



BRIDGING LITERACY GAPS: A WHATSAPP-BASED INTERVENTION TO IMPROVE READING SKILLS IN A RURAL GOVERNMENT SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an early action research study undertaken in a government secondary school in Andhra Pradesh with regard to enhancing the reading skills of Class 9 pupils through the use of social media, WhatsApp in particular. The study was undertaken to address the chronic problem of poor reading proficiency among students newly admitted to the school, who, due to a lack of prior English instruction, were exposed to very basic instructional English, and therefore, their reading skills were rudimentary. For this purpose, WhatsApp was used for four weeks, with stories, short videos, audios, and captions as provided materials.

Data was gathered through student and teacher questionnaires, interviews, and recording the level of participation in the reading activities through the system. Findings showed that 70% of students claimed that their engagement in the reading activities was far greater than what they had had before, as well as that they had significantly better reading skills than previously, while 60% claimed that their fluency and comprehension levels considerably improved. Teachers witnessed greater enthusiasm among learners for reading in general and for the instructional materials than before. Despite the obstacles, such as a lack of technology provision, a lack of training for teachers, and other infrastructural issues, the study found that social networking sites, in particular WhatsApp, have the potential to be practical and affordable educational tools designed to equip students with fluent reading skills in low-income contexts. The research suggests possible changes in language reading policy and instruction to improve poor performance in reading.

KEYWORDS: Reading Skills, Comprehension, Technology, WhatsApp and Questionnaires

INTRODUCTION

Reading is very important to learn a language and advance academically, particularly for school-age learners. Government schools in India continue to face issues with students lacking reading skills, especially in English. Most pupils enter the secondary school level with very poor literacy skills, which negatively affects their language and academic achievement. The problems mentioned above stem from an underlying problem of having large class sizes, insufficient reading materials, a lack of exposure to the English language, and conventional textbook-based teaching methods. At the same time, students have become active participants in social media platforms like WhatsApp and YouTube as a result of the policies in the twenty-first century. Access to low-cost smartphones and the internet has made students very active on these platforms. Students use these platforms as a means of communication and accessing content, as well as socializing with their peers. In most public schools, these platforms are not utilized effectively for developing language skills.

The present research is located in the gap between two worlds, the reading skills of secondary learners, which requires urgent attention, and the incorporation of digital tools in students' lives.

This study aims at WhatsApp, which is a mobile-based platform, to see its effectiveness as an educational tool to enhance the reading skills of Class 9 students at a government high school in Andhra Pradesh.

The study takes an explorative action research stance with a focus on a student group who demonstrated low reading skills and low interaction with the reading materials provided. Using multimedia materials such as short stories, audio files, videos with subtitles, and read-aloud sessions, which were provided through WhatsApp, this research seeks to test the impact of informal digital micro-interventions on students' motivation, reading and comprehension skills, and overall fluency. It also aims to gauge the attitudes of the students and teachers towards the application of technology in teaching language.

Using a social networking site that is already known to the target audience within the context of a lesson helps to bridge the divide between teaching and learning and presenting information in a digital realm. More generally, this research seeks to respond to the need for low-resource environments with theoretical discourse in digital pedagogy and to address the gap.



OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Objectives of the Study

The goal of this study is to evaluate the reading skills of secondary school students when they use technology like WhatsApp and whether this inclusion of technology in their teaching resulted in improvement of engagement, fluency, and comprehension in students of English.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To assess the level of reading skill deficits of students in government secondary schools, paying particular attention to language comprehension skills.
2. To assess the impact of teaching reading through WhatsApp on the fluency and comprehension skills of the students.
3. To assess the attitudes of the students and the teachers towards the use of WhatsApp as a teaching tool for language instruction.
4. To devise appropriate methods for using social networking tools to enhance the teaching and learning of language in resource-poor settings.

Research Questions

In concordance with the objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the most significant challenges with regard to reading skills faced by the selected Class 9 students in the government school?
2. In what ways can reading fluency and comprehension in English be enhanced through the use of digital platforms like WhatsApp?
3. How are teachers and students viewing the use of WhatsApp for educational purposes, especially for language acquisition?
4. What are the pedagogical approaches that can be drawn out from this intervention for future implementation of SNS tools in the classroom?

METHODOLOGY

A combined action research methodology combines both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze WhatsApp-based learning approaches that enhance reading skills in high school students. The chosen research model includes specific elements such as context-oriented solution development through teacher-researcher partnerships and ongoing implementation feedback.

Research Context: The study took place at a public secondary school in Andhra Pradesh in India. The investigation focused on 20 ninth-graders who transitioned from nearby schools and needed assistance because they showed weaknesses in English reading. The students were chosen because of their academic achievement, together with teacher evaluations and the researcher-administered basic reading evaluation.

Participants: The research involved 20 ninth-grade students who ranged from 13 to 15 years old, along with a requirement that all

students had phones at their homes. The study obtained parental permission before students could participate.

The same school's two English teachers took part in the study to deliver feedback while helping students maintain their engagement and evaluation. The study used purposive sampling to choose students who required reading assistance while maintaining digital access through WhatsApp.

Intervention Design

This specific research initiative lasted for four weeks. Through WhatsApp, an organized learning framework containing multiple components was established, which included the following features:

1. Short stories with images and voiceover: each day, the group received English stories combined with images and voiceover narrations.
2. Subtitled videos: the program provided English dialogues with subtitles from Tenali Raman Krishna and Jataka stories for better reading skills.
3. Students completed reading practice exercises by recording themselves reading out loud different sections and then submitted their recorded work for evaluation.
4. The program used informal online activities, which included text-based questions to promote reading understanding and writing skills development.
5. Teachers provided brief audio or text-based feedback together with motivational support when responding to student recordings and submissions.

Data Collection Methods

Several methods were applied for gathering information, which determined the effects of the program. The structured Questionnaire, which uses Yes/No questions, was given to students before and after the program to discover their reading behaviors along with confidence and engagement. Teachers responded to the perceived digital tool performance through their feedback on improvements and feasibility challenges, and possible drawbacks. The researcher conducted telephone interviews with particular students to investigate their specific learning experiences. Before and after the program, researchers tracked student engagement and language proficiency using participation statistics. Researchers evaluated student reading progress by examining recorded audio files and text messages to track improvements in both fluency and pronunciation, and comprehension.

Ethical Considerations

The students and their parents gave their permission before participating in the research. All participants received confirmation about secure data handling solely for academic and research goals. The intervention took place during the regular curriculum of students while receiving permission from school administrators.



RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The following section provides results obtained through a four-week WhatsApp program that aimed to enhance reading abilities for ninth-grade students. The collected information originated from student and teacher questionnaires and interviews, as well as reading submissions and classroom observations. Two main sections exist within the report: the examination of survey data

Survey Item	Pre-Intervention	Post-Intervention
Enjoy Reading Non-Textbook Materials	20% (4/20)	70% (14/20)
Use The Phone For Learning	10% (2/20)	85% (17/20)
Read Aloud Confidently	15% (3/20)	60% (12/20)
Motivated To Read English At Home	25% (5/20)	70% (14/20)
Like Using Whatsapp For Learning	N/A	90% (18/20)

Through the analysis, students displayed enhanced reading comprehension when exposed to multimedia content (stories containing images and videos with subtitles). They displayed enhanced feelings toward sharing their voice recordings with others through WhatsApp. The research revealed a substantial improvement in students' digital learning tool acceptance levels. A detailed analysis of teacher responses through open-ended reflections from a structured questionnaire reveals the following:

1. The implementation period led to increased confidence among students who had previously been hesitant about speaking in class.
2. The implementation period showed increased student involvement in digital learning and in-class activities according to teacher observations.
3. After testing WhatsApp as a supporting tool for reading practice, most teachers who had doubts about its effectiveness came to accept it as an effective solution.
4. One teacher observed students who previously remained silent in English class but now express themselves through WhatsApp audio messages.

Interviews and Submissions Thematic Analysis

The qualitative research from student interviews and recorded audio material revealed multiple emerging themes in the analysis. Students claimed they never received guidance to read materials beyond their English textbook. The digital stories students received through WhatsApp channels provided higher satisfaction when compared to standard classroom learning materials. Students who shared story information with friends and family members at home demonstrated a rise in English language use. Audio feedback from teachers emerged as a source of motivation for students. According to one learner, their teacher's positive audio feedback motivated them to continue working on their reading assignment.

Summary of Impact

Seventy percent of the students demonstrated an increased desire to read. Pronunciation and word recognition showed improvement in sixty percent of students. Teachers demonstrated they were willing to use WhatsApp-based learning for reading tasks. The study proves that structured non-intrusive digital platforms that operate through WhatsApp can boost reading

through numerical approaches and the identification of patterns from open-question responses and field research.

A student survey administered before and after the intervention period measured changes in three key areas: reading habits, confidence levels, and student engagement. The research analyzed student responses to the following key outcomes:

engagement and confidence among students who lack access to traditional learning materials.

DISCUSSION

The research results from this initial investigation show that using WhatsApp as a teaching tool improved how students participated in reading activities while boosting their desire to learn and becoming better readers. The following discussion analyzes the results with established literature as well as educational models and practical classroom situations to identify both the advantages and obstacles of using social media for learning in low-resource educational settings.

Bridging the Gap Between Informal and Formal Learning

The research intervention demonstrated a major achievement through its ability to decrease student opposition to reading English. The students previously associated reading with traditional textbook assignments, along with the typical assessments. The students found WhatsApp familiar and minimally stressful, which enabled them to view reading as an interactive social experience. The Sociocultural Theory of Learning (Vygotsky) confirms that social interactions help people develop new abilities.

Digital platforms that take on a structured learning environment, about WhatsApp, indicate that these tools enable academic development throughout non-classroom periods when students use them for their intended educational purposes.

Reinforcement Through Multimodal Learning

The intervention is focused on applying a multimodal learning theory and hence uses audio, video, image, and text formats. Students were engaged and responded actively to subtitled videos and audio stories. They listened and repeated the content according to their ability and their own pace. This freedom resulted in improved comprehension and fluency. The results support the earlier studies (Reinders, 2012; Warschauer, 2007) that say technology makes language learning easier when learners have the freedom to control their pace and engagement in learning.



Teacher Adaptability and Acceptance

While teacher skepticism toward digital platforms is well-documented, this study found a gradual shift in attitudes among participating teachers. Teachers were first cautious about using WhatsApp for instruction. It changed later as the majority of the teachers observed significant improvement among their students. It helped them to welcome the gradual and consistent inclusion of technology into the classroom. This shift indicates that basic digital tool training and instructor support help one to adjust to new modalities of instruction even in the absence of costly infrastructure.

Limitations and Structural Constraints

The intervention concluded positively in general, but there were a few tough spots too. Like, a big problem was that some students didn't always have phones or enough mobile data, so they just couldn't join in the same way as others. Some students also struggled with their home environments, not everyone had a quiet spot to record their reading or speak aloud without disturbance. From the teachers' side, giving feedback over WhatsApp took extra time, usually beyond their usual classroom duties, which wasn't always easy to manage. These kinds of issues point out that, while WhatsApp can help as a starting point, making this kind of digital learning work on a larger scale will need stronger support from institutions, along with better infrastructure.

Implications for Language Pedagogy

This study shows that there is no need for fancy tools to do something meaningful with tech in education, especially in places where there aren't a lot of resources. WhatsApp worked well here, not because it was made for learning or anything, but because teachers used it smartly. They shared stories, gave students small tasks to try, and responded with feedback when they could. So, it's not really about the platform itself, it's more about *how* it's used. For teachers in schools that don't have much, this kind of thing shows that even a simple app like WhatsApp can still help a lot. Teachers used it for reading practice, asking students to write, sending vocabulary, or even telling stories with voice messages. These small, digital activities, when they connect to what's in the textbook and when the teacher is involved, can help students participate more.

Future Research Directions

This study opens up a few directions for more research. One idea is to look at how using WhatsApp over a longer time might affect students' learning, like, does it still help if used for a year or more? Another thing to explore is how it compares with other platforms like Telegram or Google Classroom, especially when it comes to how students stay engaged and what they learn. It is also interesting to see if the progress in reading will also help to improve the speaking skills.

To sum it up, WhatsApp isn't meant to replace proper classroom teaching, but if used well, creatively, and with students and teachers working together, it can support learning. In a country like India, where making education more flexible and inclusive is

important, small tech-based ideas like this can make a big difference and be used more widely.

CONCLUSION

This study was done to see how WhatsApp could help improve reading skills for secondary school students in a government school in Andhra Pradesh. Even though there were a lot of limitations, like not having enough resources or proper infrastructure, the results showed that WhatsApp made a positive difference when it was used properly. Students started reading better, they became more interested in the reading activities, and many of them got more confident in using language, both while learning on phones and in the classroom. They also seemed to enjoy using mobile phones for learning, especially when there were stories, small interactive tasks, and when teachers encouraged them. When teachers are supported by the school and provided with basic tools and training, they express a strong willingness to try out this method.

This study shows that a simple chat app can be a useful and affordable tool for learning in places. Students were more interested when tasks came with videos, images, or voice notes, and when learning felt social and low-pressure. Teachers played a big role too, their feedback and willingness to try new things helped students stay involved.

For teachers trying this, starting small is better. A story a day or a short video, plus quick feedback like a voice note, can help the process. Appreciating students' efforts also makes them more confident. But it's important to make sure even students with less access still feel included.

On the policy side, learning with mobile-based tech should be considered seriously. Teachers can use tech in smart ways with training and support. Not everything needs big budgets, just a bit of freedom to try and continue.

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