

Enhancing EFL Learners' Verbal Communication Engagement Through WhatsApp Chat Group's Voice Messages Using Referential and Display Questions

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Abstract—Despite significant attempts to raise verbal communicative skills in the Arab world, the verbal production of English-language EFL learners still falls short of expectations. By employing display and referential questions to start a conversation in WhatsApp chat groups, this study aims to expand verbal communication outside of academic settings. The participants in two WhatsApp chat groups (Groups "A" and "B") using voice messages were exposed to the same learning material as part of an integrated activity for the traditional classroom. On the basis of the various question types used by each group, the performance of the two groups was then statistically assessed. Comparing the verbal responses of group (A) using display questions to group (B) using referential questions, the data revealed a considerable improvement. It is clear that EFL beginners interact more naturally with question types about which they already have information or experience. In contrast to asking referential questions, the display question format verbally encouraged EFL beginners to participate. Because the traditional EFL classroom is no longer appropriate for providing enough opportunities for EFL learners' verbal interaction, using display questions on WhatsApp chat groups through voice messages can be advised as an effective technique to improve EFL beginners' verbal interactions outside of classroom contexts.

Index Terms—verbal interaction, referential, display, chat group, voice messages

I. INTRODUCTION

By speaking up in class, participating in conversations, and asking and answering questions, students are interacting verbally with one another. It has been noticed that the standards of EFL learners' verbal competence were obviously declining in the 21st century in spite of the updated reforms, facilities, and the availability of multi-channels of learning. Whereas, the need for developing verbal communicative competence in the English language has increasingly become a universal demand particularly in the Arab world. In fact, enormous efforts have been exerted to establish integration between national experiences with better international ones to improve unsatisfactory situations, however, EFL learners' verbal performance is still inadequate. EFL Classrooms are still exploring appropriate techniques to stimulate EFL learners to involve in the verbal classroom interaction although these classrooms follow the communicative learning program system. Additionally, EFL learners are demotivated and not interested in taking part in the verbal interactions. The questions are one of the most important techniques for developing classroom interaction. However, many factors impede verbal interactions within classroom contexts and limit their opportunities. For example, these reasons can be summarized as follows: Lack of participation opportunities due to the high number of students in a language classroom, uncontrollable nervousness while speaking in front of peers, time limits, lack of EFL learners' desire in participating in verbal acts. The most difficult thing for EFL teachers to do is establish verbal engagement outside of the setting of the classroom, notwithstanding the difficulties with it inside. Establishing a platform to improve EFL learners' verbal engagement outside of the classroom becomes required due to the lack of time provided for language activities inside the classroom and for the other reasons indicated above. Consequently, it is crucial to close the gaps in verbal language usage. Thus, among young EFL users recently, notably university students, communication via mobile messaging services like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp has grown in popularity. With WhatsApp's popularity rising, more options for engagement and teamwork between teachers and students are emerging, notably in language learning due to a good WhatsApp's chat group properties. The chat group feature can be modified to achieve extensive interactive collaborative learning outside of the confines of the classroom. Making chat groups on WhatsApp, a new mobile platform for verbal communication, can help EFL students use WhatsApp to its fullest extent outside of the classroom because it is accessible to nearly everyone and smart phones are becoming more and more prevalent. In addition, the WhatsApp app provides a chatroom for each group (each with a number of members) with tools that facilitate verbal communication. For example, group members can hold a discussion in the chatroom by recording voice or video for one another. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of display or referential

questions in boosting verbal communication via voice messages in WhatsApp's chat group. The major objective of this study is to identify a suitable verbal communication platform for extending EFL learners' participation outside of the classroom using referential and display questions in WhatsApp's chat group. More precisely, it intends to increase verbal engagement outside of the classroom by analyzing the effects of referential and display questions that were previously voiced in WhatsApp chat group messages. Thus, the study intends to answer what is the most effective question type (referential or display question) for enhancing verbal interaction through voice messages on WhatsApp's chat group?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Verbal Classroom Interaction

Verbal classroom interaction is considered one of the core principles of contemporary approaches to instructed language learning (Ellis, 2014, cited in Tuan & Nhu, 2010). The fact that students are allowed to do the majority of the talking is the most crucial component of any good language learning environment. Creating interactive learning in an EFL classroom constitutes one of the most important keys for using English for communicative purposes. A classroom in a foreign language setting is the only place that is intentionally designed for EFL learners to use language communicatively. Unfortunately, most EFL students remain silent in class and are reluctant to engage in conversation (Zohrabi et al., 2014). In this respect, the teacher plays a vital role in stimulating students to participate actively (Arifin, 2012).

B. Classroom Interaction Questions

Teachers' questions constitute a primary means of engaging learners' attention, promoting verbal responses, and evaluating learners' progress. Farahian and Rezaee (2012) state that the reason for the learners' silence or reluctance to participate might have been due to the ineffective questioning technique. Questioning is, by far, the most common communication strategy used in teaching. Questioning is the major factor leading to teaching-learning situations in both content classes devoted to teaching science, math, etc., and language classes (Gall, 1986; Nunan, 1991). According to Long and Porter (1984), questioning helps to activate the teacher-learner interaction and ensure that all students participate in their learning. Long and Sato (1983) suggested two questioning techniques for the teacher in EFL classrooms: "referential" and "display" questions that are identified in the following section.

C. Display and Referential Questions

A display question is one in which the person asking the question (the teacher) already knows the answer and calls on students to demonstrate their understanding, according to Nunan (1989) and Long and Sato (1983). This kind of question is asked for comprehension checks, confirmation checks, or clarification requests. Examples of display questions, such as: what is the opposite of "cheap"?, what does this paragraph say? , and what's the meaning of "fan"?. Consequently, display questions are employed as a tool to assess the knowledge of an addressee regarding a specific linguistic issue (Ellis, 1992). Because display questions produce different linguistic elements from regular discourse, they are not advised to enhance classroom involvement.

Referential inquiries are those whose answers the asker (teacher) is unaware of, according to Brock (1986) and Long and Sato (1983). This means that it could lead to social dialogue. It is utilized when the teacher wants to improve students' speaking skills and create a social-like environment in the classroom, rather than assessing the students' knowledge. In order to ensure that learners have legitimate communicative goals, they are obliged to provide interpretations and judgments in response to these inquiries.

Open and closed referential questions are the two varieties of referential inquiries. Examples of open referential questions include: what are your interests?, how did you meet your close friend, and what do you think of their new instructor. Examples of closed-referential questions are: are you teacher?, what's your name?, and what's your job?.

D. Related Studies

It is important to note that the evaluated research studies that follow are case studies that frequently try to analyze the role of instructor question types on classroom interaction in English classroom learning. According to studies, display questions are typically employed in EFL courses for students with low thinking levels, whereas referential questions require distinct information from the students and elicit a different response from them. The following succinct summary is taken from the review of these studies:

- The main objective of Menyani and Merabti's study, according to their statement in (2020), is to explore and analyze teachers' perceptions on how question-asking affects interaction in EFL classrooms. It demonstrates how teachers' appreciation of the benefits of both display and referential questions supports students' learning. However, concentrating on referential queries promotes in-class participation from students. It improves student participation, critical thinking, and comprehension, which contributes to the success of the teaching and learning process.

- According to Aprina and Andriyanti (2020), the purpose of the current study was to examine how instructor question styles affected student engagement in English classes.

The findings indicate that both display and referential questions were utilized by the teachers, with display questions being used more frequently overall. Both, however, are crucial for EFL students. Based on display questions and referential questions about the levels of the students, the goal of the class, and the students' learning strategies, the use of both question kinds can be modified.

-According to Omari's (2018) study, which sought to examine the kinds of questions Jordanian English language teachers ask in the classroom.

According to the findings, 86% of the teachers' questions were display questions, 77% of them were closed-ended, and 80% were on low thinking levels.

The findings also showed that at the upper basic stage and secondary stage, teachers employed more open-ended questions, more referential questions, and higher-order thinking questions. At each grade level, it was advised that EFL instructors in Jordan ask several questions.

-The study conducted by Wright (2016) that looks at display and referential questions in an EFL communicative classroom context. The findings of this study indicate that the use of referential questions in a communicative task may push students to engage more in negotiation and give lengthier and more complex responses than display questions.

-Bozorgian and Fallah (2017) made an effort to investigate the impact of asking referential questions on the quantity of words produced by lower intermediate EFL learners and the time spent discussing various themes. The findings show that: (i) asking referential questions boosted the learners' talk time and word production, which improved their speaking ability; and (ii) the experimental group's students talked longer and used more words than the control group's students. The amount of speaking time and student participation thus rose significantly, and teachers may now utilize more referential questions to enhance the learners' conversational skills and foster their motivation in learning the English language, particularly in speaking. It implies that using more referential questions in the classroom improves students' speaking fluency.

- Ghabani (2010), the study suggested, rather obliquely, that readers' level of processing rises as they progress from display questions to referential and inferential ones. Both the control and experimental groups fared remarkably well when answering display questions compared to how they did on the other two types of questions, as seen by the descriptive statistics for both groups.

The following research' shared findings supported the need to use both display and referential questions for classroom interaction. The findings indicate that different levels of use depend on one type more than another depending on a variety of significant factors, including the academic levels of the students, the learning objectives, the teaching methods used by the teachers, etc. In a communicative activity, referential questions are used to lengthen talk time and increase the quantity of words learners create, so enhancing their speaking skill. While showcase questions are frequently used, especially with students who have low thinking skills, to assess students' mastery of a particular subject, they are not advised to enhance classroom interaction because they produce different linguistic elements from everyday speech. As a result, rather of being defined by the question type's inherent characteristics, the effectiveness of the question type is determined by the goal meant to be served in the learning contexts.

III. THE STUDY

A. Background

This study was conducted based on the results shown in the study conducted by Minalla (2018), which was mainly aimed at enhancing verbal interaction outside classroom contexts through utilizing WhatsApp chat groups via voice messages. The result that the current study depends on is that using voice messages on WhatsApp is an effective technique to enhance verbal interaction outside classroom contexts.

B. Participants

The participants of this study are Saudi Arab first-year university students who are almost the same age as well as having the same background knowledge of English as beginners. In particular, they are students at the University of Tabuk, Tayma branch in the first semester of the academic year 2017/2018. Their age ranges between 17 and 18 years old. Twenty participants are systematically and purposively selected based on the homogeneity in verbal ability of English language speaking that was obtained in the placement tests' results. The statistical result showed that there was no significant difference in the mean of scores between groups 'A' (mean: 2.13) and group 'B' (mean: 2.13) in the placement test that they had because the significance (P) was greater than 0.05. The participants were divided into two groups, group "A" to deal with display questions and group "B" to deal with referential questions.

The participants of both groups had been studying general English (Headway Plus–Elementary) as a university requirement course. Thus, both groups have the same content utilizing the traditional method, and for the purpose of this study, the traditional method was integrated with two WhatsApp chat groups to enrich classroom learning through extending its discussion outside classroom contexts. It is worth mentioning that the participants of both groups are exposed to the language for 25 hours a week, 10 hours inside classroom contexts and 15 hours outside classroom contexts on WhatsApp chat groups. As mentioned above, group 'A' is specified to utilize display questions and group 'B' is to deal with referential questions. Voice messages are the primary form of communication in both WhatsApp groups.

In this regard, it is important to note that the course's instructor served as both the researcher and the group leader for the two WhatsApp chats in order to encourage and spark participants' interest.

C. Data Collection's Procedures

The data was gathered using an interview guide and verbal dialogues that were observed in WhatsApp chat groups. Out of the twelve sessions for each group, only the concluding four consecutive sessions for both groups were observed. The themes covered in the discussion's display and referential questions are drawn from those that participants have already encountered in the textbook they have used, *Headway Plus – Elementary*. Referential questions that are tailored to the members of group "B" are derived from display questions. To maintain the communicative setting as authentic and natural as possible, it was important that the supervisor (researcher) did not disclose the specific purpose of the observation and the evaluated sessions to the observed participants in either group. The supervisor first listens in on the talk during the active sessions and then double-checks it using the voice recordings that are placed in the chat group. Four hours per day are spent in touch with each group, from 4:00 PM to 7:00 PM with group "A" and from 8:00 PM to 11:00 AM with group "B." The supervisor first listens in on the talk during the active sessions and then double-checks it using the voice recordings that are placed in the chat group. Four hours per day are spent in touch with each group, from 4:00 PM to 7:00 PM with group "A" and from 8:00 PM to 11:00 AM with group "B." The interview questions center on how they responded to each question and how they felt it might have affected their willingness to participate in the session and the growth of their language. They also investigate the reasons why some queries received no responses from participants. Their suggestions were promptly taken into account for the next session. To prevent any misinterpretation of the questions that were asked of the participants, the interviewer utilizes their native language (Arabic).

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

This section will summarize, evaluate, and elaborate on the data that was gathered from the observed WhatsApp chat group sessions, which had a total of 20 Saudi participants—10 in each group. Both groups (groups "A" and "B") were intended to communicate solely through voice messages. Group "A" plans to handle display questions in this regard, whether they are open or closed, whereas group "B" plans to handle referential questions, whether they are open or closed. In four executive sessions, a total of 210 questions were raised. It is clear that display questions—both open and closed—represented the bulk of the questions, while referential questions—especially open ones—were seldom. Closed referential inquiries are excellent at encouraging people to speak. Overall analysis reveals that group "A" performed significantly better than group "B," which is attributable to the display question type's suitability for EFL students' beginners' practice of verbal language for what they had frequently taught using WhatsApp chat groups' voice messages as a means of communication. 210 questions in all, spread over three four sessions as follows: 30 closed display questions, 75 open display questions, 30 closed referential questions, and 75 open referential questions. These questions were to be asked of both groups.

The following provides a detailed summary of the study's findings:

TABLE 1

Question type	Session 1	Session 2	Session	Total
Group A: Open-display:	20 (26.6%)	22 (29%)	24 (32%)	66 (out of 75) (88%)
Closed-display:	8 (26.6%)	8 (26.6%)	9 (30%)	25 (out of 30) 83%
Group B: Open-referential:	9 (12%)	9 (12%)	11 (14.5%)	28 (out of 75) 37%
Closed-referential:	8 (26.6%)	9 (30%)	10 (33.3%)	27 (out of 30) 90

Referring to the outcome displayed in Table 1, 145 (69%) of the 210 (100%) questions asked had a response. The number of questions posed and the number of questions returned were recorded for each session. It is clear that the display was the question that the students were asked to respond to rather than the referential one. The findings show a preference for display questions over referential ones, with a ratio of 82% for display questions and 50% for referential. In the three sessions, the use of display questions of both categories has grown, while the use of referential questions has not changed significantly. The outcomes support display questions once more. Consequently, it is evident that the display of questions at the beginning level is preferred. However, the comparison of closed-display questions (83) and closed-referential questions (90%) shows that closed-referential questions are superior (90%). Questions with an open display received a better score (88%) than questions with an open reference (37%). However, it was discovered that closed-display questions scored lower percentages (83%) than closed-referential questions (90%), therefore the outcome is in favor of closed-referential questions (90%), when comparing the results of closed-referential questions and closed-display questions.

TABLE 2

Question type	No. of words in Sessions 1, 2, 3	Time of speaking (in minutes)	Length Average
Group A: <i>Display</i>	457	17 minutes	4.4
Group B: <i>Referential</i>	274	9 minutes	2.6

Table 2 statistical results are consistent with table 1 due to the superiority of the display question type over the referential one. The statistical outcome shows that the length of students' responses to the questions posed, which is a measure of the participants' language production, was calculated by counting the number of words in each type of question, including open-ended and closed-ended of both question types namely referential and display questions.

Tables 1 and 2 of the three sessions indicate the total number of questions posed, the total number of answer response, and the total number of words in each response.

The number of participants and responses under each category were totalled up to determine the frequency of student involvement and responses for both types of questions because some of the questions had more than one possible response.

To assess which form of question elicited the most responses, the mean length (in words) of student responses to both display and referential questions was computed in addition to the number of participants and responses. With reference to table 2, the students' responses to display questions in four sessions totaled 457 words, but 274 words for questions that served as referential questions. By counting the words in each response, the average word length from students was determined (calculated by dividing the sum of the words from the sum of the words in each type of instructor question). It was discovered that the display questions performed better on average (4.4) and required much more speaking time (17 minutes) than the referential ones with average (2.6) of (9 minutes). In other words, display questions are more appropriate question types to prompt EFL beginners to answer and interact verbally well via WhatsApp chat groups that use voice messages. Thus, obviously display questions with an average of 4.4 outperform referential questions with an average of 2.6. This result is consistent with some research' findings, which showed that display questions are often employed, especially with low-level students (Omari, 2018; Ghabanchi, 2010; Aprina & Andriyanti, 2020).

The interview findings can be summed up by saying that display questions prompt participants to respond, maximizing EFL beginner language verbal production because its participants already have background knowledge from their time spent in traditional courses. Participants of the display question type were thus intriguingly asked to respond to them and were able to quickly retrieve the answer from this prior information. In contrast, due to a lack of prior practice, expertise, and understanding for answering these types of questions, participants in referential questions made no more of an attempt to respond. Therefore, the referential question does not encourage EFL beginners to communicate verbally via voice messages on the WhatsApp chat group. Additionally, a lot of participants are worried of making mistakes, thus they hold off on responding to referential questions because they are unsure of their ability to provide the correct response.

V. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that display questions maximize EFL beginner language verbal production more than referential questions do. Involving EFL beginners in verbal situations needs to be primarily equipped with some prompt that helps them respond positively. The participants react favorably to the question since they have already encountered it. In order to feel confident in their responses, the participants become motivated to respond to the questions. It suggests that display question types should be used instead of referential ones to start with, in order to encourage EFL newcomers to interact verbally.

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