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ASSESSING TASK-BASED LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE THROUGH WHATSAPP-MEDIATED INTERACTION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

The rise of social media has provided new opportunities for language learning, particularly for more authentic engagement beyond the formal classroom. This is consistent with the notion of authentic assessment, where language proficiency is assessed by real-life activities, not just written tests. This study aims to analyze the manifestation of task-based language performance through students' interaction on WhatsApp and how students' interaction is used as a form of authentic assessment. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach involving 14 students in the Master's Program in English Language Education at Universitas Negeri Makassar. Data were collected through task-based discussions in a WhatsApp group, transcript documentation, observation, assessment rubrics, and semi-structured interviews and were subsequently analyzed thematically. The results indicate that students' language performance is evident in their ability to express opinions, respond to ideas, and engage in spontaneous discussions. Interactions on WhatsApp also demonstrate authentic communication contexts, allowing conversation data to be used to assess aspects of accuracy, fluency, interaction, and appropriateness of language use. This study confirms that the integration of task-based learning and social media can support more contextual language assessment practices, while expanding the use of digital platforms as spaces for learning and assessment in the era of modern learning.

Keywords: Authentic Assessment, Language Performance, Social Media, Task-Based Language Learning, WhatsApp

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed language learning by extending communication beyond the boundaries of traditional classrooms. Mobile technologies and social media platforms have created opportunities for learners to engage in authentic communication, collaborate with peers, and construct knowledge in contexts that closely resemble real-life language use. Rather than relying solely on teacher-centered interaction during classroom instruction, learners now participate in continuous technology-mediated communication that allows them to develop and demonstrate communicative competence in more meaningful and socially situated environments (Lai, 2017; Stockwell, 2013).

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The growing use of digital communication in language education has also prompted a reconsideration of how language performance should be assessed. Conventional language assessment often relies on written examinations or isolated classroom activities that primarily measure learners' knowledge of linguistic forms. Although such assessments provide valuable information about grammatical knowledge, they frequently fail to capture learners' ability to use language effectively in authentic communicative situations. Consequently, authentic assessment has received increasing attention because it evaluates learners through meaningful tasks that reflect real-world communication, emphasizing the application of language knowledge rather than the recall of discrete language forms (Tai et al., 2018; Villarroel et al., 2018). Authentic assessment therefore offers a more comprehensive representation of communicative competence by focusing on learners' performance in contextualized activities (Adachi et al., 2020; Saher et al., 2022).

The principles of authentic assessment closely align with Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which considers meaningful communication as the central mechanism through which language learning occurs. Within TBLT, learners accomplish communicative tasks such as exchanging information, solving problems, expressing opinions, and negotiating meaning in order to achieve shared goals. These tasks encourage learners to use language functionally rather than simply practicing grammatical structures in isolation. As learners interact to complete meaningful tasks, they generate observable language performance that reflects multiple dimensions of communicative competence, including language use, interactional ability, discourse management, and strategic competence (East, 2021; Ellis et al., 2020; Long, 2014). Consequently, task-based interaction provides valuable evidence that can support authentic assessment because it reveals how learners use language to accomplish genuine communicative purposes.

Recent developments in digital learning environments have expanded the possibilities for implementing both TBLT and authentic assessment. Online communication platforms enable learners to participate in collaborative discussions that extend beyond classroom time and generate permanent records of interaction. Unlike traditional assessments that often evaluate only final products, digital communication documents the entire interactional process, allowing teachers to observe how learners express ideas, negotiate meaning, respond to peers, sustain discussions, and develop their language over time (González-Lloret, 2020; Nieminen et al., 2023). Digital interaction therefore has the potential to function not only as a medium for learning but also as an authentic source of assessment evidence that captures learners' communicative performance as it naturally unfolds.

Among various digital communication platforms, WhatsApp has become one of the most widely adopted applications in language education because of its accessibility, familiarity, and interactive features. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that WhatsApp facilitates learner engagement, collaboration, participation, confidence, and language development by providing flexible opportunities for communication beyond formal classroom settings (Andujar, 2016; Cetinkaya, 2017; Naghdipour & Manca, 2023). The platform also automatically archives messages, voice notes, multimedia exchanges, and discussion threads, creating naturally occurring records of learners' language use that may

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provide rich evidence for evaluating communicative performance throughout the learning process.

Despite these documented pedagogical benefits, existing research has primarily examined WhatsApp as a medium for language learning, learner engagement, collaborative interaction, or language skill development. Likewise, research on Task-Based Language Teaching has mainly focused on the effectiveness of communicative tasks in promoting language acquisition, while studies on authentic assessment have concentrated on assessment design, feedback practices, and classroom evaluation. Comparatively little attention has been given to examining how task-based interactions generated through WhatsApp can function as authentic assessment evidence that documents learners' communicative performance in naturally occurring digital communication. As a result, the potential of WhatsApp-mediated interaction to serve as a systematic source of authentic assessment remains insufficiently understood.

Another limitation of previous studies concerns the conceptual integration between digital interaction, task-based learning, and authentic assessment. Although these three areas have been widely investigated independently, few studies have explicitly examined how they intersect within a single assessment framework. In particular, there is limited empirical evidence demonstrating how archived digital interactions can be systematically analyzed to evaluate multiple dimensions of learners' communicative performance, such as language use, coherence, responsiveness, interaction, and digital communication competence. Addressing this issue is important because digital communication has become an integral part of contemporary language use, requiring assessment approaches that reflect learners' authentic communicative practices rather than isolated language production.

To address these gaps, this study investigates how task-based language performance is manifested through WhatsApp-mediated interaction and explores how such interactions can serve as authentic assessment evidence in language learning. Unlike previous studies that primarily position WhatsApp as a learning tool, this study reconceptualizes WhatsApp-mediated interaction as an authentic assessment artifact that provides observable evidence of learners' communicative competence during task completion. By integrating perspectives from Task-Based Language Teaching, authentic assessment, and digital interaction analysis, this study contributes both conceptually and empirically to the growing field of technology-enhanced language assessment. Conceptually, it extends current understanding of digital interaction as assessment evidence rather than merely a communication medium. Empirically, it demonstrates how archived WhatsApp interactions can provide contextualized, continuous, and process-oriented evidence that supports formative language assessment in authentic learning environments.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How is task-based language performance reflected in students' interactions on WhatsApp?
2. How can task-based interactions on WhatsApp be used as a form of authentic assessment in language learning?

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METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design to examine how students' task-based language performance is reflected in interactions mediated by WhatsApp and how such interactions can serve as a form of authentic assessment in language learning. The study was conducted at the Master's Program in English Language Education at Makassar State University during the 2024/2025 academic year. Fourteen second-semester students from the class of 2025 participated in this study, consisting of two male and twelve female students aged 22–30 years. Participants were selected using purposive sampling because they were all enrolled in a course that integrated WhatsApp as a task-based learning platform and had direct experience relevant to the research focus (Patton, 2014). The WhatsApp activities were conducted as part of the course activities and were designed to generate naturally occurring evidence of students' task-based language performance.

Students took part in two task-based discussion activities conducted through a WhatsApp group over a one-month period. Each task lasted approximately 90 minutes, and English was used as the primary language of communication. The first task, "Authentic Assessment versus Traditional Testing," was designed as a discussion and opinion-exchange activity. Students were asked to discuss the fundamental differences between authentic assessment and traditional testing, express their opinions, respond to their peers' ideas, and interact naturally throughout the discussion. The second task, "WhatsApp as a Learning Tool," focused on students' perceptions of whether WhatsApp group discussions could help improve their English skills and in what ways. In this task, students were asked to provide their opinions, explain their experiences, and respond to and interact with other participants. Both tasks were designed to elicit meaningful language use through opinion exchange and peer interaction rather than isolated responses to predetermined language exercises.

Before the first discussion, participants received standardized instructions explaining the purpose of the study and the procedures for participation. They were informed that the researcher would act solely as an observer and would examine interaction patterns, language use, and engagement during the discussions. Participants were instructed to actively participate, express their opinions, respond to other participants, and interact naturally in English. They were also informed that there were no right or wrong answers, as the purpose of the activities was to observe how English was used for meaningful communication. Approximately one hour before the discussion began, a reminder was posted in the WhatsApp group. The researcher then posted the discussion question to initiate the task and observed the interaction without providing corrective feedback or directing individual responses. At the end of the first discussion, the researcher summarized the main points raised by the participants before introducing the second task.

To understand the phenomenon under study comprehensively, data were gathered from several sources. The main data source was the discussion transcripts from WhatsApp conversations archived during the two tasks. These were supplemented by observation records focusing on active participation, use of English, interaction, collaboration, focus on meaning, and task engagement. In addition, students' task-based language performance was

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evaluated using a theory-informed analytic rubric developed with reference to principles of Task-Based Language Teaching and authentic assessment (Ellis et al., 2020). The rubric consisted of six criteria: language use, clarity, coherence, interaction, responsiveness, and digital communication. These criteria were selected to capture the linguistic, discourse, and interactional dimensions of students' task-based performance as manifested in WhatsApp-mediated communication. Language use, clarity, and coherence addressed how students expressed and organized meaning, while interaction and responsiveness captured how they engaged with, responded to, and developed their peers' contributions. Digital communication was included to account for the specific communicative characteristics of the WhatsApp environment. Thus, the criteria were designed to reflect both the communicative demands of the tasks and the characteristics of authentic digital interaction. Each criterion was scored on a four-point scale ranging from 1 (very limited performance) to 4 (excellent performance).

The researcher served as the assessor and applied the rubric to the students' WhatsApp interaction records after the discussion activities had been completed. The assessment focused on observable evidence of students' communicative performance across the six criteria. The rubric was used to systematically organize the interpretation of students' language performance rather than to establish generalizable measures of language proficiency. The resulting scores were subsequently used to purposively select six participants for the interview stage, consisting of three participants with the highest total scores (APMS, APY, and NA) and three participants with the lowest total scores (NMS, F, and FW).

To further interpret the findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants selected purposively based on their assessment scores. Three participants with the highest scores and three participants with the lowest scores were selected to represent contrasting levels of observed task-based language performance. The interviews explored participants' experiences of using WhatsApp for task-based interaction, their perceptions of the discussion activities, their experiences in expressing and responding to ideas in English, and their views of WhatsApp as a potential environment for authentic assessment.

The data were analyzed by means of thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke (2021). The analysis consisted of multiple readings of the entire dataset to develop a deeper understanding and coding of data segments relevant to the research focus. The resulting codes were then grouped into categories with similar meanings and developed into themes that explain patterns of task-based language performance and the potential of WhatsApp interactions as a form of authentic assessment. These themes were then reviewed, refined, and interpreted by linking them to the concepts of authentic assessment, TBLT, and digital interaction.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, this study employed data source triangulation by comparing WhatsApp transcripts, observation records, assessment results, and interview data (Lincoln & Guba, 1988). The different sources were compared to identify converging patterns in students' task-based language performance, interaction, participation, and perceptions of WhatsApp-mediated assessment. All participants were informed of the study's objectives and provided their voluntary consent to participate.

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Participants' identities were anonymized using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and protect their privacy.

RESULTS

The analysis of WhatsApp discussion transcripts, observation records, and interview data generated three major themes related to students' language performance in task-based interaction and the potential of WhatsApp as a medium for authentic assessment. These themes are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of emergent themes

Theme	Main Findings
Students' Language Performance in WhatsApp-Based Tasks	Students demonstrated communicative competence through active participation, interaction, and negotiation of meaning.
WhatsApp as a Medium for Authentic Assessment	WhatsApp interactions provided authentic and continuous evidence of students' communicative performance.
Challenges in Implementing WhatsApp-Based Authentic Assessment	Message overload, unequal participation, use of translation tools, and language anxiety influenced interaction quality.

Students' Language Performance in WhatsApp-Based Tasks

The findings revealed that students' language performance was reflected through their participation in task-based discussions conducted via WhatsApp. Among the 14 participants involved in the study, most students actively engaged in the discussions by expressing opinions, responding to peers, and maintaining interaction throughout the activities. However, several participants showed lower participation levels and contributed only limited responses.

The observation data indicated that active participants consistently demonstrated several aspects of task engagement, including the use of English, interaction with peers, collaboration during discussions, and successful completion of assigned tasks. Most participants appeared to focus more on conveying meaning than on achieving grammatical accuracy. This pattern suggests that students used language primarily as a tool for communication rather than merely as an object of study.

The interaction transcripts further showed that students constructed and developed ideas through exchanges with their peers. Rather than producing only isolated responses, participants responded to previous contributions, asked follow-up questions, and clarified meanings during the discussions. The following interaction from the first task, "Authentic Assessment versus Traditional Testing," illustrates this process.

APY: *You have a very clear explanation, I am curious to know about your opinion, which one is better between two of them? give us some explanation thank you.*

TMK: *Hi NA, thanks for sharing your view! I get your point, but I have a slightly different take on this. What do you think, NA?*

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APY: *What do you mean about stakes and context TMK?*

TMK: *Ohh I see what you mean! By 'stakes and context' I basically meant this: Stakes = how much pressure there is. In a traditional test, the stakes are high. But in authentic assessment like this chat, the stakes are low. Even if I mess up my grammar, nobody's going to fail me. So, I can just focus on saying what I think.*

TMK: *Context = the situation we're in. Traditional tests put us in a weird situation, silent room, no talking, no Google, time ticking. That's not how we use English in real life. Authentic assessment puts us in a real situation. Like now, we're discussing, asking questions, replying. If I don't get something, I can ask 'what do you mean?' Just like a normal conversation.*

This sequence demonstrates several interactional features of task-based communication. APY first invited a peer to elaborate on the comparison between authentic and traditional assessment, after which TMK responded by presenting a different perspective and inviting further response. APY then requested clarification of the expression "stakes and context," and TMK responded by explaining the intended meaning. The exchange therefore provides observable evidence of interaction, responsiveness, follow-up questioning, and clarification, while also illustrating how participants negotiated meaning through successive contributions.

A similar interactional pattern emerged in the second task, "WhatsApp as a Learning Tool," although participants expressed different views about the effectiveness of WhatsApp for improving English skills. The following exchange illustrates how participants responded to an extended one another's perspectives.

AP: *I don't think so, I think it's better to speak directly either by using video conference (zoom/Gmeet) or by meeting offline. Chatting in WhatsApp group is not very effective, especially as most of WhatsApp group only focus on repeated small talks, unless all of the group members are committed to practice their English seriously using WhatsApp group*

NAB: *Honestly, I think WhatsApp Group discussions do help, but in a simple and relaxed way. I get to practice writing and thinking in English more often, even though I still make mistakes. I also feel more confident because I have time to think before replying, unlike speaking in class. But yeah, I still mix it with Indonesian sometimes, especially when I don't know certain words.*

F: *Yeah, I'm agree with NAB, in my opinion, WhatsApp group discussions can be a highly effective 'low-pressure' environment for improving English skills, particularly in terms of communicative fluency and vocabulary retention. Unlike a formal classroom, the casual nature of WhatsApp encourages students to use the language more spontaneously. But then again, it depends on people in the chat group, I mean the discussions would be less effective if we still use Bahasa in group chat.*

This exchange illustrates interaction through contrasting and complementary perspectives. AP questioned the effectiveness of WhatsApp discussions and proposed direct

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or video-based communication as an alternative. NAB responded with a contrasting view, emphasizing opportunities to practice writing, think in English, and gain confidence in a less pressured environment. F then explicitly aligned with NAB's position while adding a qualification concerning the continued use of Indonesian in the group. The sequence demonstrates responsiveness, elaboration, and the development of a discussion through different perspectives rather than through isolated answers.

Interview data further supported these findings. Several participants reported that WhatsApp discussions helped them practice English more frequently and increased their confidence in communication. One participant (NA) stated:

> *"Reading and responding to messages also help me become more confident in using English."*

Similarly, another participant (NMS) explained:

> *"I can learn from my classmates' responses, vocabulary, and different ways of expressing ideas."*

These responses suggest that task-based interaction in WhatsApp not only facilitated language use but also supported collaborative learning and communicative development among students.

The assessment results also showed variations in students' language performance. Some participants produced longer responses, interacted actively, and provided more elaborated arguments, whereas others tended to contribute shorter and less interactive responses. Overall, most participants demonstrated acceptable levels of language performance, although some grammatical and lexical errors were observed. These errors rarely obscured the intended meaning, suggesting that students generally prioritized communicating and interacting over formal linguistic accuracy during the WhatsApp-based tasks.

Table 2. Assessment scores of selected participants

Participant	Total score	Group
APMS	24	Highest
APY	23	Highest
NA	23	Highest
NMS	19	Lowest
F	17	Lowest
FW	10	Lowest

The assessment scores further indicated differences among the selected participants. APMS obtained the highest total score (24), followed by APY and NA (23 each). In contrast, NMS obtained a total score of 19, F obtained 17, and FW obtained the lowest score (10). Based on these results, APMS, APY, and NA were selected as representatives of the highest-scoring group, whereas NMS, F, and FW represented the lowest-scoring group for the subsequent interviews.

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WhatsApp as a Medium for Authentic Assessment

The findings also showed that WhatsApp could be used as a tool for authentic assessment as it gives students a chance to use language in communication contexts that resemble daily interaction. The students were involved in spontaneous discussions rather than language drills in isolation, in which they had to share ideas, respond to their classmates and engage in cooperative communication.

The authenticity of the assessment was reflected not simply in the use of WhatsApp as a digital platform, but in the nature of the communicative activity that participants performed. The tasks required students to express personal views, respond to peers, clarify meanings, and develop ideas in an ongoing interaction. These features allowed the assessment to capture language performance as it occurred during meaningful communication rather than through isolated responses.

This interaction illustrates that communication developed dynamically among participants without depending entirely on teacher direction. Students initiated responses, asked follow-up questions, and extended discussions. Consequently, language use emerged naturally within meaningful communicative contexts.

Interview data also revealed that many participants perceived WhatsApp discussions as a comfortable and less stressful learning environment. One participant noted:

> *"Honestly, I feel WhatsApp Group discussions are quite fun and not too stressful. It feels more like chatting with friends than studying, so I'm more comfortable using English."*

Another participant stated:

> *"Compared to classroom discussions, I feel less nervous because I have time to think before responding."*

Similar views were expressed by other participants. NMS explained:

> *"WhatsApp discussions feel more interactive and natural. It allows students to express opinions more freely, while traditional exams can feel more stressful."*

Likewise, NA reported:

> *"This method is better than traditional written exams in some ways because it allows students to interact and communicate more naturally."*

These responses indicate that students viewed WhatsApp-mediated interaction as a more authentic environment for demonstrating communicative competence than traditional assessment formats.

In addition, students' interaction data, including chat messages, and discussion replies, served as direct evidence of language use in authentic communication environments. The archived nature of WhatsApp discussions enabled continuous observation of students' participation, interaction, and language development throughout the learning process.

Table 3. Evidence of Authentic Assessment Criteria Observed in WhatsApp Interaction

Criterion	Evidence Observed

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Language Use	Students expressed opinions, explained concepts, and supported arguments using English.
Clarity	Most messages communicated intended meanings clearly and understandably.
Coherence	Students developed arguments and connected ideas logically throughout discussions.
Interaction	Active exchanges and collaborative discussion occurred among participants.
Responsiveness	Students frequently responded to and elaborated on peers' contributions.
Digital Communication	Participants appropriately used WhatsApp features to facilitate communication.

These findings suggest that social media interactions can be used not only as learning activities but also as valuable assessment evidence to evaluate students' communicative performance in a contextualized and continuous manner.

Challenges in Implementing WhatsApp-Based Authentic Assessment

Despite its potential benefits, several challenges were identified in the implementation of WhatsApp-based authentic assessment. One of the main challenges involved the large volume of incoming messages during discussions. Some participants reported difficulties in following the flow of interaction because messages appeared rapidly. One participant explained:

> *"With so many messages coming in, I sometimes find it hard to focus and keep up with the discussion."*

This finding suggests that while WhatsApp facilitates continuous interaction, excessive message flow may reduce students' ability to follow discussion threads effectively.

Another challenge concerned the use of external language-support tools such as online translators and dictionaries. Some participants admitted consulting translation tools before responding in English. One participant stated:

> *"If I am not sure, I sometimes check Google Translate or dictionary first before sending my message."*

This result implies that the students' answers were not always completely spontaneous. But the use of digital assistants also reflects the way people commonly communicate in today's online world.

The interview data also showed that some students had language anxiety even with the flexibility of online interaction. One participant (NMS) explained:

> *"Sometimes I feel nervous about making grammar mistakes, so I overthink before sending messages."*

Similarly, another participant (NA) reported:

> *"One difficulty I faced was feeling afraid of making grammatical mistakes when replying to messages."*

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These responses indicate that concerns about linguistic accuracy continued to influence students' willingness to participate in English-language discussions.

Differences in participation levels also emerged during the discussions. Although all students had equal opportunities to contribute, some participants remained passive readers and engaged minimally in the interaction. In addition, occasional code-switching between English and Indonesian was observed. While such practices are common in digital communication, they may complicate the evaluation of consistent target-language use.

Overall, the results indicate that WhatsApp has considerable potential as a platform for authentic language assessment. The effectiveness of its implementation, however, depends on factors such as task design, discussion management, participant engagement, and clearly defined assessment criteria. While challenges related to participation, language anxiety, translation tools, and message overload remain, the findings demonstrate that WhatsApp-mediated interaction can provide rich and authentic evidence of students' communicative performance in task-based language learning contexts.

DISCUSSION

Task-Based Interaction and Students' Communicative Performance

The findings of this study indicate that task-based interaction through WhatsApp encouraged students to use English in meaningful and contextual communication. During the discussions, students were not merely responding to teacher instructions but were actively exchanging opinions, asking questions, clarifying ideas, negotiating meaning, and maintaining interaction with peers. These interactional patterns suggest that language use in digital discussion activities became functional because students used English to achieve communicative purposes rather than merely completing linguistic exercises.

This finding is consistent with the principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which emphasize meaningful interaction as an important mechanism for language learning. East (2021); Ellis et al., (2020) state that task-based activities help learners focus on meaning when using language to achieve communicative goals. Similarly, Long (2014) suggests that learners benefit from participating in real communication involving information sharing, negotiation and co-construction of knowledge. The interactions described in this paper reflected these principles, as students regularly utilized language to express opinions, to respond to peers and to co-construct understanding.

One important insight from the findings was that communicative effectiveness often seemed to be more important than linguistic accuracy. Some responses were characterized by grammatical and lexical inaccuracies, but such errors did not often impinge on communication or make it impossible for students to communicate their intended meanings. This finding validates the claim made by Ellis et al. (2020) that successful communication requires not only grammatical accuracy but also the learners' ability to negotiate meaning, maintain interaction and achieve communicative goals. The results thus support the view that communicative competence is a constellation of linguistic, discourse, interactional and strategic abilities rather than the mastery of isolated language forms.

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The results also show how digital discussion activities can generate opportunities for participation that might not be always accessible in traditional classroom contexts. Others said they felt more relaxed posting on WhatsApp because they had more time to think about what they wanted to say. This finding aligns with prior research highlighting the potential of digital communication platforms to enhance learner participation and engagement by mitigating communication anxiety and providing more flexible interaction opportunities (Naghdipour & Manca, 2023; Stockwell, 2026). Interestingly, some participants who contributed less frequently were nevertheless able to participate through the online discussion format. This suggests that WhatsApp may provide learners with an alternative mode for expressing ideas and participating in task-based interaction.

Moreover, the interaction patterns in the study indicate that students displayed multiple dimensions of communicative competence simultaneously, such as discourse management, interactional ability, responsiveness and strategic competence. Rather than generating individual answers, participants-built conversations by responding to the ideas of others, extending conversations, and negotiating meaning. These findings add to the previous TBLT literature by showing that the communicative processes often linked to face-to-face task performance can also develop effectively in mobile-mediated learning environments.

WhatsApp as a Medium for Authentic Assessment

One of the most significant findings of this study is the potential of WhatsApp-mediated interaction to function as a form of authentic assessment. The discussion activities generated digital interaction data, including chat messages, and collaborative responses, which provided direct evidence of students' communicative performance during task completion. Unlike conventional assessments that frequently evaluate language knowledge through isolated tasks or written examinations, WhatsApp discussions captured language use as it naturally occurred in meaningful communication contexts.

This finding is consistent with modern perspectives on authentic assessment which highlights the evaluation of learners through meaningful contexts and in realistic performances (Ajjawi et al., 2022; Villarroel et al., 2018). Authentic assessment aims to assess what the learners can do with language in situations close to real-life communication rather than merely assessing what students know about language. In the present study, students were able to express opinions, justify arguments, ask questions, respond to peers, and sustain interaction over time. These communicative behaviors are evidence of language competence that may be under-represented through traditional testing formats.

The findings also support recent arguments that assessment should include evidence generated during the learning process and not just measure final learning outcomes (Adachi et al., 2020). WhatsApp provided a continuous record of students' participation, interaction patterns and language development through archived discussion transcripts. Such records enabled the observation of learning processes which would be difficult to see through conventional examinations. Therefore, WhatsApp interactions provided a more detailed and more holistic picture of communicative competence by capturing how students used language in real communication, rather than just evaluating the final results of learning.

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This study contributes to the literature by integrating authentic assessment, TBLT and WhatsApp-mediated interaction in one analytical framework. Most of the previous studies have investigated WhatsApp mainly as a tool to enhance learner motivation, participation, engagement or language achievement (Andujar, 2016; Cetinkaya, 2017; Naghdipour & Manca, 2023). While these studies have shown the pedagogical benefits of WhatsApp, relatively little attention has been paid to its potential as a source of assessment evidence. The present study extends the literature by conceptualizing WhatsApp interactions not merely as learning activities but as assessment artifacts capable of providing authentic evidence of students' communicative competence. This distinction represents an important contribution to the growing body of research on technology-enhanced language assessment.

Another important finding relates to the connection between digital communication and learner confidence. In the present study, participants reported feeling less anxious and more willing to contribute in WhatsApp discussions than in face-to-face settings. The asynchronous nature of the interaction meant that learners were able to read messages, organize ideas and formulate responses before posting. These results suggest that digital communication environments may be conducive to both language output and evaluation by providing a context in which learners can demonstrate their abilities in less stressful conditions. From a pedagogical point of view, this means that it is beneficial to incorporate mobile-mediated interaction into assessment practices that are intended to reflect authentic communicative performance and at the same time promote learner engagement.

The increased participation observed in this study is consistent with recent findings on the pedagogical benefits of WhatsApp-mediated learning. Namaziandost et al. (2025) reported that WhatsApp-based instruction significantly enhanced learners' academic engagement and autonomy while reducing foreign language anxiety. These findings support the argument that mobile messaging environments may create a less intimidating communicative space where learners feel more comfortable expressing opinions and participating in discussions. In the present study, such conditions appeared to facilitate sustained engagement in task-based activities, allowing learners to demonstrate their communicative competence through authentic language use rather than through isolated assessment tasks.

Challenges in Implementing WhatsApp-Based Authentic Assessment

However, the findings, while having some advantages, also point to some challenges in implementing WhatsApp-based authentic assessment. A frequent difficulty mentioned was handling the enormous volume of messages produced in discussions. Sometimes participants struggled to follow discussion threads when multiple responses were made in a short timeframe. The results show that digital platforms do indeed support interaction, but may also generate cognitive demands that influence learners' ability to process and respond to information effectively. Similar concerns have been raised in online collaborative learning environments where information overload can lead to decreased quality of participation and coherence of discussion (Hampel, 2015).

Variations in the level of participation also emerged as an important issue. All students had equal opportunities to contribute, but some participated very actively and some more

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passively. This finding suggests that digital environments do not necessarily promote equitable participation. Language skill, confidence, prior experience, and willingness to communicate may continue to affect students' participation in online discussions. Hence, teachers should create tasks that promote the participation of all learners and offer appropriate scaffolding for those who might be hesitant to contribute. The use of online translators and dictionaries is also an important factor in authentic evaluation methods. Many participants admitted to using translation tools before responding in English. Although these practices might restrict spontaneity in language production, they also reflect current practices in digital communication. Instead of seeing the use of technology as a threat to the validity of assessment, it might be more helpful to look at how learners strategically use resources at their disposal in their pursuit of communicative goals. This view is consistent with contemporary conceptions of digital literacy as the ability to effectively utilize technological resources in authentic contexts for communication (Godwin-Jones, 2022).

Similarly, the presence of code-switching between English and Indonesian reflects the multilingual realities of digital communication. Code-switching can make it difficult to assess the use of the target language, but it also shows the learners' efforts to maintain the interaction and negotiate meaning when they do not have enough resources in the target language. Such practices are regarded as strategic and not problematic from a sociocultural perspective, because they serve the purpose of maintaining communication continuity and collaborative meaning-making.

The findings suggest that for WhatsApp-based authentic assessment to be successfully implemented, there is a need for careful task design, clear assessment criteria, active facilitation and clear expectations for participation. Despite the ongoing challenges of participation inequality, language anxiety, information overload and technological assistance, the study indicates that WhatsApp-mediated interaction has significant potential to support more contextualized, process-oriented and communicatively meaningful assessment practices in today's language learning environments. While previous research focused on WhatsApp as a tool to improve language learning outcomes such as learner engagement, autonomy and vocabulary acquisition (Barzani & Omar, 2024; Namaziandost et al., 2025), this study provides a different perspective by investigating the use of WhatsApp-mediated interaction as a source of authentic assessment data. The findings suggest that learners' digital interactions can offer useful information on communicative competence, participation patterns, responsiveness and language use while completing tasks. Thus, WhatsApp-mediated interaction may provide educators with an additional source of evidence for examining language performance in contextually meaningful ways.

The findings illuminate the opportunities and challenges of WhatsApp-mediated interaction in language learning. Consistent with Dooly & Davitova (2018), the learners utilized online interaction as a resource to share ideas, negotiate meaning, and co-construct understanding while completing the tasks. Such interaction provided observable evidence of communicative performance that could potentially inform assessment. However, the results also indicated disparities in how learners participated, mirroring the concerns raised by Harsch et al. (2021) about the difficulties of ensuring equitable interaction in online

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language learning environments. These findings supplement past research by demonstrating that interaction mediated via WhatsApp can be used not only as a learning tool but also as a provider of authentic assessment evidence in task-based language learning contexts. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this approach depends on careful task design, active instructional support, and strategies that encourage equitable learner participation.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how task-based language performance was reflected in students' WhatsApp interactions and examined the potential of WhatsApp-mediated communication as a form of authentic assessment in language learning. The findings indicated that task-based discussions conducted through WhatsApp provided opportunities for students to demonstrate aspects of communicative competence through meaningful language use, interaction, negotiation of meaning, and collaborative participation. The archived nature of WhatsApp interactions also provided contextual records of students' language performance, suggesting that such interaction can complement more conventional assessment practices by capturing aspects of communication that may not be visible through traditional testing alone.

The study contributes to the growing body of literature on technology enhanced language assessment by integrating Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT), authentic assessment and digital interaction within one analytic framework. Unlike previous studies that mainly focused on WhatsApp as a learning or communication tool, this study highlights the potential of WhatsApp-mediated interaction as a complementary source of assessment evidence for examining aspects of learners' communicative performance in digital communication contexts. In practice, the findings suggest that teachers can use WhatsApp-based task discussions as a complementary component of formative assessment to examine students' language performance in more authentic, process-oriented, and communicatively meaningful ways. To reduce assessment workload and support fairness, teachers could use a focused analytic rubric, assess selected task segments rather than every message, and apply the same criteria consistently across participants.

However, this study was limited to a small number of postgraduate students in a single educational context and a single digital platform. Future research could include more diverse groups of participants, compare different social media platforms, and investigate the long-term impact of authentic assessment via WhatsApp on language development. Further studies could also explore the integration of assessment rubrics and learning analytics to enhance the reliability and validity of digital authentic assessment practices.

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