

OPTIMIZATION OF THE USE OF WHATS APP SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE WRITTEN LANGUAGE SKILLS IN BIPA LEARNERS: RESEARCH STUDIES IN BIPA UMSU INSTITUTE

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Abstract: BIPA is an Indonesian language learning whose subjects are foreign students. In this case, learners are expected to be able to master and be able to speak Indonesian. In teaching, learning media are needed to support language skills, especially written language, namely through WhatsApp social media. WhatsApp is one of the social media that is often used to interact and communicate. However, it is not only limited to social media, but can be used as a learning medium in relation to training a person's language skills, namely written language. This study focuses on the use of WhatsApp social media as a means to improve written language skills in the BIPA program at the UMSU BIPA Institute. This study aims to (1) determine the effectiveness of WhatsApp social media in improving the written language skills of BIPA learners, (2) determine the features of WhatsApp social media that can be optimized for written language learning. This study uses a field research method through a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques in the form of interviews, observations, analysis of activities in WhatsApp groups, and questionnaires. The results of the research show that (1) WhatsApp social media can improve the written language skills of BIPA learners, (2) The role of features such as voice messages, images, and videos in the use of WhatsApp social media can help BIPA learners understand the language as a strategy in written language learning media.

Keywords: BIPA Program, Social Media WhatsApp, Written Language Skills, BIPA Learner.

Introduction

The Indonesian Language Program for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) has a very strategic role in promoting Indonesian language and culture globally. BIPA supports international learners not only to master language skills such as speaking, reading, and writing but also to understand Indonesian culture and customs through various courses and programs (Zainab, et al., 2001). This learning approach helps develop a deeper understanding for foreign speakers about Indonesian society and provides opportunities for foreign learners to build emotional connections with the local culture. The BIPA program is also held in various educational institutions both domestically and abroad and in collaboration with the government and cultural institutions as part of cultural diplomacy. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), for example, supports more than 130 institutions that offer BIPA in various countries. With a learning method that combines linguistic and cultural aspects, BIPA allows for a more comprehensive learning experience through diverse teaching materials, including the use of audio-visual media, which enriches the learning experience of participants from various cultural backgrounds (Hermoyo, R.Panji&Suher, 2017).

The UMSU BIPA Institute is present as one of the institutions that also makes efforts to internationalize language for learners and foreign speakers who provide language learning services including speaking, reading, and writing skills as well as an introduction to local wisdom of Indonesia, especially North Sumatra. The learning activities carried out always support the existence of current digital technology. The use of digital technology in education continues to grow, especially in the realm of teaching Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (BIPA). One of the most widely used social media applications is WhatsApp, which offers easy access and effective communication between teachers and learners. WhatsApp is a potential media in supporting the language learning process, especially in improving the written language skills of learners. Through instant messaging features, media sharing, and the ability to form discussion groups, WhatsApp enables more dynamic and collaborative interactions in language learning (Ardiani and Pujiriyanto, 2022).

The use of social media in the learning process provides a number of important benefits, especially in increasing student learning motivation and facilitating access to various learning materials. Social media allows the use of various interactive features, such as videos, images, and text, which can make learning more interesting and in accordance with students' learning styles. In addition, social media can facilitate collaborative communication between students and teachers flexibly, thus supporting active engagement and deeper learning experiences (Hayati, et al, 2024). Integration of social media in the teaching and learning process can provide additional motivation for learners and facilitate access to more varied learning materials.

WhatsApp social media provides flexibility for learners to practice writing informally with quick responses from teachers and fellow learners, so that it can help improve language skills gradually. This is in line with efforts in BIPA teaching to provide an authentic, interactive, and relevant learning experience to the needs of learners. This can be done through the application of WhatsApp social media. A number of studies that support the benefits of using WhatsApp in learning, especially in improving writing skills and strengthening communication between learners and teachers, including research by Setiyaningsih & Jatmikowati (2019) and Indah & Hariyanti (2018) show that WhatsApp provides an effective medium for students and lecturers to communicate actively. Furthermore, it is proven in the research results that the use of WhatsApp social media in learning can support the needs of learning communication between lecturers and students, students with lecturers, and students with students well. This is because WhatsApp social media offers various features that make it easy for its users to communicate. Verbal and non-verbal communication that occurs between group members shows that social, ritual, expressive, and instrumental communication functions can be achieved well through the WhatsApp social media (Hartatik, S. F., and Lestari, H. D., 2021).

Literature Review

BIPA

Rapid globalization is an opportunity for Indonesia's position as a global language. The BIPA program has various functions in learning Indonesian as a forum for students to learn about the linguistic aspects of Indonesian (Amalia et al., 2022). The Indonesian Language Program for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) focuses on teaching Indonesian to foreign participants with the aim of helping learners understand the Indonesian language and culture in more depth. This program consists of four language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing which are tailored to the daily communication needs of foreign participants. BIPA also uses various teaching methods, including approaches that integrate local culture to provide a richer and more interactive learning experience. In implementing the BIPA program, components must be prepared in the learning process such as institutional management, teaching staff, teaching

systems, teaching materials, media, and others are needed for the implementation of the BIPA learning process. These components play an important role in ensuring the success of the implementation of BIPA and helping foreign learners understand Indonesian better, both in linguistic and cultural contexts (Suparsa, I. N., et al., 2016).

Learning Media

Learning media is a tool used in the teaching process to increase the effectiveness and involvement of students. Media can be in the form of tools, materials, or resources that help teachers deliver lesson materials more concretely and easily understood. The use of media in learning is very important because it can make the learning process more interactive, interesting, and effective (Sapriyah, S., 2019). Learning media has a very important function in the education process because it can improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning. This media not only facilitates the delivery of material, but also enriches students' learning experiences. Learning media has several main functions including: (1) Enriching learning, media can expand students' learning experiences, (2) Helping students understand concepts more easily, (3) facilitating more varied teaching, (4) Increasing student motivation, and (5) Increasing participation. (Sartika, F., et al., 2020). The selection of the right learning media will greatly support the achievement of the expected learning process and outcomes (Humaira, P., & Syamsuyurnita, 2024). Furthermore, learning media includes various tools or events that can stimulate the learning process, helping students to more easily accept and understand the material (Moto, M. M., 2019). The use of media in learning must also be adjusted to the needs and learning styles of students to maximize its effectiveness (Indriyani, L., 2019).

Whats App Social Media

Social media is an application that allows the creation and exchange of content by users. In this definition, social media includes various forms such as blogs, social media based on social networks such as Whats App, Facebook, Twitter and others (Butar-butur, C., & Isman, M., 2023). WhatsApp social media is a messaging application that was originally developed for basic chatting which later evolved into a social media platform that includes media sharing features, voice and video calls, and the ability to share locations directly. In addition, WhatsApp also allows users to create discussion groups, share files, and interact through status and sticker features, making it a dynamic and effective communication tool. This platform is popular in various parts of the world as a fast and easily accessible communication tool, especially because of the encryption feature that guarantees message privacy. The use of WhatsApp as a learning medium has been proven to make it easier for students to access learning materials and allows for fast information sharing. Several studies have shown that this platform can improve student learning discipline and engagement, especially in the context of distance education, because WhatsApp facilitates direct discussion and interaction between students and teachers in real-time (Sahidillah, M. W., & Miftahurrisqi, P., 2019).

Written Language Skills

Writing is one of the important skills that Indonesian language students for foreign speakers (BIPA) must have. Writing not only functions as a way to communicate, but also as a tool for critical and creative thinking, and to convey information and ideas quickly (Aminullah, F. D. S., Sodiq, S., & Inayatillah, F., 2024). Written language skills are important skills in language learning, because they include the ability to compose and convey ideas in written form with the right structure and good grammar. Learning that prioritizes writing skills often uses a comprehensive approach to ensure that students can connect new ideas with prior knowledge, while building deeper meanings to the language being learned (Wati, N. M. A., Rasna, I. W., &

Martha, I. N., (2020). Written language skills include not only technical aspects such as grammar and vocabulary, but also students' ability to organize ideas logically. Mastering this skill requires a combination of cognitive skills and strategies for constructing cohesive and coherent texts (Jiang, D., & Kalyuga, S, 2022). Thus, developing writing skills requires a comprehensive approach, including cognitive strategies and assistance through structured feedback.

Method

Method is a way of working to be able to understand the object that is the target of science (Abubakar, H.R.I., 2021). This study uses a field research method through a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques in the form of interviews, observations, analysis of activities in WhatsApp groups, and questionnaires. The subjects of this study were intermediate level BIPA learners from Cambodia, Thailand, Sudan, and Yemen. The stages carried out in the qualitative data analysis of this study are as follows: 1) Reading and studying the data that has been obtained both from the interview process, observation, documentation, and field notes, marking keywords, and important ideas in the data; 2) Studying the keywords, coding certain discussion titles, then trying to find themes that come from the data. After being coded, the data is studied and reviewed again, then sorted and tested to be included in certain groups that will become the origin of the theme. 3) Collecting, sorting, and classifying them into each theme. 4) Thinking, by making the data categories meaningful, searching and finding patterns and relationships, and making general findings. 5) The final stage in this research is to make a summary/conclusion. The author uses an inductive way of thinking, namely drawing conclusions.

Result and Discussion

Based on the research that has been carried out by researchers through observation and interviews, it can be described as follows.

1. Optimization of Whats App Social Media as an Effort to Improve Written Language Skills of BIPA Learners

The results of the study show that WhatsApp is an effective media in improving the written language skills of BIPA students, especially among intermediate level students from various countries such as Cambodia, Thailand, Sudan, and Yemen. This effectiveness can be seen from several aspects, including the level of language comfort, active involvement, and increased understanding of grammar and vocabulary. The use of WhatsApp in teaching is able to create a more relaxed and non-pressuring learning environment, which is very beneficial for foreign language learners. In this study, WhatsApp was proven effective in encouraging students to write more often because of the ease of access, flexibility of time, and convenience of the platform that allows students to communicate without fear of being wrong. The following is a table of the effectiveness of using Whats App social media in learning written language for intermediate level BIPA learners,

Table 1: Effectiveness of Using Whats App Social Media in Learning Written Language for Intermediate Level BIPA Learners

Whats App Features	Frequency of Use in a Week (Average)	Effectiveness (Scale 1-5)
Text Messages	20 times	4,5
Voice Messages	5 times	4,0
Documents	7 times	3,8
Images	4 times	3,9

Videos 2 times 3,6

Based on the results of the analysis of activities in the Whats App group, it was found that features such as text, voice messages, and images are very useful for improving written language skills. The use of these features is as follows: (1) Text Messages, used by teachers to give short writing assignments, such as writing self-descriptions, composing simple sentences, or telling daily experiences. Students are also accustomed to writing questions or comments in Indonesian which improve their practical writing skills, (2) Voice Messages, used to support understanding of difficult words and phrases, which are then rewritten by students to practice writing in the correct context, and (3) Documents and Images, some learning materials, such as examples of dialogues or descriptions of places, are shared in the form of documents or images which are then asked to be rewritten by students as writing practice.

2. Learner Participation in Written Language Activities Through WhatsApp Social Media

Based on the questionnaire given to BIPA Intermediate Level learners, it shows that the majority of learners feel that they are more motivated and active in learning written language because this platform is easily accessible and flexible. Learners admit that they can write and send assignments at any time, and get quick responses from teachers or classmates. This increases their confidence in writing Indonesian. In addition, the results of the interview showed that discussions in WhatsApp groups facilitated by teachers helped learners understand how to use correct vocabulary and good sentence structures. Not only that, learners feel more comfortable writing on informal platforms such as WhatsApp social media than in formal classroom environments. Furthermore, the routine use of this social media provides opportunities for learners to correct their mistakes through direct correction from the teacher. Discussions between learners in the group help in giving each other feedback, sharing knowledge, and correcting writing errors together. The following is a table and graph of the level of learner participation based on country of origin.

Table 2: Learner Participation Rates by Country of Origin

Country	Number of Learners Average	Participation (Messages/Week)
Cambodia	5	10
Thailand	15	12
Sudan	2	8
Yaman	6	15

3. Improving the Written Language Skills of Intermediate Level BIPA Learners Through Whats App Social Media Based on Participation Frequency

Based on the results of the questionnaire and activity analysis, it was found that there is a relationship between the level of participation and the improvement of written language skills as described in the table and graph below.

Table 3: Improving the Written Language Skills of Intermediate Level BIPA Learners Through Whats App Social Media Based on Participation Frequency

Participation Frequency (Messages/Week)	Improving Written Language Skills (%)
<5	10%
5-10	30%
11-15	60%
>15	75%

4. Distribution of Discussion Topics in Learning Through Social Media Whatsapp

Based on the results of qualitative data analysis, the following presents the main discussion topics that emerged from observations and interviews with intermediate level BIPA learners regarding written language learning through Whats App social media.

Table 4: Distribution of Discussion Topics in Learning Through Social Media Whatsapp

Theme	Percentage of Students Who Mentioned Discussion Topics
Language Comfort	30%
Grammar and Vocabulary Correctness	25%
Collaboration and Interactive Discussion	20%
Motivation in Learning	15%
Social Support from Teachers	10%

Based on the table and graph above, the aspect of “Language Comfort” appears most frequently, indicating that this factor greatly supports the effectiveness of using WhatsApp in learning written language so that the quality of learning is optimal.

Conclusion

Based on the research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that the use of Whats App social media is very optimal to be used as a platform that supports the success of Intermediate level BIPA learners in writing. WhatsApp is a learning media that has great potential in developing written language skills, especially for foreign students. This media not only provides convenience and motivation but also supports interactive learning through direct feedback and active communication. By utilizing WhatsApp, teachers can expand the learning space for BIPA students, creating a collaborative, relaxed, and productive learning environment. Furthermore, research related to the use of WhatsApp social media can be used more widely as part of a written language learning strategy in BIPA programs or other language programs.

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