

## **COVID-19 INDUCED WHATSAPP PLATFORM FOR EFAL LEARNERS IN A MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The fame of the WhatsApp Group in the academic circle has raised the interest of researchers in investigating its potential benefit in the teaching and learning of English First Additional Language (EFAL) in a multilingual setting. This study seeks to investigate the opinions of the EFAL learners on the use of the WhatsApp platform as a learning tool in an EFAL context outside the classroom during the Covid-19-induced school holiday. This study was designed as a qualitative research project where only 30 EFAL learners in Grade 12 were used as participants. A focus group interview was used to collect data from the participants. In 6 groups of 5 each, they shared their opinions on the importance of WhatsApp as an online resource in an EFAL context. The results of the study revealed that WhatsApp is for just about anything therefore its presence and influence become inevitable in an academic context. The ‘contaminating effect’ of the WhatsApp platform on EFAL learners’ writing, reading and speaking is now commonplace. However, EFAL teachers need to accept that texts of technologies are mutating into complex hybrid systems that will inevitably and justifiably make new demands on reading, speaking and writing, viewing, social exchange and communication. The study also highlights the socio-economic and contextual factors that complicate the relationships between EFAL teaching and technology. It becomes imperative for the relevant stakeholders to reconsider teacher professional development, which should not be a one-size-fits-all approach because EFAL teachers operate in different teaching and learning contexts.

**Keywords:** English First Additional Language; Covid-19; Translanguaging; WhatsApp; Multilingual

### **INTRODUCTION**

As most people in the world are now acutely aware, an outbreak of COVID-19 was detected in mainland China in December of 2019. Since then, the virus has spread to more than 100 countries, including South Africa (Department of Health, 2020). As of this writing, every continent in the world has been affected by this highly contagious disease, with nearly a million cases diagnosed in over 200 countries worldwide. The cause of this outbreak is a new virus known as the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). On February 12, 2020, WHO officially named the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). The complete clinical picture about COVID-19 is still not fully clear. Several therapeutic agents have been evaluated for the treatment of Covid-19 but none has yet been shown to be efficacious (Cao,

Wang, Wen, et al. 2020).

On 23 March 2020, the South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa announced a new measure to combat the spread of the Covid-19 coronavirus in South Africa – a three-week nationwide lockdown with severe restrictions on travel and movement, supported by the South African National Defence Force – from midnight on Thursday, 26 March, to midnight on Thursday, 16 April. The President said more needed to be done to avoid “an enormous catastrophe” among the population (Department of Health, 2020). In essence, this meant people would only be allowed to leave their homes to buy food, seek medical help or under other extreme circumstances. A quarantine was also enforced on inbound travellers and returning citizens. All these measures meant schools had to be closed. For the EFAL teachers to cover the syllabus, they resorted to online teaching, of which WhatsApp as a teaching platform is one of them.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Language is an orderly way of communicating ideas using sounds, gestures, signs or marks (Zano, 2020b). It is the code used to express oneself and communicate with others. Communicating is to share information, or to share what one knows and to interact with others. It involves a system of combining words to create meaning. Thus, communication involves language and language, therefore, remains potentially a communicative medium capable of expressing ideas and concepts as well as moods, feelings and attitudes (Songxaba and Sincuba, 2019).

Interaction is central to any educational experience, irrespective of whether the students are studying through distance or not and it has a positive effect on academic performance (Amry, 2014). The problem arises when face-to-face interaction is missing as in the case of distance education (Makoe and Shandu-Phetla, 2019). As a result, education systems and styles have developed rapidly in the last decades, the traditional approaches and methods are affected by technology invention and started to vanish (Hamad, 2015). Blended learning was often associated with simply linking traditional classroom training to e-learning activities such as asynchronous work -typically accessed by learners outside the classroom at their own time and pace (Hamad, 2015).

The integration of ICTs in education offers several benefits: sharing of resources and learning environments as well as the promotion of collaborative learning and a general move towards greater learner autonomy (Padachaye, 2017). However, technology integration is more than supplying computers and an internet connection; it involves the instantiation of learning activities with pedagogically informed use of ICT tools (Mereku and Mereku, 2015; Padachaye, 2017). For language teaching and learning at a distance, mediated interaction is crucial. Studies have shown that mobile-based social media have been used successfully to enhance social interaction through collaborative learning (Amry, 2014). While mobile phones have been used extensively as social communication contraptions, they are now being utilised as instructional tools that nourish collaborative learning (Shandu, 2017).

WhatsApp instant messaging (WIM) is a cross-platform Smartphone messenger that employs users' existing internet data plan to assist them network socially in real-time (WhatsApp, 2010). It is a free messenger application that works across multiple platforms like iPhone and

Android phones, and this application is being widely used among learners to send multimedia messages like photos, videos, audio along with simple text messages Gon and Rawekar (2017). WIM client software is available for Apple iOS, Google Android, Blackberry OS, Microsoft Windows phones, among others. WIM was created in 2009 by Jan Koum and Brian Acton, both formerly of Yahoo (Eric, 2012).

According to La Hanisi, Risdiany, Dwi Utami and Sulisworo (2018), WhatsApp messenger has the following collaborative features: multimedia, which allows the user to exchange videos, text messages, images and voice notes, and group chat, which supports the interaction of many group members. It offers unlimited messaging. The application uses 3G/EDGE internet data plan or Wi-Fi to ensure continuous data transmission across platforms. Interactants with different devices (personal digital assistants, Smartphones, Galaxy tablets) can message one another through various media (text messages, pictures, videos, voice notes). Messages are saved automatically when the device is off or outside the coverage area. There are no charges involved for using WhatsApp as it uses the same internet data plan, which is used for email, or web browsing.

Similarly, Eric (2012) reports that WIM enables communication with anyone who possesses a Smartphone has an active internet connection and has installed the application. The overall cost of WIM is arguably low depending on the network provider in South Africa. One of WIM's unique features is the option to create a group and to communicate within its boundaries. The creator of the group becomes its manager, a position that includes the privilege of adding and removing participants without the need for approval from them. Aside from this, all members of the group enjoy equal rights (Cohavi, 2013).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study hinges on the technological pedagogic content knowledge (TPACK) Framework by Koehler and Mishra (2013) as shown in Figure 1 below.

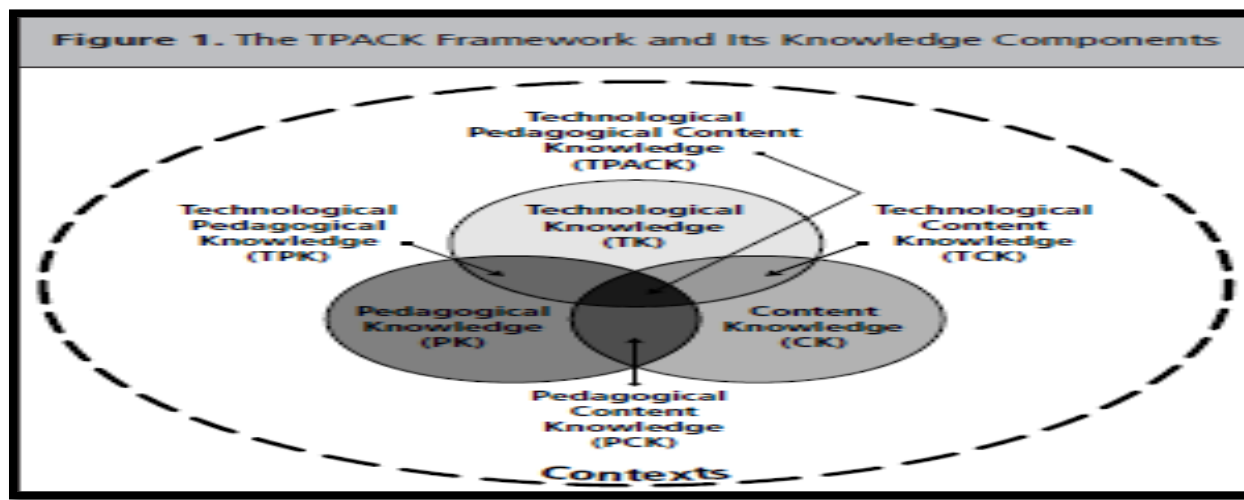


Figure 1: The TPACK Framework and Its Knowledge Components (Koehler and Mishra: 2013:15)

Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) is a perspective that emerges from interactions among content, pedagogy and technology knowledge. It is the basis of effective teaching with technology, requiring an understanding of the representation of concepts using technologies and pedagogical techniques that use technologies in constructive ways. These are used to teach content, knowledge of what makes concepts difficult or easy to learn and how technology can help redress some of the problems that learners face, knowledge of learners' prior knowledge and theories of epistemology and knowledge of how technologies can be used to build on existing knowledge to develop new epistemologies or strengthen old ones (Koehler and Mishra, 2013).

TPACK is an understanding of how teaching and learning can change when particular technologies are used in particular ways. This includes knowing the pedagogical affordances and constraints of a range of technological tools as they relate to disciplinarily and developmentally appropriate pedagogical designs and strategies. To build TPACK, a deeper understanding of the constraints and affordances of technologies and the disciplinary contexts within which they function is needed (Koehler and Mishra, 2013). An understanding of the affordances of technology and how they can be leveraged differently according to changes in context and purposes is an important part of understanding TPK. TPK becomes particularly important because most popular software programs are not designed for educational purposes. Software programs such as the Microsoft Office Suite (Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Entourage and MSN Messenger) are usually designed for business environments. Web-based technologies such as blogs or podcasts are designed for purposes of entertainment, communication, and social networking. Teachers need to reject functional fixedness and develop skills to look beyond the most common uses for technologies, reconfiguring them for customised pedagogical purposes. Thus, TPK requires a forward-looking, creative and open-minded seeking technology use, not for its own sake but the sake of advancing student learning and understanding (Koehler and Mishra, 2009).

## **METHODOLOGY**

After the closure of the schools on March 18, 2020, the learners went home for an early holiday. The EFAL teachers decided to use WhatsApp to reach out to these learners to cover aspects, which included comprehension, summary, advertisement and cartons, language structures, literature, essays and shorter transactional texts. Schools were opened on 8 June and immediately, the researchers sought feedback from the learners about their experiences in using WhatsApp as an online learning tool during the holiday, which started on 19 March and ended on 7 June 2020.

This study aims to determine the importance of WhatsApp as an online resource in an EFAL context. The two research questions addressed by the participants are as follows: What are the advantages of using WhatsApp as an online resource to learn EFAL at Grade 12? What are the disadvantages of using WhatsApp as an online resource to learn EFAL at Grade 12?

This study was designed as a qualitative research project. It took place in a multilingual setting where there are predominantly Sesotho home language learners. None of the participants was a native speaker of English. For this qualitative study, only 30 EFAL learners in Grade 12 were used as participants. Random sampling was used to select the participants. The learner

participants comprised 24 girls and 6 boys and were aged 17-20. Statistics from the school revealed that the school has almost double the number of females compared to males.

The researchers used a focus group interview to collect data from learners. The researchers recorded the interviewees and took down notes. In 6 groups of 5 each, they shared their opinions on the importance of WhatsApp as an online resource in an EFAL context. Before the participants took part in the study, they were informed of the aim of the study that is, 'to determine the importance of WhatsApp as an online resource in an EFAL context'.

The researchers requested parental consent for their children to participate in this study. The researchers also requested assent from learners to participate in this research. Before the focus group interview, the participants were also introduced to the interview guide form with open-ended questions used as a data collection instrument. The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity for participating in this study; hence, they were numbered using pseudo-names FG1 for focus group 1 to FG6 for focus group 6.

The qualitative data for this study were analysed using the content analysis method. The content analysis reduced the volume of information and identified significant patterns. The researchers analysed the participants' responses, finding links and similarities in the responses and coded them appropriately. Then, the researchers abridged and positioned the results into themes.

## **RESULTS**

### **What are the advantages of using WhatsApp as an online resource to learn EFAL?**

One advantage of WhatsApp groups in an EFAL context is the alternation between two or more languages in the context of a single conversation. This is so common in a multilingual WhatsApp group platform where the learners have different home languages, as is the case with the participants under study. The participants had this to say: *When learners share their responses, you always witness a mix of English and our mother tongue. It is a practice, which is difficult to stop on the WhatsApp platform but in the classroom, we tend to stick to English in writing but only mix English and a home language in speech. We understand better when we mix English and our home languages (FG1).*

According to Rwodzi, De Jager and Mpofu (2020), social media has a chance to improve participation by learners who perform poorly because social media can cater to different personality profiles. It is commonplace that some learners are not comfortable sharing their views during class conduct. Sometimes they have no confidence in participating in the classroom because they know that they may be laughed at either for their incorrect or incomplete responses unless the teacher reprimands them. This finding is echoed in the following sentiments: *Contributing to our classmates during English lessons requires confidence and you have to be sure about your answer, otherwise, you will be a laughingstock all day. Hence, the WhatsApp platform is distance learning; we are not facing our classmates, so we can freely make our contributions (FG6).*

Since January 2017, there are 1.2 billion active WhatsApp users worldwide (Woods, Moorhouse and Knight, 2019). Even though growth seems to be slowing down, sub-Saharan Africa remains one of the fastest-growing regions in mobile subscription access in the world, with

a mobile penetration rate of 75% in 2018 (Isaacs, Roberts and Garth Spencer-Smith, 2019; GSMA, 2018). In 2017, third-generation (3G) connectivity via mobile phone was almost universal in South Africa (Isaacs, Roberts and Garth Spencer-Smith, 2019; GSMA, 2017). This implies that the majority of high school learners in South Africa who have a cellphone, have access to a WhatsApp platform. This resonates with the following finding: *All our classmates have their phones, which have WhatsApp for use. When the teacher asked us to conduct the English lessons through WhatsApp during the COVID-19 lockdown, we easily embraced that because we felt no one was left out (FG4).*

Today's learners are a technologically driven generation who spend most of their time using technological tools such as computers, video cams and cellular phones. Even the children yet to be enrolled in primary schools know how to 'navigate' a cellphone. A cellphone is not a strange tool for these learners; they know how to use them with ease. Thus, the participants had the following to say: *We enjoy using WhatsApp as a learning tool because we know how it functions. We can easily log in for details and when done, we log out so easily. Therefore, it is easier for us to use WhatsApp as a learning tool because we will be using a gadget we are comfortable with (FG2).*

Makoe and Shandu-Phetla (2019) report that WhatsApp can be used to build learning communities and facilitate interaction, through the lens of Ubuntu – an African concept of humanness, which means that a person owes his or her existence to the existence of others. The key elements of Ubuntu grounded the findings and demonstrated how technology can be used to bridge the interaction distance and how Ubuntu principles are articulated in the communities of learning. Their paper illustrates how Ubuntu is manifested in a local context, with principles that can be applied globally to enhance collaboration. Their finding is in tandem with the participants' responses: *Learning English through the WhatsApp platform helps us to bond and work as a family towards a shared goal. No group member's contribution is too small to make a difference. We interact as siblings do where there are some 'cat' fights but we remain one in our aims: passing English at matric. This is easily achievable as we work as a team instead of competing with each other (FG5).*

Bensalem (2018) reports that WhatsApp helps instructors save time and better manage the classroom as well as keeping students up-to-date with classroom activities. There are moments when not everything can be explained in the classroom due to time constraints. In a bid to make up for insufficient classroom learning and teaching time, WhatsApp becomes a useful tool. This is confirmed in the following response: *Our periods are about 40 minutes each and sometimes it will be difficult to finish the analysis of language structures and cartoons in that one period. The only option is for us to continue the discussion with the English teacher through WhatsApp (FG3).*

Research indicates giving EFAL learners opportunities to engage in negotiation of form can help them to develop their second language faster (Zano, 2020a). Sato and Lyster (2012) conduct a study that shows that peer-to-peer feedback appears to have a positive impact on both accuracy and fluency development in a second language (L2) learning environment. Sato & Lyster (2012) conclude that peer assessment offers opportunities for repeated production practice; it sharpens their abilities to monitor both their language production and that of their peers. Their study suggests that peer feedback accelerates learners' monitoring progress, which stretches them to achieve their full potential in the automatization of L2 processing. The above is captured in the

following response: *When we conduct English lessons through WhatsApp, we get corrected (feedback) immediately either by our English teacher or other learners. You are corrected either in written form, inboxes or an audio is sent to you (FG2).*

According to La Hanisi, Risdiyani, Dwi Utami and Sulisworo (2018), WhatsApp messenger allows for cross-platform engagements. Interactants with different devices like personal digital assistants, smartphones and galaxy tablets can message one another through various media namely text messages, pictures, videos and voice notes. Correspondingly, the participants shared the same sentiment: *The presentations can be as colourful as in the picture and video forms, thus, they are so easy to remember. Also, that content is stored on my phone. It is as if our phones are our 'moving or walking' textbooks. When we need referencing, we just open our phones and revisit the uploaded content (FG4).*

### **What are the disadvantages of using WhatsApp as an online resource to learn EFAL?**

Regardless of its advantages, WhatsApp as a learning tool has disadvantages too. Yeboah and Ewur (2014) found that WhatsApp harms students because they are distracted easily from their studies. This is echoed in the following sentiment: *Some learners do not take such lessons seriously as long they are conducted outside of the classroom. Instead, they will be engaged in other activities on their phones instead of focusing on the lesson at hand. Besides, the teacher will not be physically present to monitor them (FG6).*

The distractive nature of WhatsApp as a learning tool can allude to the volume of information that is sent at the same time. Also, it can be a result of other message notifications while the WhatsApp lesson is in progress. WhatsApp has no control over the volume of information that can be sent at a given time, thus; you can receive several messages explaining the same concept in one minute. The respondents had this to say: *The problem we have is that before you are done processing a message explaining a certain point, say language clues in a cartoon, you are 'bombed with a host others explain the same concept. Some even sent voice notes. We find it difficult to remain focused on the same point (FG1).* Grammar is important because it makes a language; it helps in naming the types of words that constitute sentences in any language. It helps in improving communication and writing skills. Unfortunately, some users of English underrate the importance of English grammar. The participant aptly says: *When using WhatsApp to learn English, we do not care to pay much attention to grammar. This could be because most of the activities we do in our English WhatsApp group are mainly informal (FG5).*

Another challenge is vocabulary. The importance of learning in a first additional language cannot be undermined. There is abundant proof to confirm that the quantity of vocabulary has a considerable function in forecasting reading comprehension capacity (Zano and Phatudi, 2019; Nation, 2006). Vocabulary is a key in manipulating the basis for the development of other skills such as reading comprehension, writing and spelling (Zano and Phatudi, 2019). Even badly spelt work does not score highly, hence the participants had this to say: *Using WhatsApp 'kills' our spelling skills because we hardly observe spelling rules. We tend to use spelling, which is less formal and in the end, this is reflected in the formal tasks we present for marking (FG3).*

In most cases, learners are so used to face-to-face interaction with the teacher. If they encounter a challenge, they ask for the teacher's help. Sometimes teachers just upload material on the WhatsApp group to keep the learners occupied. In such scenarios, learners are likely to battle with reading comprehension because the teacher did not explain the uploaded learning content. Occasionally a teacher can employ such a method to encourage research and teamwork among the learners. This challenge is summed up below: *When the teacher wants to pursue their personal 'things', they just upload loads of work with no explanation to accompany that. This is so demotivating because we only have to rely on group members to try to make sense out of it (FG5).*

The presence or absence of the teacher determines how the WhatsApp group discussion will span. A teacher is an authority and is in authority, thus, all group members obey them. Teachers' absence in a WhatsApp group discussion is usually a precursor to 'no-learning' considering that learners are contemporaries and naturally resort to sibling-like fights. Instead of focusing on the task, they tend to digress, hence the following participants' response: *Every time the teachers leave the discussion to us, it is difficult to come up with meaningful results. Group members will be making unfocused exchanges, which is a huge distraction to other learners (FG4).*

Another challenge is so technical. Internet coverage in South Africa is so uneven. Some areas are not easily accessible 'internet wise'. They have poor network coverage. Sadly, certain areas are so prone to cable and battery tower theft. Also, the challenge could be load shedding while the WhatsApp lesson is in progress. Because of these factors, the participants had this to say: *Where the network is poor, it is difficult to download files be it a pdf, word or voice note. It will be difficult to be at par with group members (FG6).*

According to Baishya (2020), some learners have no interest to talk in WhatsApp groups because they may think that this kind of group is unimportant and it is not their duty to reply every time. The lack of enthusiasm to participate could be fear of labelling for incorrect responses. For when they are labelled, they tend to withdraw from the group and keep a distance. They do not feel like being part of the group but are very excluded. They develop low esteem and resort to individualism instead of collaboration expected of WhatsApp group members. The participants' statement recorded verbatim is: *Some learners tend to pass negative comments on our incorrect answers. Instead of passing such comments, they can also send emojis, which are so obvious that they are making fun of one's response; that is why group members will not participate at all (FG1).*

Another disadvantage of WhatsApp as an online teaching tool to teach EFAL is the absence of non-verbal cues. Nonverbal communication is the process of sharing cues between people, which is similar to public speaking. Generally, gestures have a universal interpretation. These cues include the nodding of the head sideways, winking at someone and raising a hand. Where there is no such communication, clarity, interest and trust are likely to be lost. Similarly, the participants had this to say: *In our English WhatsApp group, we have no room to use gestures to interpret any shared information. We rely on gestures to read the message faster and we remain focused on the speaker because of them. We hardly lose interest unless the speaker overuses these gestures, then; it becomes or overshadows the message (FG2).*



## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The main findings indicate that EFAL teachers use social media to communicate with learners on matters relating to schoolwork. EFAL teachers and learners use online resources to research and then share the information with their classmates on social media groups although the use of social media in teaching English has not been explicitly advocated by the Department of Basic Education policy on methodology in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) Grades 10-12 English First Additional Language.

Besides, the findings reveal that the participants translanguage when they are sharing information on WhatsApp. Translanguaging theory, in relying on a conceptualisation of bilingualism as dynamic, argues that there are not two interdependent language systems that bilinguals shuttle between but rather one semiotic system integrating various lexical, morphological and grammatical linguistic features in addition to social practices and features individuals “embody (e.g., their gestures, their posture), as well as those outside of themselves which through use become part of their bodily memory (e.g., computer technology)” (García, 2016). Rather than turning one language “off” and turning another “on,” translanguaging suggests that we creatively integrate all semiotic resources to communicate (Wei, 2017; Charamba, 2020a). Translanguaging, therefore, provides opportunities for individuals to conceive of languages not as independent but as facets of the same adaptive system (García and Li, 2014; Charamba, 2020b).

In this study, translanguaging was used to create moments of less language separation, as the alternation of languages in different phases of one single EFAL class through WhatsApp to make them clearer to their group members. Baker describes this process in the following way: “to read and discuss a topic in one language, and then to write about it in another language, means that the subject matter has to be processed and digested” (2011:289).

From this perspective, as the learners translanguage in the WhatsApp group, language is no longer bounded, self-contained entity, embedded in static communicative activities as reported by García and Otheguy (2020) but rather a dynamic and transformative process in which the multilingual speaker structures and restructures various named languages across different modes in various contexts for meaning-making purposes (Omidire, 2019). By so doing, translanguaging disrupts the hierarchy of languages and cultures in the classroom (Charamba, 2019b). In defining the same concept, Grosjean (2019) uses a sports analogy of hurdles, where two athletic skills, high jump and sprinting are involved. Hurdlers use these skills as an integrated whole to excel in their sport just in the same way multilingual use their linguistic skills to communicate effectively (Hedman and Magnusson, 2020).

The results also revealed that learners used the WhatsApp platform for its distinct advantages, which include instant messaging, immediate feedback and ‘accommodation’ of both the teacher and the learners. This finding resonates with Rwodzi, De Jager and Mpofu’s (2020) recent research, which has demonstrated how collaborative learning improves learners’ performance and provides extended learning time. Given the advantages of collaborative learning in a digital landscape, teachers should eliminate inhibitions and perceived obstacles limiting learner progress. In another study on the use of tablets in a classroom context, Falloon (2015) attributed the positive findings on the use of technology to tablets’ capabilities for instant sharing and feedback.

In a recent study by Baishya (2020) in which the academic use of Whatsapp is explored, most participants studied agree that Whatsapp is necessary in a world where students are surrounded by technology. Because of the advancement of technology, people do not prefer pen and paper any longer; they prefer technology like WhatsApp, as they can get notes and materials from it. This is also in line with Zakaria, Abdullah, Mahir and Abdullah (2018) who report that the WhatsApp application provides faster and easier communication among learners and develops idea-sharing. It is a platform, which includes the instructors (teachers) and learners and provides an instant response within the group members to join the conversation. This makes effective communication.

The findings also point to the challenges faced in using WhatsApp as a platform in an EFAL environment. These include the absence of non-verbal cues, internet connection challenges and non-participation by some group members. These challenges and a host of others are in tandem with previous studies, which point to the denial of the use of E-learning in schools. These factors include lack of time, lack of clarity regarding the e-Education policy, lack of support both in terms of infrastructure and policy (Vandeyar, 2015) and the lack of skills (Msila, 2015). However, we feel that for linguists to cherish the WhatsApp platform there is a need to focus more on its pedagogical advantages rather than on its technical challenges.

Another challenge is that the use of WhatsApp as a learning platform in EFAL is that learners fail to observe the rules of punctuation, spelling and grammar. Stakeholders become worried that if learners have a habit of using social media such as WhatsApp language in their day-to-day writing, then they may not be able to write appropriately in formal job situations. Even Songxaba and Sincuba (2019) report that presently, development and technological advancement have seen writing of formal English on the decline and much of this is attributed to WhatsApp communication.

## **CONCLUSION**

The present study has shown that a great many people, especially, youths and learners use social networking sites, therefore its presence and influence become inevitable in an academic context. A school is a microcosm of the society in which it is situated. Every school mirrors the community which it serves. The majority of the community members surrounding schools are networking through WhatsApp. The same learners in schools are from the same communities. It becomes an apparent impossibility to separate these EFAL learners from their community practices.

It is common knowledge that new technologies do not merely alter the way people live their lives but also affect the way they think. Thus, EFAL teachers need to accept that texts of technologies are mutating into complex hybrid systems that will inevitably and justifiably make new demands on reading and writing, viewing, social exchange and communication. The 'contaminating effect' of the WhatsApp platform on EFAL learners' writing, reading and speaking skills is now secondary; it does not have much damaging effect on the prime use of any language of communication. As long it is phonological, meaning-making can always take place (source).

The study highlights that socio-economic and contextual factors complicate the relationships between EFAL teaching and technology. It is commonplace that socio-economic

and contextual factors are often unsupportive of EFAL teachers' efforts to integrate technology use in their teaching and learning. We call upon all stakeholders to support the use of the WhatsApp platform to teach EFAL. EFAL teachers in South Africa often have inadequate (or inappropriate) experience with using digital technologies for EFAL teaching and learning. Many teachers earned teaching qualifications at a time when educational technology was at a very different stage of development than it is today. Current platforms, which are seemingly new to many EFAL teachers, include survey monkey, zoom and the google drive shared link (source). It becomes imperative for the relevant stakeholders to reconsider teacher professional development, which is not a one-size-fits-all approach because EFAL teachers operate in different teaching and learning contexts.

All language learners in this multilingual era 'act' as active 'constructors' of knowledge. These learners should be provided with an interactive learning environment (WhatsApp) where they can keenly engage in the teaching and learning process of EFAL and promote their interaction with their teachers and other EFAL learners. This should not only happen on the school premises but also well after class in the comfort of their homes. It only calls for the EFAL language teacher to facilitate the teaching and learning process by providing them with user-friendly instructional learning media –WhatsApp- to help them build their knowledge of EFAL.

However, we still maintain that the need to embrace this technological development as it is presently unavoidable in linguistics. Categorically, we affirm that is inescapable and excusable that EFAL learners' exposure to new technologies affects the way they will perceive the world; these learners are just moving with times and reacting according to the technological dictates.

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