STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE USE OF WHATSAPP IN WRITING ACTIVITIES: A CASE STUDY AT SMPN 1 PAGAR GUNUNG

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Abstract

The aim of this study was conducted to find out the students' perceptions on the use of WhatsApp in writing activities at SMPN 1 Pagar Gunung. This study used a qualitative research design. The participants of this study were the eleventh grade students of SMPNegeri 1 Pagar Gunung which consisted of six students by usingpurposive sampling with maximum variation sampling. The data were collected by using semi-structured interview through open ended questions. The data were analyzed by using thematic analysis technique. The findings of this study revealed that there were advantages and disadvantages on the use of WhatsApp in writing activities, as follows: (a) perceived progress of vocabulary, (b) independent from time and location, (c) internet connection problem, (d) costly to use, and (e) no grammatical improvement. Then, by knowing the students' perceptions on the use of WhatsApp in writing activities, the students can explore by themselves on the use of e-learning to upgrade the English proficiency.

Key words: students' perceptions, whatsapp, writing activities

Introduction

As we know, there are four skills in learning English such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. One of the skills that must be learned in learning English is writing skills. Among the four language skills, writing is one of the most important skills for some reasons. Writing is productive skill as writing is considered as an indirect communication and the nature of the character is very different from that is expressed by speaking directly; therefore, writing is included as productive ability. The most important of all basic skills is writing, since writing presupposes the other two skills such as listening and reading. Thirdly, Afrin(2016) stated writing skills are important part of academic because they allow to organize feelings and ideas clearly as well as convey meaning through well-constructed text. In addition, Hyland (2013) stated that writing is a technique for sharing individual feelings and writing courses construct someone views on the topic.

Some studies revealed that Indonesian students encountered problems in writing. According to Husin and Nurbayani(2017)found that two reasons why EFL students struggled with writing. It is a combination of internal and external factors, with the internal factor referring to their low English writing proficiency and the external factor referring to their insufficient quality in studying writing skills. In conclusion, the difficulties faced by students come from internal and external factors themselves. Students and teachers must cooperate in learning to write for better writing. Furthermore, a study conducted by Octaviana (2016) stated that in learning writing a lot of students still have difficulties. These difficulties were primarily due to their limited knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary. In addition, Aryanti

(2016) stated that that most of Indonesian learners still struggle with grammatical issues. The greatest challenge stems from the cultural differences between English and the learners' mother tongue, so it is possible to know that the production of their writing does not sound well in appropriate English culture.

The impact of the Corona virus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic has influenced the world of education. Indonesian government should apply self-quarantine and social distancing during the situation Covid-19 pandemic. Social distancing is deliberately increasing the physical space between people to avoid spreading illness. Staying at least six feet away from other people lessens the chances of catching Covid-19. Therefore, the government applied social distancing by closing school or substituting to online class and working from home (WFH). To overcome that, teachers' teach their students' by implementing online class by using application such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Zoom, and Google classroom.

In this era, information and communication technology (ICT) rapidly develops. ICT is supporting tool of learning and teaching in social distancing of the pandemic era. According to Suryani (2010), argued ICT makes a considerable influence to supporting of learning, students can be active learners by using technology in their learning. They will know what information they need, why they need it, and how they can get it. Furthermore, Nartiningrum and Nugroho(2020),students and teachers can study anywhere and at any time using ICT. Due tothe diverse practices of online learning and the heterogeneous learning environment in Indonesia, students and teachers have a varied readiness to face online learning. In conclusion, teaching and learning

process by using ICT makes it easy for students and teachers to study in flexible time and find they need. One of technology that used in ICT is social media.

WhatsApp is one of social networking service (ICT) that used for teaching and learning process for writing activities. One of features of WhatsApp is appropriate for writing activities is the WhatsApp group. Mistar and Embi(2016) stated that to improve students' writing skill using WhatsApp, teacher can send a text about particular topic in group and ask the students to do some exercise such as writing comments or any responses. Similarly, Fattah (2015) stated that, through the use of WhatsApp group teacher can ask the students to write and have discussion. Further, a study conducted by Mohesh & Meerasa(2016) showed that 77 percent of the participants liked and enjoyed the WhatsApp group as there was a good chance for the teacher to go paperless as students simply post their work through WhatsApp personal chat or group, then the teacher will respond by giving them feedback.

There are some benefits on the use of WhatsApp. A study conducted by Mulkalwar et al.(2019) stated that WhatsApp can provide a channel through which educators can communicate with their students more quickly and smoothly. In short, WhatsApp can improve the level of student communication and provide another room for learning. Furthermore, Hamad(2017) proposed that, WhatsApp was facilitate students in discussion, and helped students to overcome their fear of using the language. Students felt enthusiastic on the writing activity because that was the first time they had online activities. They worked and learnt together as teammates in a group. Additionally, According to Bouhnik and Deshen(2014), WhatsApp in school

allows learning outside the classroom, as it helps to easily and quickly pass links compared to other technology to study materials and the use of WhatsApp to submit study materials means that the message intended for class is sent to everyone in every form, even if it is sent after school hours, it can be concluded that WhatsApp has benefit for learning writing.

In a relation to this, at SMPNegeri 1 Pagar Gunung the teachers started to teach the students through online interaction. The teacher used digital technology as a tool to share information and material for teaching and learning. A preliminary study was conducted by interviewing one of the teachers of English at SMPNegeri 1 Pagar Gunung,the researcher found that they used WhatsApp as a application in teaching and learning process. WhatsApp is still being used for writing activities during pandemic Covid-19 and the feature that they used from WhatsApp is WhatsApp group.

There are several previous studies that are considered related to this study. The first study was conducted by Dumanauw (2018) which investigated the use of WhatsApp for teaching writing of recount text. The result showed the use of WhatsApp was effective to be used in learning activities. Students were eager learning process especially in writing activities. Furthermore, a study conducted by Fattah (2015) which aimed to identify the effectiveness of using WhatsApp messenger as one of mobile learning techniques to improve students' writing skills. The result showed the students who are taught using WhatsApp had significant improvement on their writing skill, particularly on their sentence structures. Additionally, a study conducted by Linda and Ri'aeni (2018) which identified WhatsApp messenger as a mobile media to learn writing. The

result of this research showed that, the students had positive responses toward using WhatsApp messenger in teaching writing. Considering those conditions, the researcher is interested in conducting a research entitle "Students' perceptions on the use of WhatsApp in writing activities: A case study at SMP Negeri 1 Pagar Gunung Lahat. Furthermore, the objective of this study is to find out students' perception on the use of WhatsApp in writing activities at SMPN 1 Pagar Gunung Lahat.

Literature Review
Features of WhatsApp in Writing Activities
Linda and Ri'aeni (2018) proposed some features of WhatsApp for writing activities, as follows:

a. WhatsApp group
   The teacher of writing subject gives instruction to the students to make a WhatsApp group. Then the teacher sends the material about writing text in group discussion by using WhatsApp.
b. Document
   The teacher gives the assignment of writing by using feature document to send file.
c. Camera
   The students take picture of their writing, and then they send it to group discussion on WhatsApp. The teacher reviews the students writing and gives score to the students on WhatsApp.

Advantages of WhatsApp for Writing Activities
There areadvantages regarding the use of WhatsApp in writing activities there are offering possibility of peer review, independence from time and location, perceived progress

in vocabulary, and grammar improvement.

1. Perceived progress in vocabulary

Another advantage of using by WhatsApp in writing activities is the perceived progress in vocabulary. Students are able to see their friend paragraphs as well as their vocabulary and make their vocabulary richer. According to Ma'ruf et al., (2019)through WhatsApp, they can identify their friends' paragraphs as well as their vocabularies, allowing them to expand their vocabularies. Additionally, Muslimah (2020), by using WhatsApp the students can add their vocabulary and their vocabulary and the teacher allow the students to use the dictionary in translating the text from another English chat in the Group by other students.

2. Independence from time and

The advantage of using WhatsApp in writing activities is the independence from time and location. WhatsApp makes students easier to submit their assignment. Ma'ruf et al., (2019) revealed that one of the benefits was freedom of time and place. Through the use of WhatsApp, the participants did not need to submit their assignments directly. Additionally, Ahmadi and Ilmiani (2020) stated that WhatsApp Group Application is accessible to all students using internet and it is still accessible even at the location with limited access of internet

3. Grammar improvement

Another advantage claimed by students for language learning when using WhatsApp in their writing classes as supplemental learning tools is grammatical improvement. All students ascertained that their writings were getting better in regard to grammar because they were allowed to have correction for the grammatical aspects. All students in WhatsApp group could

give comments and revise their peers' writings in terms of sentence structures or grammar. They can improve their understanding about English grammar and remembered more things through the discussions.

Disadvantages of WhatsApp for Writing Activities

There aresome disadvantages regarding the use of WhatsApp in writing activities it has following:

1. Internet Connection

WhatsApp is very attractive tool for students due to its popularity because WhatsApp present opportunities to the independence from time and place. However, using WhatsApp means that the users need the internet connection. It will hinder the learning and teaching process because of low connection. According to Ma'ruf et al., (2019), an internet connection is required to use any social networking service. It is difficult for the participants to establish a good connection. Muslimah (2020) added that the users must have access to internet to send and receive messages for free. Furthermore, Ahmed (2019) stated that the students have some problems in using WhatsApp such as unavailability of Wi-fi connection and the students must spend internet quota in access WhatsApp.

2. Costly to Use

Another problem found in this research is that the teachers are required to prepare a good operator in order to make them able to write and give assignments to their students everywhere. In line with that, Ma'ruf et al., (2019) stated that the users must prepare a good operator in order to be able to write and send their assignments anywhere. Additionally, Ismail et al., (2020) who said that the main concern of the challenge is heavily pointed to the poor internet connection

experienced by the students. Besides that, the institution did not provide internet quota for the students in learning activities. In relation to this, it can be concluded that internet connection and costly to use obstruct teachers and students for teaching and learning process in writing activities by using WhatsApp.

Method of the Research

This study was conducted by using qualitative study with case study design. Creswell (2014) define qualitative as an approach for exploring and understanding an individual or social human problem based on building a complex holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detail views of informants, and conducted in natural setting. A qualitative approach also allows teachers to hear the students' voices regarding how they felt and viewed English life skills through individual interview.

Moreover, a case study design was used for this study, since the researcher was interested in experience, insight, and perception of a particular group of foreign language learners. Besides, Creswell (2012) stated a case study is a problem to be studied which will reveal an in depth understanding of a bounded system, which involves understanding an event, program, activity, process, or one or more individuals. In addition, case study is appropriate with the study because researcher want to explicate an in depth of information students' perceptions on the use of WhatsApp in writing activities. Therefore, the qualitative with case study research is used to find out students' perceptions on the use of WhatsApp in writing activities at SMPN1 Pagar Gunung Lahat.

Participants of theStudy

This study used purpose full sampling method. According to Palinkas (2013), purposeful sampling is generally utilized for qualitative research in order to identify and choose a lot of information which is concerned with intended case. Additionally, Dornyei (2014) emphasized purposeful sampling as a technique to find individuals who can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation so as to maximize what we can learn. Therefore, class VIII B was chosen, since the teacher used WhatsApp to enhance writing activities.

Maximum variation sampling was used to select the participants. According to Creswell (2012), maximum variation sampling is a purposeful sampling strategy in which the researcher samples cases individuals that differ on some characteristic or trait. Thus, 6 students, which consist of: 2 high achievers, 2 medium achievers, 2 low achievers will be chosen based on the teacher's recommendation. To determine the participants, researcher took mid-semester score to choose the participants.

Technique for Collecting the Data

In this study, the researcher used interview to collect the data in order to gain information about teachers' perception toward the use WhatsApp in writing activities. According to Gilham (2005), interview is a conversation usually conducted between two people where one person is seeking responses for a particular purpose from the other person. It can be conclude that interview is used in obtaining information for research by asking respondent orally. One-on-one interview will be used in this study. Creswell (2012) defined one-on-one

interview as a data collection process in which the researcher asks questions and records the answers from only one participant in the study at the time. Furthermore, open-ended question will be used to get elicit information from students.

The researcher used semi-structured interview with participants. According to McIntosh and Morse (2015), a semi-structured interview is intended to elicit subjective responses from people about a specific situation or phenomenon related to their experience. The interview were recorded and later transcribed into English. The writer explained the purpose of the interview and the use of audio recorder before conducting the interview. Additionally, Galletta (2013) argued that the semi-structured interview provides a repertoire of options. It is sufficiently structured to address specific terms related to the phenomenon of the study, while also making way for participants to create new meaning to the study focus. The semi-structured interview allows for a great deal of versatility, and the arrangement of questions can be structured to yield significant and often multidimensional streams of data. The interview was recorded and transcribed into English.

Technique for Collecting the Data

To analyze the students' perception on the use of WhatsApp in writing activities, researcher used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes within a data set. As it provides core skills for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Creswell (2013) identified six steps following in the process of qualitative data analysis. The very first step requires the research to organize and prepare the data for

analysis through transcribing interviews. First, the researcher organized and prepared the data that was collected. Second, read and looked at the data. At this step researcher looked at the data collected and saw the tone, general ideas, and credibility. Third, coding about placing segments, pictures and text data in categories and then labeling them with a term. Fourth, the researcher generated a description of the setting for the people places or events as well as categories for analysis. Fifth, defining and naming them. The last, the final step is to provide the interpretation of qualitative research conclusions and results.

Findings and Discussions

There were some findings related to the students' perceptions on the use of WhatsApp in writing activities at SMPN 1 Pagar Gunung. The data were obtained from interview by using a thematic analysis with six students in SMPN 1 Pagar gunung.In-depth interview was done by using Indonesian, as it was more comfortable and connected between the interviewer and interviewees.

In this study, the researcher found some advantages and disadvantages perceived by students' perceptions on the use of WhatsApp in writing activities. The advantages are: (1) Independence from time and location, and (2) Perceived progress of vocabulary. Meanwhile, the disadvantages are: (1) Internet connection problem, (2) Costly to use, and (3) No grammatical improvement. After analyzing the data from six participants, the data was collected and grouped. Then,the researcher categorized them into some themes and codes.

Based on the data obtained from the interview, the researcher found one of the advantages on the use of WhatsApp in writing activities was improved vocabulary. When the students

sent their assignment in the WhatsApp group, the students read what their friends wrote and whenever they did not know what the word meaning, they could directly search the meaning in dictionary or Google Translate. The comments and suggestion from the teacher could improve their vocabulary. It could enlarge their vocabulary by using WhatsApp in writing activities. Perceived progress of vocabulary was stated by some students *"Emm. Yes, I think is a little bit effective to improve my vocabulary because when I saw the writing of my classmate,I accidentally learned new vocabulary, so that without realizing it, my vocabulary increased." (IA).* The second students said *"Yes, it's effective, because I think by using WhatsApp I can learn more convenient with the help of Google Translate. I can also learn new vocabulary. Because at the school, the students are not allowed to use cellphones."(PF).* The other students stated, *"I think it's effective. Because it is convenient to use a dictionary and Google. I can also see the writings of my classmates who have sent photo of assignments in the WhatsApp groupso that I can learn new vocabulary." (DP).* In short, through the use of WhatsApp, the students can improve their vocabulary. By reading their classmate's writing and convenient to use a dictionary and Google Translate, their vocabulary got richer. Based on the data obtained from the interview, the researcher could find out the independence from time and location during writing activities through WhatsApp during Covid-19. Without attending the school, they still could study and submit the assignments. Furthermore, the students can submit their assignments via WhatsApp Group. This was stated by several students *"Yes, I agree. If I am at home, I can submit the assignments while playing games. As long as the internet connection is good"*

(DM). The second students said *"Emm. I think it's easy. Because by using WhatsApp I can save my time, so I prefer submitting my assignment by using WhatsApp because I can submit anywhere and anytime." (PF).* The other students also complained *"Eem. Yes, I agree. It's easier to submit assignments using WhatsApp because you can submit assignments anywhere and save more time, but the connection must be stable".(DP).* In short, students could submit the assignments anywhere and anytime by using WhatsApp.

Internet connection

Besides the advantages, the researcher found some disadvantages on the use of WhatsApp in writing activities. From the interview data, the researcher found internet connection became one of the disadvantages. The students also needed fast internet connection in accessing WhatsApp for sending the assignments and downloading the materials sent by the teacher. Sometimes, their internet connection was good and sometimes it was bad. As confessed by the students *"Sure. To get a good internet connection at my house, I have to climb a tree." (DM).* The students said *"Yes, sometimes. The internet connection at my house is missing." (V).* The other students confessed *"Yes. This happens all the time. The internet connection at my home is poor" (PF).*In short, every student had different speed of internet access at home or outside the school. Thus, it became an obstacle for them in accessing WhatsApp in writing activities and supported by the data interviewed, most of students experienced slow internet connections.

Costly to use

Based on the data obtained from the interview, the researcher found the second disadvantages on the use of

WhatsApp in writing activities which was costly to use. As confessed by the students *"I think so. Since the existence of this online learning, I always buy expensive prepaid cards like Telkomsel to get a good signal." (DP)*. The second students said *"I think so. To have a good connection I have to buy an expensive internet provider like Telkomsel" (RM)*. The other student confessed *"Yes. Sometimes, I am very upset because the internet connection at my village is really bad. Because I used the cheapest internet access card, namely IM3, if the lights go out the internet connection in my village was gone. So, I have to buy expensive internet provider, namely Telkomsel to have good internet connection."(DM)*. From the information above, students have to buy expensive internet access card to have good connection when they submitted their assignment.

No grammatical improvemen**t**

The last perception by the students in this study was there was no grammatical improvement in writing activities by using WhatsApp. The students felt that there were no improvements in significant aspects of writing, especially grammar. The students still felt confused in using correct grammar although the teachers gave the suggestion and comments about their grammar. There was no tool for grammar checker in WhatsApp. As confessed by the students *"I think, my grammar is not getting better because it's difficult to understand. I prefer learning face-to-face instead of using WhatsApp."* (*DM*). The second students said "*Hmm. I don't think so. Because through WhatsApp there are often miscommunications and it makes me even more confused about grammar". (PF)*. The other students stated *"I don't think so. Learning face-to-face still made me confused, let alone learning through WhatsApp." (V)*. From the information above, the students felt that there was no grammatical improvement to use correct grammar in writing activities by using WhatsApp.

Discussions

After analyzing the data by using a thematic analysis, the researcher found some advantages and disadvantages on the use WhatsApp in writing activities at SMPN 1 Pagar Gunung which consisted of: (1) Independence from time and location, (2) Perceived progress of vocabulary, (3) Internet connection, (4) Costly to use, and (5) No grammatical improvement. Therefore, the explanations of the factors are described as following in order to know the further much information about them. The first perception was WhatsApp gave positive impact for class VII B at SMPN 1 Pagar Gunung was perceived progress of vocabulary it can be seen from the result of interview. The students knew and felt that they got more new words through the use of WhatsApp in writing activities. The teacher shared the material of writing, gave the students the assignment, and then the students submitted their task into WhatsApp group, and other students could see their friends' writing. Ma'ruf et al., (2019) stated that through WhatsApp, they can identify their classmate paragraphs as well as their vocabularies, allowing them to expand their vocabularies. The students believed that the paragraphs were interesting to read if they had a lot of vocabulary choices. Additionally, Muslimah (2020) argues that by using WhatsApp the students could add their vocabulary and the teacher allow the students to use the dictionary in translating the text from another students' even at the location with limited access of internet.

The second perception was independence from time and location.

Students said they could submit their assignment anywhere and anytime (freedom of time and location). The students did not need to submit their assignment directly. WhatsApp also made the students free in doing the assignment everywhere. Ma'ruf et al., (2019) revealed that one of the benefits was freedom of time and place. Through the use of WhatsApp, the participants did not need to submit their assignments directly. Ahmadi and Ilmiani (2020) stated that WhatsApp group application was accessible to all students using internet and it was still accessible.

The third perception perceived by the students is that WhatsApp had limitation, such as the internet connection. Students said sometimes the internet connection was good, but sometimes it was bad. Internet connection was needed for the students when they were going to download file sent by the teacher and when they were going to submit their assignment. If the internet connection was bad, it would be hard for teaching and learning process. The finding was supported by Ma'ruf et al., (2019) stated an internet connection is required to use any social networking service. It is difficult for the participants to establish a good connection. Additionally, Muslimah (2020) argued that the users must have access to internet to send and receive messages for free. Ahmed (2019) revealed that the students have some problems in using WhatsApp such as unavailability of internet connection and the student must spend internet quota in accessing WhatsApp.

The fourth perception on the use of WhatsApp in writing activities perceived by the students was costly to use. The students are required to prepare a good operator in order to make them able to write and give assignments to their students everywhere. A study conducted Ma'ruf et al., (2019) revealed

that the users must prepare a good internet provider in order to be able to write and send their assignments anywhere. Additionally, Ismail et al., (2020) argued that the main concern of the challenge is heavily pointed to the poor internet connection experienced by the students. Besides that, the institution did not provide internet quota for the students in learning activities.The last perception on the use of WhatsApp in writing activities perceived by the students was no grammatical improvement. The students felt that there was no grammatical improvement. According to Ma'ruf et al., (2019),in using WhatsApp , there was a grammatical improvement. In this case, students did not feel that their grammar improved.

In short, the use of WhatsApp in writing activities could give positive and negative impacts to the students. The students felt that the use of WhatsApp during covid-19 pandemic situation help and also make it hard for the students. WhatsApp was practical to be used; the use of WhatsApp could improve their vocabulary by reading their classmates' paragraph and convenient to use dictionary and Google. The students could access and submit the materials anytime and anywhere. Besides, the positive impact, there were some negative impacts too, such as: the students had problems with the internet connection, by using WhatsApp the students have to buy expensive prepaid card to have a good internet connection, and the students felt no grammatical improvement after being taught by using WhatsApp in writing activities. The students prefer learning face to face instead of using WhatsApp.

Based on the findings above, researcher can conclude that using WhatsApp in writing activities inefficient at SMPN 1 Pagar Gunung. Because there are two advantages using

WhatsApp in writing activities, meanwhile there are three disadvantages using WhatsApp in writing activities at SMPN 1 Pagar Gunung . To overcome that problems hope the teachers English at SMPN 1 Pagar Gunung to make strategy that appropriate for the students and teachers in teaching and learning process by using WhatsApp in writing activities.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the study about the students' perceptions on the use of WhatsApp in writing activities, the researcher found that there are two different perceptions conveyed by the students which are advantages and disadvantages. The advantages perceived by the students on the use of WhatsApp for writing activities, are: (1) perceived progress of vocabulary in writing activities by using WhatsApp, (2) independence from time and location in writing activities by using WhatsApp. The disadvantages of WhatsApp perceived by the students', are: (1) internet connection problem in writing activities by using WhatsApp, (2) costly to use in writing activities by using WhatsApp, and (3) no grammatical improvement in writing activities by using WhatsApp. Based on the findings above ,the researcher concluded that using WhatsApp in writing activities inefficient at SMPN 1 Pagar Gunung Lahat because there were two advantages using WhatsApp in writing activities, meanwhile there are three disadvantages using WhatsApp in writing activities at SMPN 1 Pagar Gunung lahat.

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