Instant Chats in Collaborative Learning: Its Merits and Demerits in Bangladeshi Tertiary Education

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ABSTRACT

Various technological platforms have become prominent in recent times for communication. It is hard to survive for educated people in this modern world without effective communication. People use various technological tools for mutual interaction. These technological aspects are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Messenger, WhatsApp, and others. Among these instruments, instant messaging applications are the popular means through which students can share their ideas on how they can improve their English language skills. Group messenger or WhatsApp chatting are significant ways through which more than two students can discuss their study materials collaboratively. In this context, the main objective of this research is to find out the contributions of online group chatting to interactive English language learning. Many Bangladeshi tertiary-level students do not have proper knowledge about the use of technological tools. This study will help them to understand how messenger\WhatsApp chats can create an interactive and friendly environment among English language learners. The researcher followed qualitative research methods for this study. The researcher took semi-structured interviews with ten participants, all drawn from a renowned private university of Bangladesh. However, findings inform us that online messaging platforms help students to improve their English language in a rapid way. On the contrary, the researcher also found that students sometimes face difficulties while sharing their ideas in English through messenger\WhatsApp or other online applications. Finally, some recommendations have been proposed in light of the research findings.

Keywords: Technological platforms, instant messaging, collaborative, qualitative methods, semi-structured interviews.

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Effectiveness Of Online Learning Platforms

Technological platforms offer an innovative and smart means of language teaching and learning. These platforms help the students to understand different aspects of the English language. Effective online applications have not only caught the attention of language educators but also created student oriented learning environment in English language learning classrooms (Jabeen & Thomas,2015). We can see many fascinating technological apps/web portals which help the students to learn different components of English language collaboratively. These online applications are, Facebook, You Tube, WhatsApp, Messenger, Twitter etc. For these online platforms students can get instant feedback from their teachers. Therefore, to create an interactive atmosphere inside the classroom both the teachers and students need to understand the importance of online learning platforms.

Online learning instructions have become a significant part in second language learning. The use of communicative platforms is helpful for making the learning process more effective among ESL (English as Second Language) learners (Mahfouz & Ihmeideh, 2009). There are many useful online platforms that help

the students to grasp English language skills. Yaccob & Yunus (2019) stated that traditional teaching-learning techniques have become outdated in recent times. These online platforms, for instance, Messenger, YouTube, Twitter, Face book, Viber etc. can involve the students in different classroom activities. Teachers use these applications in a creative way so that their students may not lose their curiosity in lesson content. These online platforms help teachers to assess students' performances in a quicker way. Some teachers prefer online platforms rather than pen and paper to assess students' speaking and writing performances. Nurhadianti & Pratolo (2020) mentioned that teachers can design different game-based assessments with technological applications which facilitate students' involvement in classroom activities. Some online platforms are easily attainable by which students can promote English language learning through communication. These applications can increase students' self-confidence because they can share their ideas with other students who have similar interests. Most of the researchers found that instant messaging applications, for instance, Messenger, and WhatsApp have upgraded the language learning process of the learners'. Students create messenger group chats to communicate with their groupmates for academic information. The teachers can arrange creative materials for their students by using online learning platforms to make the lesson contents interesting for the students. Therefore, some teachers may not have proper training on the use of online learning platforms. They need to know how to use online platforms successfully inside the classroom to make their lectures convenient for the students which will help them to become more efficient English language learners in future. Moreover, in the following section the researcher will discuss some instant messaging applications.

- **INSTANT MESSAGING APPLICATIONS**

Instant messaging platforms are considered as the means of immediate communication among 15 or more than 15 people. People not only interact through words but also can share files, pictures or videos within the chats through these applications. The popularity of instant messaging applications is increasing day by day around the world and these platforms are helping learners to make a connection with other people for academic or professional purposes (Oseni, Dingley & Hart, 2017). Examples of some instant messaging applications are, Messenger, WhatsApp, Snap chat, iMessage etc. According to (Baily, Schroeder, Whitmer and Sims, 2016), the people of the United States also use IM applications for immediate interaction. Instant Messaging applications have some merits and demerits.

In academic and professional fields, it is important for students and employees to ask for and receive information. Instant Messaging applications will help them to communicate with each other without any delay. These applications can ensure efficient communication among English language learners. The biggest advantage of IM applications is that it can encourage students to create teams to complete creative tasks beyond classroom settings. Besides these advantages, IM applications have some disadvantages. When we write an e-mail to our instructors we can get a chance to review information. We can add or change any words or sentences from the written information in the e-mail. In Instant Messages, sometimes students cannot get that opportunity to re-write their messages within a short time limit. Instant Messaging also can create distraction when students share personal life related information within class discussions. Moreover, in the following section, the researcher will explain the context of this study.

- **Bangladeshi Context**

Collaborative learning is accepted as a method of teaching and learning in the 21st century and by following this method students can work together to finish a complicated task given by the teacher (Mahbib, Esa, Mohamad & Mohd. Salleh, 2017). In collaborative learning method, messenger application plays an important role because students can exchange their knowledge with their friends both in formal and informal settings through messenger chats.

Mobile based Instant Messaging tools are interactive through which learning can happen anytime and

anywhere (Cetinkaya, 2017). In many private universities of Bangladesh teachers prefer collaborative learning which can facilitate students' English language learning process.

The people of Bangladesh use popular social networking sites for instance, Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp, You Tube so that they can pass any information rapidly (Amin & Sheikh, 2021). Instant messaging applications can contribute to improving students' academic performances because these applications can provide opportunities to the students to enrich their academic knowledge through frequent discussions. Moreover, Covid -19 pandemic made virtual teaching and learning even more popular across the world. During the pandemic period, teachers and students in Bangladesh have also used electronic platforms for teaching and learning. People especially tertiary-level students use Instant Messaging applications for sharing information with others. Tertiary-level students' especially private and public university students in Bangladesh use group messenger chats for communication. Bangladeshi tertiary-level students face English pronunciation problems. Two or more students can discuss class lectures on English pronunciation through video calls by using messenger or WhatsApp. Not only pronunciation problems but also instant messaging is helpful to solve vocabulary issues through sharing new words with others. Many Bangladeshi students are not aware of the importance of online chatting in educational field. Moreover, academic research on the influences of Instant Messaging applications in collaborative learning is inadequate in the circumstances of Bangladesh. Hence, this study is important for understanding the implications of Instant Messaging platforms in Bangladeshi tertiary-level education. Bangladeshi students need to know the advantages and disadvantages of immediate online chatting in collaborative learning as technological tools are frequently being used in the educational field. This study will explore the ways by which group chatting can help students to improve their English language skills, the difficulties that the students face while sharing their ideas in English through messenger/WhatsApp chatting and some recommendations on how students can use messaging applications for academic purposes. The researcher reviewed articles on the importance of collaborative learning and how Instant Messaging applications can encourage students to complete a task cooperatively which will be presented in the following section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary focus of this study is to find out the influence of messenger chats in collaborative language learning process. This chapter presents the existing literature on collaborative learning approach, instant messaging applications and its academic implications. The chapter also explains the research gap in the existing literature. The following sections will briefly present the contribution of instant messaging applications in academic purposes.

Collaborative Learning

In collaborative learning, two or more students work together in pairs or groups to complete problem-solving tasks. In language classrooms we can see some students remain silent. They do not interact with teachers. Anxiety, hesitation and low confidence keep them away from communicating with their instructor for class work. Collaborative learning can significantly remove these problems. If students do class activities with other students, then they can share their opinion with each other, take notes and explain their ideas to the teacher in group. This kind of collaboration increases their self-confidence. According to (Khosa & Volet, 2014), collaborative learning enhances students' ability to work together in both formal and informal context.

By adopting collaborative learning method students can fulfill their goals in academic and professional fields. It can create a friendly and game-like environment among the learners (Khosa & Volet, 2014). Teachers can create enjoyable classroom activities to remove hesitation and shyness of language learners. Collaborative activities help students to understand the importance of collaboration in completing problem-

solving tasks (Lizzio & Wilson, 2006). Besides chalk-duster, teachers can use different online applications to make collaborative learning more fascinating to students.

Various collaborative platforms can encourage cooperative learning. Becker & Cline (2005) mentioned some interactive platforms for instance, Messenger, WhatsApp, YouTube, Face book, E-mail, Video-conferencing and so on. By using these tools students can enrich their knowledge. For example, students can learn new vocabularies from English dictionary and they can share those words with their friends through messenger\WhatsApp applications. University students, especially undergraduate level students use suitable communicative platforms like messenger or WhatsApp applications through which they can share photos, videos and other text messages (Chan & Holosko, 2017). In the following section, the contribution of instant messaging applications for collaborative learning will be explained.

Instant Messaging Applications for Collaboration

Messenger as a Communicative Platform

Electronic platforms provide opportunities to the students so that they can share their skills to others. Texting and sharing videos these two are important functions of messenger applications. According to Tananuraksakul (2018), messenger application is a medium of academic discussion. The people of Thailand use some well-known messaging applications but messenger is the second most popular instant messaging applications which 26 million people of Thailand use for communication (Sodano, 2017). Through messenger application students can share their class lectures and they can encourage other students to participate in video-call discussions. Ajid, Reni, Yunita and Dwi (2018) mentioned that messenger application allows the users to exchange information and supports communication among 20 group members. In pandemic situation, teachers and students used messenger applications for regular communication. Students share knowledge, images of their class notes or videos with their teacher and other students through messenger. Cooperation relies on effective interaction among students and messenger application can create that communication within a minute (Maina, 2013). Besides academic purposes, people use messenger application in professional spheres. In workplaces, instant messaging platforms allow workers to share their views across the world (Jones, 2013).The main advantage of using messenger application is that it can connect people across the globe. Another disadvantage of using messenger application is that if people use messenger application regularly their face-to-face communication will be affected (Maina, 2013). In the next part, the importance of messenger application in collaborative English language learning will be discussed.

Whatsapp as a Collaborative Language Learning Tool

English arguably has become foreign language in Bangladesh. If we want to achieve proficiency in English, we need to learn the language through different English textbooks. Besides English textbooks, we can take help from technological tools which can facilitate our language learning process. Among those platforms, WhatsApp is an important one. Students can utilize WhatsApp for collaborative English language learning process. Through WhatsApp, students can share videos, images or even they can share pdf version of textbooks with other students (Ajid, Reni, Yunita &Dwi, 2018). It diminishes the importance of collecting hard copies of printed books.

Therefore, sometimes through WhatsApp video-calls, English language teachers create discussions for individual students. According to Ajid, Reni, Yunita and Dwi (2018), students can record their presentation by using You Tube channels and share it through WhatsApp with their classmates. WhatsApp is also a useful application to enrich vocabulary skills. Lu (2008) mentioned that students who use mobile based platforms learn vocabularies better than in the format of pen and paper. Moreover, if students want to improve their English reading skills, they can share short stories or other study materials to the students to

read. Most of the Bangladeshi students have major problem in English listening skills.

Teachers can share their recorded video lectures to the students through messenger or WhatsApp (Ajid, Reni, Yunita & Dwi, 2018). In addition, teachers can also share important YouTube videos through WhatsApp on English language skills. Bangladeshi tertiary level students can listen to these videos properly and improve their English listening skills. In the following section, the researcher will explain information gap from the existing literature.

2.5. Research Gap

It appears from the existing literature that messenger and WhatsApp have multiple contributions in collaborative learning. The existing literature reveals some of the major issues for instance, the concept of collaborative learning, messenger as a communicative platform and the use of WhatsApp in collaborative language learning process. The issues mentioned above have not been addressed in the context of Bangladesh. Many Bangladeshi tertiary level students do not know how to use instant messaging applications for language learning and the problems they may face while using those applications. This study mainly focuses on how online messages can help students to develop their English language skills, the difficulties they face while using immediate messaging applications. The study ends with suggesting some recommendations on how learners can use messenger, WhatsApp or other quick messaging applications for academic purposes. In the articles, researchers mostly followed quantitative or mixed methods but in this study the researcher will follow qualitative method to get in-depth information from the participants.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Qualitative research method shall be used to conduct this research. The main feature of qualitative method is to investigate a central problem and develop an elaborate understanding of that problem. (Creswell, 2012). This research method is useful for the researcher to collect in-depth information from the participants. The researcher chose an inductive approach for this study. The purpose for using an inductive approach is that this approach can generate reliable and valid findings by scrutinizing qualitative data and inductive approach is easier than other approaches in analyzing qualitative data. (Thomas, 2006). The researcher collected participants' opinions through semi-structured interviews to collect detailed information. The following section will highlight the research questions of this study.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

1. What are the influences of instant online chatting on the tertiary level students of Bangladesh?
2. How the use of instant online chats can be introduced in Bangladeshi English language classrooms for collaborative learning?

Participants

Choosing an appropriate sampling technique is essential for conducting research. Purposive homogenous and snowball sampling techniques were adopted for the study. According to Patton (2015), in purposive homogenous sampling technique the researcher selects cases that are very similar to study the characteristics they have in common. The researcher must choose participants with similar characteristics. The researcher chose homogenous sampling technique because the main criterion of selecting participants was to choose Bangladeshi students who know the functions of messenger or WhatsApp. The reason behind choosing this criterion is that if the students used messenger or WhatsApp, they could answer the interview questions

related to messenger chats. Other criteria were: (b) the students must be from private university where the medium of instruction is English (c) their age range is 19-25 (d) they are from Bangla medium background and (e) they must be willing to be a part of this study. For the reasons mentioned above the participants are suitable for this research. Most of the participants are from Bangla medium background. Their names are given below:

Participants' Table

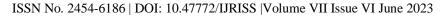| Name (pseudonyms)	Background
Ratul	Bangla medium
Shafiqul	Bangla medium
Sreetoma	Bangla medium
Rajib	Bangla medium
Nipa	Bangla medium
Anjie	Bangla medium
Sandip	Bangla medium
Sidhu	Bangla medium
Pinky	Bangla medium
Torsha	Bangla medium

In addition, the researcher selected snowball sampling technique for this research. Researchers use snowball sampling when it is difficult to reach to the expected population for this study.(Anieting & Mosugu, 2017). Messenger and WhatsApp are well-known platforms for Bangladeshi students. For this reason, the researcher followed snowball sampling technique. The researcher first posted in different Face book groups whether students participated in group messenger chatting at least twice. One student responded to the post first. Then, the researcher contacted the student via messenger and asked her whether she was free for the interview session. After getting her permission, the researcher took contact number of another student who used messenger application for academic purposes. Thus, the researcher could manage ten participants for the interview.

Instrument

Interview technique was used by the researcher to collect the data. According to Bolderston (2012), researchers take face-to-face qualitative interviews by listening and gaining information from participants. There are different kinds of qualitative interviews. Among those interviews E-mail or internet interview is a prominent one. Semi-structured interviews can be taken through electronic devices which include e-mail, instant messaging, video-conferencing and others. The researcher took semi-structured interviews of ten participants from a renowned private university of Bangladesh through zoom application. The researcher made eight open-ended interview questions for the participants. In qualitative interviews researchers ask topic-related questions and note down their answers (Creswell, 2012). This instrument will make this research reliable.

Data Collection Procedure

After making eight interview questions the researcher did a pilot study. The researcher piloted the interview questions with three participants Rahim, Nashrah and Antonio (pseudonyms). The researcher chose these three students because these students did their thesis by using qualitative method in their postgrad level and had good knowledge on the patterns of interview questions.

Harding (2013) mentioned that the researcher will get benefits if he/she pilots the interview questions. Therefore, among ten participants one participant did not want to give face to face interviews via zoom meeting because of her hesitation to speak in English. For this reason, the researcher took her interview via e-mail. According to Creswell (2012), researchers send open-ended questions to the respondents through their e-mail by using Internet facilities .The researcher sent the interview questions to that participant via e-mail and the participant replied.

The researcher then noted down her answers. The rest of the participants gave their interviews via zoom meeting. Creswell (2012) stated that, one-on-one interviews are good for those respondents who can speak without any hesitation. The researcher did a member checking to develop validity and credibility of the study at the last stage of data collection process. (Carlson, 2010).

Interpretation Of Data

Qualitative thematic analysis is a method which is used to analyze qualitative data in this research. Thematic analysis is a process which identifies, analyzes, describes and presents themes within the discussion part. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher used NVivo software for qualitative thematic analysis .The researcher adopted the data analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) which consists of six steps. These steps are mentioned below:

Familiarization with collected data: In this phase, the researcher reads transcript or listen to video recordings to become aware of the information. She read the answers of the interview questions thoroughly.

Generating Initial Codes:

This phase scientifically analyzes data through codes. Qualitative coding helps the researcher to effectively classify the excerpts of the qualitative data. (Savage, 2000). The researcher tried to find out interpretive codes from the answers.

Searching for Themes:

After coding data, the researcher searched for similar codes to generate themes. King (2004) stated that predefined codes need to be identified first. The researcher found major themes from the similar codes.

Reviewing Themes:

Themes need to have connection with coded data. Then, the researcher reviewed the coded data to find coherence with themes. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Defining and naming themes

In here, the researcher gave names to each of the themes. She gave enough time to name the themes. King (2004) suggested that before finalizing themes it needs to be evaluated at least twice. After evaluating the data and codes the researcher finalized themes of the study.

Producing the report:

After establishing themes, the researcher began to write the final report. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).Thorne (2000) encouraged that researchers need to develop the findings in a systematic process which will make the results believable.

Ethical Consideration

While seeking permission from the respondents the researcher explained the purpose of this research to them (Creswell, 2012). As the participants are classmates of the researcher, she (the researcher) asked for the permission of the participants through messenger chat and told them the purpose of the research. In addition, the researcher used pseudonyms of the participants in this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Online Platforms

Tertiary level students frequently use online applications to get instant information from their teacher or other students. Through these electronic platforms, learners can interact with foreign teachers\students to discuss any issues related to their classroom lectures. For instance, Kahoot! is a game-based platform that helps teachers to connect with students in any educational settings. (Toth, Logo & Logo, 2018). According to (Mahfouz and Ihmeideh,2009), students who learn English as their second or foreign language use interactive platforms to make the language learning process fruitful for the learners which the researcher mentioned in the introduction section. The researcher interviewed ten students from a private university of Bangladesh.

Among those interviewees, one male student mentioned that he is a You Tuber and uses this platform for educational purposes. Besides YouTube, he uses messenger and Facebook where he reads various things in English. He tries to write one Facebook post regularly in English. He shares messages in English through messenger. Another female student from a renowned private university in Bangladesh said that she uses messenger, WhatsApp and Facebook for communication purposes. She tries to speak in English and encourages others to use English while using these applications. These platforms help them a lot in collaborative English language learning. Sreetoma, who is currently doing her B.A in Computer Science and Engineering at a popular private university of Bangladesh stated that, besides YouTube, messenger and Facebook, she practices English language from Coursera, skillshare and 10 minutes school. Collaborative classroom performances through online platforms thus help the students to become extroverts. Therefore, teachers-students need to utilize online applications in a proper way to facilitate English language teaching and learning in future.

The Influences of Instant Chats

Instant chatting enables efficient communication among the learners. Through short messages learners can discuss class activities, create new ideas and talk to others about something that happened at their university. Becker and Cline (2005) stated that, through communicative platforms learners can expand their knowledge which the researcher mentioned in the literature review section. Ten students shared their experiences of using instant messaging applications for collaborative learning.

Among the ten students, Ratul who is a private university student stated that, he uses messenger application for group projects. He mentioned that, in messenger, people do not need to be friends with others to be in group chats. The relationship can be formal if it is required but in WhatsApp students need to have other peoples' numbers saved in order to chat with them. He also shared his experiences of using instant chatting in the collaborative English language learning process. He stated that he mostly uses messenger chats for collaborative learning. Whenever he has any query, he leaves a message on messenger and his group mates provide answers to those questions.

Nipa, another female student mentioned that, she used messenger and WhatsApp during the pandemic

period. She communicates with her relatives through a messenger in English and encourages them to use good English vocabulary in group chats. Moreover, Sandip who is a student at a renowned private university of Bangladesh said that, he uses the messenger application for group discussion. Through instant messaging platforms, he not only can write texts but also can share links of videos, pictures, pdf files and articles which are helpful for students. Through messenger video-call, he can keep in contact with his instructor for class discussions. Apart from communication, instant chats can play an essential role in vocabulary learning.

Rajib mentioned in the interview that, he shares some new English words and grammar rules via messenger\WhatsApp. The interviewee makes some questions, for instance, fill in the blanks and asks his group mates to answer those questions. He asks for word meanings from his friends and tries to read short messages with unfamiliar vocabulary. Then, he googles those words. By this way, he learns new vocabulary from instant messages. Therefore, instant chats have great influence in many ways as discussed above on the lives of Bangladeshi people.

Difficulties And Recommendations

Instant chats have positive as well as negative sides. Students sometimes face difficulties while using instant messaging applications. In the articles that the researcher used for this study, writers mostly talked about the positive aspects of instant messages. In the interview session, the researcher asked a question on whether students face any problems while using instant messaging applications for group chats. Ten students mentioned some difficulties which they faced while participating in online group chats. Besides problems, students also suggested some ways through which instant messaging can be introduced in Bangladeshi language learning classrooms.

In the whole interview session, Bangladeshi private university students mentioned some of the obstacles they face while using instant messages for collaborative learning. Sidhu, stated that, if messenger becomes loaded with many messages, he cannot recognize the responses of other group members. If any group member ignores any important message, he becomes quite frustrated. Another female student mentioned that, one of the biggest problems is keeping track of messages. When everyone starts communicating, it becomes difficult to keep track of who said what and reply to each and everyone's messages. In addition, Anjie said that, there are some issues while using messenger application for group discussions for instance, network problem, typing errors, glitches in the voice chats etc. These are some of the difficulties that students can face while using messaging platforms.

Besides obstacles, students provided some suggestions on how instant messaging applications can be used in Bangladeshi language learning classrooms. Shafiqul said that, the teacher can simply ask the students to use messenger, WhatsApp or snap chat for collaborative learning during the lecture. One thing he suggested that, teachers need to make sure that students do not cheat in examinations by using messenger or other electronic platforms. Pinky another respondent of this research, clearly suggested not to use messenger or other online applications in the classroom because students can be distracted while using these applications. Students can only use instant messaging applications for educational purposes in emergency situations inside the classroom. Though learners face problems to participate in instant chats, it can be implemented in English language classrooms to facilitate the learning with the permission of the instructor.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As concluding remarks, it can be said that, messenger, WhatsApp are easily accessible instant messaging platforms for free language learning and it opens a new door for the learners to learn new languages (Ahmad, 2021). In Bangladesh, messenger and WhatsApp are popular means of online written communication. It has been said in this study, despite some manageable problems, in most cases learning

through online chats has been useful to the students. Therefore, the experiences of Bangladeshi students regarding the influences of instant chats need to be explored. As Bangladeshi students do not yet know the functions of instant messaging applications properly, it is also essential to examine how students utilize these applications inside and outside classroom settings. In addition, this study is mostly important for Bangladeshi students' for understanding the implications of messenger\WhatsApp in language classrooms. As students may not find enough opportunities to interact with their classmates or relatives who live abroad, online platforms like messenger and WhatsApp help them to minimize this problem. As technological development is increasingly gaining momentum, the use of online messaging applications will be far more acceptable to the future students who would be learning new languages.

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