknowledged by many proponent scholars such as Basturkmen (2010: 149), Graves (2000: 175), Harmer (2001:304), and Woodward (2001:46), conventional textbook's portability is below that of a gadget. Gadget's portability, combined with its vast pervasion into modern people's daily lives, is a great asset to be used as a supplement to or a replacement of conventional textbook when it comes to learning vocabulary.

One of the most common applications installed in gadget is a messaging application called "Whatsapp". Collaborative features of "Whatsapp", according to Bere (2012), include: (1) Multimedia: It allows the user to exchange videos, text messages, images and voice notes; (2) Group Chat: It supports the interaction of up to 50 group members ("Whatsapp" has increased this capacity up to 256 members); (3) Unlimited Messaging: The number of messages you can share on "Whatsapp" is unlimited. The application uses 3G/EDGE internet data plan (now it supports 4G) or Wi-Fi to ensure continuous data transmission across platforms, (4) Cross Platform Engagements: Interactants with different devices (personal digital assistants, smart phones, galaxy tablets) can message one another through various media (text messages, pictures, videos, voice notes); (5) Offline Messaging: Messages are saved automatically when the device is off or outside coverage area, (6) No Charges involved: there is no charges involved for using "Whatsapp" as it uses the same internet data plan which is used for e-mail or web browsing; (7) Pins and Users Name: "Whatsapp" users need not to remember passwords or username as it works via phone numbers and integrates with users' address books. "Whatsapp" can also be accessed from PC for those feel more comfortably working on a larger screen and is rich in feature without being too complex to understand (for example, the messages are encrypted by default, so the users do not need to find and set it manually). Its search facility, which allows users to find a certain person or message quickly, and bookmarking facility, which enables users to mark certain messages, serves as an additional advantage.

With numerous features to offer, it is of no surprise that "Whatsapp" has become popular and highly alluring. Taking advantage of this phenomenon, the researchers decided to observe whether teaching vocabularies with "Whatsapp" was feasible.

Some previous researches on this topic were already performed by various scholars. Amry (2014)'s research, despite its small sample size, reveals that the experimental group using "Whatsapp" learnt more effectively compared to control group resorting to face-to-face method in the classroom. Another research by Man (2014) observed that participants of his research highly appreciated the use of "Whatsapp" for helping them understand academic vocabularies and they obtained a significant increase in their scores. Learning

vocabularies through "Whatsapp", claim Jafari and Chalak (2016), is more effective than through traditional classroom instructions.

1. Vocabulary teaching techniques

Vocabularies need to be retained in memory to be recalled and used when necessary. However, forgetting is the natural phenomenon that undermines the development of necessary lexicon. Mere memorization (memorizing new vocabularies from a given list, for example) may work in a very few cases but this boring and inefficient method takes a lot of efforts and time only to produce inadequate results, if not at all (Rasinski et. al., 2014: p. 11). While practicing is important to boost the building of required lexicon, teaching techniques also help learners to learn and retain the new vocabularies better.

Alqahtani (2015: pp. 26-29) adopts Brewster, Ellis, and Girard's (1992) theory which proposes several methods for teaching vocabularies that teachers can use and combine depending on the situation.

a. Using Object: This is best practiced when dealing with concrete objects. Human memory for object and pictures is reliable and can be utilized to serve as a clue for recalling words.

b. Drawing: This can be done on blackboard, flashcard, of plastic. Drawing is effective to help young learners understand and realize what they have learnt.

c. Using Illustrations and Pictures: Pictures and illustrations are excellent means to enable learners to connect their prior knowledge to a new story and learn new words during the process of connection. Visual supports are also helpful to understand meaning and make words more memorable.

d. Contrast: Some vocabularies can be learnt by presenting their opposites (good vs black). There are, however, are not always possible as some words do not have real opposites (for example, grey, which, in the color line lies between white and black).

e. Enumeration: Some words are difficult to explain, for example, vehicle. Using enumeration means collecting words belonging to vehicles, such as motorcycles, cars, ships, and airplanes and explaining that the things previously mentioned are all vehicles.

f. Mime, Expressions, and Gestures: These can be used to explain some expressible words, for example, "sad" (teacher shows a sad face and sighs). Gestures also capture attention and make the lesson more dynamic. A lot of foreign language teachers claim that making certain gestures that can be associated with particular vocabularies being taught helps their learners remember.

g. Guessing from Context: This allows learners to guess the meaning of the newly discovered word by studying other elements within the text where the new vocabulary lies, such as the morphological, semantic, syntactic, and

discourse information of the text and the learners' background knowledge about the text.

h. Eliciting: This is when teacher, instead of directly providing a correct answer to the students, gives clues to the learners and make them find the answers. It is more motivating and memorable than giving them a list of words to learn.

i. Translation: Although translation does not create a need or incite motivation to the learners to think about the meaning of the word, it is useful for dealing with incidental vocabulary (vocabulary that is beyond the prepared learning list), checking learners' comprehension, making comparison between the first and second languages, dealing with situations where errors are prone to occur, and saving time.

2. Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

With gadget's decreasing prices, lifestyle and working demands for better communication and information, and superior portability, having gadget is now a ubiquitous phenomenon. This condition leads scholars to think that gadget may be a good medium for learning language. Accordingly, as mentioned previously, scholars have devoted some efforts on researching how to utilize gadget into a language learning tool.

Learning a language using portable device in any ways, whether it is an attempt to find a direct translation of a word, or matching one's own pronunciation with that of a native speaker, to essay collaborating, belongs to a theory called Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL). Considered superior to its predecessor, CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), due to its portability and mobility (Kukulska-Hulme and Shield, 2008), MALL has quickly gained more support from learners as a more proper and state-of-the-art theory of learning (Jarvis and Achiellos, 2013).

Aside from its portability, MALL includes a considerable number of advantages such as connectivity through internet, collaborative learning (Uzunboylu, Çavuş, and Erçağ, 2009), learner-centered (Benson, 2007), immediate feedback and response, and numerous learning strategies and activities. However, relatively small screen that many portable gadgets possess may hinder readability (Kukulska-Hulme and Traxler, 2007) and trigger cognitive disadvantages related to students' attention and visual perception instead (Kim and Kim, 2012). Unstable internet connection may also derail communication among peers.

3. Asynchronicity to encourage participations of shy students

One major problem in class activity is shy students. Shy students tend to participate less in class, rarely volunteer contributions, and provide shorter and

less elaborate answers to questions (Crozier, 2003). Without sufficient activities to observe, teachers will find it difficult to evaluate the performance of those shy students. In addition, Lao et. al. (2013, p. 270), quoting Hughes and Coplan (2010), assume that shy students are often unfairly rated as less academically competent by teachers, despite the results of the students' standardized test-based academic performance.

Crozier agrees with Jones and Gerig's (1994) research which identifies factors that incite fears among shy students: making mistakes in front of their peers, being the center of attention, and being laughed at and embarrassed. This problem might be solved by a factor that incites disinhibition effect.

Disinhibition effect is noticed when people lower their self-psychological restraints which often regulate behaviors in the online social environment, making people say and do things in cyberspace that they do not usually say face-to-face and do in the real world. They loosen up, feel less restrained, and express themselves more openly (Suler, 2004: p. 321). Factors that drive the disinhibition, according to Suler, are dissociative anonymity (no identity revealed) (p. 322), invisibility (unobservable), asynchronous (freedom to respond later), solipsistic introjection (creation of an image of other people based on information they release on the internet) (p. 323), dissociative imagination (belief that other people are from different world), and minimization of status and authority (belief that other people have different power and role than they have in the real world).

Focusing on one of the factors that trigger disinhibition effect called asynchonity (freedom to respond later), the researchers found that people who interact from behind the screen of their devices are more self-confident. This self-confidence develops because, unlike face-to-face interaction which demands quick response, people can have enough time to think of what they are going to write.

METHOD

Since this study aimed to discover the opinions of first and third year college students toward the use of "Whatsapp" in learning, especially vocabulary learning, this study used a descriptive qualitative method. Twenty (20) students of semester I and III of Academy of Foreign Language of Sinema Yogyakarta took part in this study. They already experienced learning vocabulary in two learning sessions in two weeks with each learning session having ninety (90) minutes in a face-to-face class. Students' age range was eighteen (18) to twenty-three (23) years, with eleven (11) female students and nine (9) male students. Each participant was required to have a "Whatsapp" account and join a "Whatsapp" group named "Vocab Class" created by one of the researchers.

Data was collected through a paper-based questionnaire, which was distributed to all students in a face-to-face class, a session taking place two days prior to the research. Students were to provide honest answers under the condition of anonymity to maintain validity of the answers.

DISCUSSION

Students needed to attend a special preparatory session administered at least two days prior to the day when virtual class would be conducted. They would be introduced to the rules and procedures of the class. During this session, one of the researchers, who was responsible for the virtual class, saved all participants' "Whatsapp" phone numbers into her phonebook, created a "Whatsapp" group named "Vocab Class", and added all the participants into "Vocab Class" group, where the virtual class would take place.

The participants were also informed the class would take place two days later at 13:00 WIB (GMT +7). Attention, the researcher warned, should also be given to phone battery and internet connection stability to avoid "involuntary absence" (a state where the students might get disconnected from the virtual class without their consent due to low battery power or internet disconnection) during class.

During the preparatory session, the researcher uploaded a pdf file containing two texts with simple black and white pictures. The texts and the corresponding pictures were taken from L. G. Alexander's Practice and Progress: An Integrated Course for Pre Intermediate Students, with "A Clear Conscience" being the first text and "Did You Want to Tell Me Something?" being the second.

Participants were then randomly but evenly divided into two groups. Each student of the first group was to read the first text, "A Clear Conscience", select a word from the text, and find (or draw) a picture which corresponded to the word of his/her choice. The same rule applied to the participants belonging to the second group, with the exception that the second group should work on the text entitled "Did You Want to Tell Me Something?". The pictures should be sent to the researcher via ""Whatsapp"" personally, not to the group. A note containing the title of the text where the word came from, the word of choice, and the Indonesian translation of the selected word should be added.

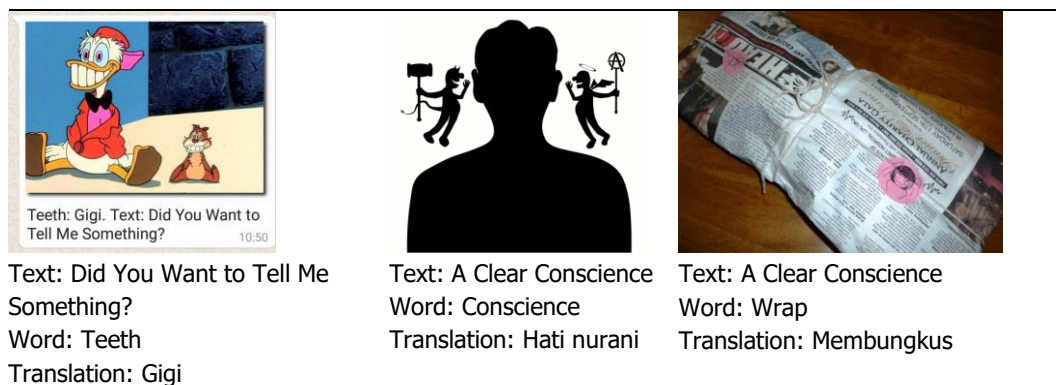| Text: Did You Want to Tell Me Something? Word: Teeth Translation: Gigi	Text: A Clear Conscience Word: Conscience Translation: Hati nurani	Text: A Clear Conscience Word: Wrap Translation: Membungkus

Figure1. Examples of Pictures Sent by Participants

The pictures were checked by the researchers to ensure the availability of the words in the mentioned texts and the accuracy of the translation. Regarding to pictures addressing the same word, only one picture was selected. The researchers needed to find another picture if their judgement dictated so (for example, there was no picture describing "dentist" while it was a new vocabulary that needed to be learnt during the virtual class).

At the end of the preparatory session, each participating student received an envelope containing questionnaires. The participants were not allowed to read the questionnaire until the research was completed.

On the day of the research, attendance was the first activity to complete. Participants confirmed their attendance by sending a message within the group, starting by the participant with the lowest student number. Some students sent emoticons or funny messages to mark their attendance. This act was permissible as it kept the class relaxed.

The attendance check was completed fairly fast compared to doing it in the real class. Then, the supervising researcher uploaded one picture, addressed the pertaining text, and asked participants to guess the word the picture described. Alqahtani (pp. 26-27) approves the use of picture for vocabulary mastery because picture makes a new vocabulary more memorable and easier to recall.

Having guessed the word correctly, the participants could select other participants to provide the Indonesian translation and an example on how to use the word properly in a sentence. Word translation method is often viewed in a pejorative sense, but Alqahtani (p. 29) disagrees as word translation method has its own strengths, especially time saving and reducing possibility of error, which have already been stated prior in this article.

After all pictures on the text were all guessed, the supervising researcher or one of the participants selected a word from the text to be given its Indonesian translation and put correctly into an English sentence. Participants might remember the meanings or translations of the words but (s)he could also

try to guess the meanings or translations from the context, which according to Alqahtani (p. 29) is a good method to teach and learn a vocabulary.

When the session ended, the students were allowed to open the envelope sealing the questionnaire and answer the questions. The questionnaire should be answered within thirty minutes after the session ended to keep their original impressions of the class unaltered.

The questionnaire consisted of three sessions. The first session tried to get information on the location where the participants accessed the virtual class.

Table 1. Virtual Class Accessing Location

Location of Access	Percentage
Campus	40%
Home	35%
Others (shopping mall, restaurant, waroong, other people's houses)	25%

Having analyzed the result of the questionnaire, the researchers concluded that ""Whatsapp"" class could minimize the negative effect of absence. This conclusion was drawn because it was revealed that places of access were found to be of no problem to the participants, as long as those locations could provide stable internet signals and electricity essentially required for the flow of the activities. The questionnaire showed that 60% participants successfully joined the virtual vocabulary class from their homes and various places. The supervising researcher who oversaw the virtual class was staying in a house located six kilometers from the campus when the class took place and encountered no problem. The number of students who connected to the virtual class from campus, however, was still surprisingly high. While the reasons why some students decided to join the virtual class from campus were not asked after this phenomenon had been observed (to maintain the condition of anonymity of the participants), it was assumed that those 40% also had another business in campus (meeting with friends or staff or having another class before or after the virtual class). This assumption was made after the supervising researcher by chance saw that the number of students who were observed in the campus increased after the virtual class ended.

The result of the questionnaire on students' perceptions toward virtual class is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' Perceptions toward the Use of ""Whatsapp"" for Learning

	Factors to perceive (""Whatsapp"")	SA	A	U	D	SD
2	Using ""Whatsapp"" for the virtual class is easy.	35%	55%	10%	0%	0%

3	Learning in the virtual class is comfortable.	40%	55%	5%	0%	0%
4	Class interaction in this virtual class is comfortable.	40%	35%	15%	10%	0%
5	Understanding is improved in this virtual class.	45%	40%	10%	5%	0%
6	Time allocation (60 minutes per class) is sufficient.	35%	40%	15%	10%	0%
7	More virtual class using ""Whatsapp"" should be scheduled in the future.	40%	55%	5%	0%	0%

Note

SA: Strongly Agree   A: Agree   U: Undecided   D: Disagree   SD: Strongly Disagree

Table 2 demonstrates that the perception of the majority of the students' towards Virtual Vocabulary Class was favorable. Points that the learners really appreciated were the learning comfortability (no. 3), and the possibility of more vocabulary class in the future (no. 7). The least appreciated were class interaction (no. 4) and 60-minute time allocation (no. 6).

Participants also answered five questions pertaining the materials and methods.

Table 3: Students' Perceptions toward Learning Vocabulary Materials and Methods in the Virtual Class

	Factors to perceive (Vocabulary)	SA	A	U	D	SD
8	The texts are not difficult to understand.	25%	40%	20%	10%	5%
9	Pictures make learning vocabulary enjoyable.	40%	55%	5%	0%	0%
10	Translation makes learning vocabulary enjoyable.	30%	45%	15%	10%	0%
11	Making a sentence from a vocabulary is not difficult.	30%	35%	15%	15%	5%
12	The method (select word, translate, and make sentence) is helpful.	25%	60%	10%	5%	0%

Note :

SA: Strongly Agree   A: Agree   U: Undecided   D: Disagree   SD: Strongly Disagree

The method used during vocabulary learning in the virtual class was also highly regarded by the participants. What participants really enjoyed was the use of pictures (no. 9), with 95% of the students gave their approval. Text difficulty (no. 8) and sentence composition (no. 11) received the lowest approval, with

only 65% participants either strongly agreed or (fairly) agree that the texts and the sentence composition were not difficult.

The questionnaire also asked the learners to optionally write their own opinions about the class. Those comments would be a better feedback than closed-ended questions in questionnaires because comments provide a greater liberty to say anything that the commenters want.

From the comments, it was discovered that "Whatsapp" eliminated the problems arising from having to make a trip to campus. One commented that this class gave her/him a greater degree of freedom because (s)he did not need to spend some time to go to campus. Another similar comment explained that (s)he loved this class because she could attend the class from anywhere. Two other comments reflected the same enthusiasm, one saying (s)he did not need to spend money for transportation and another telling (s)he could even attend the class without worrying about hot weather.

"Whatsapp" class was also beneficial to shy learners. One student informed the researchers that (s)he was usually too shy to participate in the discussion, but this method helped her/him overcome her/his anxiety. This proved Suler (p. 322)'s theory about asynchronicity, which states that people interacting from behind the safety of screen are more self-confident because they can spend time to arrange what they will write beforehand, a luxury that they cannot afford in a face-to-face interaction. Peacock and Sanghani (2014) also reported for The Telegraph that some teenagers feel more confident to communicate via text or social media compared to via traditional face-to-face conversation.

Another comfort that "Whatsapp" class delivered to students was a better visual perception. A student claimed this class was a joy because (s)he often felt it difficult to read or hear what was displayed or discussed in front of the class. However, (s)he was too shy to move to the front row. Using "Whatsapp" via her/his personal computer gave her/him better view without moving to the front row.

Having fun while learning was another advantage this class offers. One comment revealed that the writer of the comment felt more relaxed during the class as (s)he could follow the lesson while in bed, something that students in conventional class cannot afford.

Activities in class sometimes overlap, and learners cannot emphasize or choose which is better than which, especially when it comes to listening to explanation and converting that explanation into notes. Learning via "Whatsapp" provided opportunities to focus better on one thing, especially when the learners could maximally make use of "Whatsapp" facilities like bookmarking and searching. Three students highlighted how glad they were as they did not need to split attention to explanation and writing. Their "Whatsapp" saved all that took place in the class. One emphasized that (s)he would still make a manual note after class, but "Whatsapp" class made material reviewing much easier.

Traditional class is too common and may bore people. "Whatsapp" class provided a break from this every day sight. Two students noticed that this class was interesting and enjoyable because it was different from traditional class.

The use of pictures received several encouraging comments. Participants felt pictures "better than a cluster of texts", "interesting", "relaxing", "funny", "encourage her/him to focus better".

As for translation and sentence construction methods, they invited no comment from any students. The reason behind this absence of comment on this section was a mere guessing and would not be discussed here without sufficient supporting evidence.

However, "Whatsapp" class also suffered from some setbacks. One of them came from a gadget's small screen. People who were not accustomed to using gadget for a long time also obtained bad experiences during the virtual class. One student complained that this class was hard for her/him because (s)he did not like watching anything too long on her/his small display. (S)he also said she was not comfortable as there was no audio that could compensate problems with her/his visual sense. The solution of this problem might come in the form of desktop "Whatsapp" accessible via PC that would provide her/him with a larger display.

The rest of the comments were all positive but would not be discussed here as they only contained general words like "interesting", "good", or "enjoyable" without further explanation on the reason or what to address (the use of "Whatsapp", the materials and methods, or overall).

CONCLUSION

Numerous previous researches indicate that "Whatsapp" is a good medium for learning, and this research, investigating students' perceptions towards the uses of "Whatsapp" for vocabulary teaching and learning, reinforces those findings.

The virtual vocabulary class that the researchers administered overall received positive feedbacks from the learners. This finding is no different from the result of Man's research (2014) which states that the implementation of "Whatsapp" in teaching learning activities received appreciation from the participants. There were a handful of successfully identified factors that sparked off such favors from the participating students which this research revealed. First, class attendance no longer was limited to physical presence. Students could attend the class from virtually anywhere as long as supporting conditions, especially gadget battery life and internet signal, existed. Second, shy learners could eliminate the feeling of being watched and being the center of attention when participating. With this awkward feeling being no longer present, the shyness that usually went surface and crippled the performance of the shy

students would no longer bother the students. Accordingly, students suffering from shyness would be able to express themselves and perform better. Third, range of sight that sometimes became a problem to students who could not see clearly virtually did not provide an annoyance in "Whatsapp" virtual class. Students could manage the distance required, enlarge or reduce the size of fonts, and zoom in and out certain materials such as pdf file and pictures. Fourth, virtual class got rid of some exhausting attitude and formalities normally demanded in conventional class. Students could attend the class while lying relaxedly in their bed, something that no student in conventional class could perform. Fifth, students were exempted from making a difficult decision to either prioritize listening to explanation or making notes. In conventional class, students might listen to explanation but miss making notes and vice versa. "Whatsapp" virtual class saved all materials as long as they were not deleted, freeing students from the requirements of making a note. Sixth, conventional class was a boring and common routine. "Whatsapp" virtual class, as an extension of conventional class, provided a break over such a boring routine and could relieve students from the boredom that had piled up over time from the too frequently conducted conventional class.

Students also appreciated the use of pictures, translation, and sentence construction during virtual class, as shown by the result of the questionnaire. This showed that virtual class also needs to employ an appropriate method to run well and does not only rely on the use of "Whatsapp" alone to conduct a virtual class.

However, teaching and learning vocabulary using "Whatsapp" also had its own drawback. First, limitation imposed by a smaller screen a gadget might possess, which was also previously discovered by Kukulska-Hulme and Traxler (2007). The height of this problem was intensified when the user of the gadget was not accustomed to watching the small screen for a long time. Worse, the method used in this virtual class did not provide sound and voice that might compensate the occurring visual problems. This problem, and other problems that were not identified during this research, may be solved by getting to know "Whatsapp" features and use them. For example, as messages keep flowing, students may need to learn how to use "Whatsapp" search facility to find the message they are looking for. Students may also use bookmark facility provided by "Whatsapp" to return or find a message the students consider important. "Whatsapp" desktop, the ability to run "Whatsapp" in a desktop computer, also enables its users to have a better view compared to accessing "Whatsapp" from a smaller screen gadget.

Teachers can consider starting a virtual class with the medium of "Whatsapp" to get benefits that this research confirmed. It is imperative that teachers and students need to get to know "Whatsapp" long before the class.

Otherwise, time will be wasted only to learn how to use "Whatsapp" instead of learning the materials.

As this research only involved a relatively small number of participants and limited its scope only on vocabulary and a certain method, it is highly recommended that other people try to conduct similar researches with different methods, or on different subjects, or with a larger number of participants for a better understanding on how to utilize "Whatsapp" for learning.

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