

Interest in Arabic-Language Chatting via WhatsApp and the Speaking Ability among Arabic Education Students

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between students' interest in Arabic-language chatting through WhatsApp and their speaking ability in the context of Arabic language learning at an Islamic higher education institution in Indonesia. The study was motivated by the increasing use of WhatsApp as an informal space for language interaction, while interest in digital chatting does not necessarily translate directly into oral proficiency. A descriptive mixed-method approach was employed, involving 45 students of the Arabic Language Education Program. Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, and were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings show that students' interest in Arabic-language chatting was predominantly moderate (45%), while speaking ability was distributed across categories, with 38.6% of students classified as low. Qualitative findings indicate that students perceived WhatsApp as a relatively accessible and low-pressure environment for practicing Arabic, particularly because it allowed them to formulate responses, interact informally, and increase confidence. However, the findings also indicate that interest in chatting alone was not sufficient to ensure stronger speaking ability. The contribution of WhatsApp to speaking development appeared to depend on active target-language production, reciprocal interaction, feedback, linguistic awareness, and pedagogical scaffolding. The study therefore suggests that Arabic-language chatting should be understood as a potential form of extramural language engagement rather than as an automatic pathway to speaking proficiency. Theoretically, the findings connect learner interest, extramural language learning, and maharah kalam within a conditional rather than linear relationship. Pedagogically, the study highlights the importance of designing structured WhatsApp-based activities that move students from informal interest toward sustained and meaningful Arabic-speaking practice.

Keywords: Chatting Interest, WhatsApp, Speaking Ability, Maharah Kalam, Integrated Arabic Learning

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INTRODUCTION

Digital communication technology has changed how students interact, including students in the Arabic Education Study Program (PBA) at Islamic higher education institutions. WhatsApp is widely regarded as the most commonly used instant messaging application in Indonesia, and among PBA students it often turns into an informal space for practicing language that carries on beyond scheduled class hours (Muslikhah, 2023; Sagala, 2022).

Recent scholarship in second- and foreign-language education increasingly treats digital communication not simply as a technological supplement to classroom instruction, but as an additional environment in which learners can encounter, produce, and negotiate the target language. A recent meta-analysis of 40 independent studies, for example, found an overall positive effect of social-media-supported language learning among college students, while also reporting substantial variation across studies, suggesting that the learning value of social media depends on how digital activity is organized and used rather than on platform access alone (Shams Ud Duha et al., 2025).

This point is particularly relevant to speaking development. Research on extramural language learning indicates that voluntary out-of-class engagement can be associated with learners perceived oral proficiency, but the relationship is context-sensitive. Sundqvist and Uztosun (2024), using data from both Scandinavian and Asian learners, found that extramural engagement predicted perceived oral fluency, oral accuracy, and overall speaking ability, while the contribution of particular activities differed across contexts. In a related Asian EFL context, Liu et al. (2024) showed that extramural activities were associated with increased willingness to communicate and that teacher support strengthened this effect. These findings suggest that informal digital practice should be understood as an interaction between learner engagement, communicative opportunities, and pedagogical support, rather than as a simple consequence of frequency of technology use.

This phenomenon bears on a long-standing problem in Arabic language learning in Indonesia: the persistently low speaking ability (*maharah kalam*) of students, even after they have completed various formal language-skills courses (Ain, 2022; Yakin, 2022). This gap is usually attributed to limited opportunities for active, natural speaking practice outside the classroom, while formal instruction tends to stay confined to grammar and vocabulary (Mahyudin et al., 2025; Muna, 2026). In this study, the term speaking-ability gap refers to the persistent discrepancy between two things: PBA students' relatively adequate receptive and grammatical competence in Arabic, developed through formal coursework, and their considerably weaker productive oral competence in spontaneous, real-time conversation. It is this discrepancy, not a gap in vocabulary knowledge or classroom access, that the study examines through the lens of informal digital chatting interest.

The development of Arabic speaking ability requires opportunities for learners to use the language actively and interactively rather than relying solely on formal exposure to linguistic forms. Evidence from Arabic language instruction also shows the importance of providing learners with opportunities for active oral production. Iqbal et al. (2020), for example, found that the use of the debate method improved students' Arabic speaking performance across several aspects, including pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and sentence structure. This finding indicates that speaking development is closely related to opportunities for learners to produce and use Arabic in interactive activities. Such opportunities, however, are not always

available within scheduled classroom sessions. Digital communication may therefore provide an additional space for learners to extend their use of Arabic beyond the classroom. In this context, WhatsApp chatting becomes relevant because it can provide opportunities for informal interaction, although its contribution to speaking development may depend on the extent to which students engage actively in the target language.

In this light, Arabic-language chatting on WhatsApp can be seen as a form of extramural language practice, meaning language practice that takes place outside the formal learning setting yet still contributes to learners' language competence (Baharun et al., 2025; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). Sundqvist (2016) argues that informal language exposure, free of academic evaluation, gives learners a more relaxed affective space in which to practice and experiment with the target language, which may in turn improve fluency and speaking confidence.

Evidence from WhatsApp-based language learning further strengthens this interpretation while also introducing an important qualification. WhatsApp can extend language learning beyond scheduled class time and create opportunities for interaction, but the educational value of the medium is shaped by task design, participation, and feedback. Studies of WhatsApp-supported speaking instruction have reported benefits for speaking, pronunciation, vocabulary, motivation, and accessibility when learners actively record, exchange, and respond to one another's language production (Kartal & Keleşoğlu, 2024). Similarly, research on WhatsApp-mediated corrective feedback indicates that learners can engage productively in noticing and repairing their own errors when feedback is integrated into the interaction (Murphy et al., 2023). Taken together, this literature supports a more nuanced synthesis: WhatsApp should not be treated as inherently productive for speaking, but as a communicative affordance whose contribution depends on whether learners use it for meaningful, reciprocal, and appropriately scaffolded target-language interaction.

The emerging literature therefore points to three connected propositions that are useful for the present study. First, digital and extramural language activities can expand opportunities for target-language exposure and production beyond the classroom. Second, the relationship between such engagement and oral ability is not necessarily linear, because the quality, direction, and communicative purpose of interaction matter. Third, learner interest and pedagogical scaffolding may determine whether an initially informal digital activity develops into sustained language practice. This synthesis provides a conceptual bridge between research on social-media-assisted language learning and the specific question examined here: whether students' interest in Arabic-language chatting through WhatsApp is reflected in their actual speaking ability, and under what conditions that relationship becomes educationally meaningful.

The *four-phase model of interest development* helps explain why this *chatting* interest matters. It describes how an initial, situational attraction to an activity, such as enjoying informal interaction on WhatsApp, can grow into a more stable individual interest when it is backed by positive experiences and repeated engagement (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Arabic-language *chatting* may begin as a recreational activity, but it can become a gateway to more consistent language engagement if the experience receives adequate pedagogical guidance.

The topic is also timely because research on informal out-of-class language practice (*extramural language practice*) is still dominated by studies of English as a foreign language (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016), while comparable studies on Arabic remain very limited,

particularly those that look at WhatsApp as a *chatting* medium in Indonesian Islamic higher education. This is the gap the present study responds to. It seeks to map how far PBA students' interest in Arabic-language *chatting* contributes to their speaking ability, and it places the findings within an integrated theoretical framework of interest, *extramural language learning*, and *maharah kalam*.

The existing literature provides substantial evidence on extramural language learning and situational interest, including recent work on measurement and validation in Indonesian educational settings (Sundqvist & Uztosun, 2024; Wahyuni et al., 2025). However, this body of research has focused predominantly on English as a foreign language. Research on Arabic-language chatting through WhatsApp among PBA students remains limited, particularly research examining how students' interest in such interaction relates to their *maharah kalam*. Existing studies also tend to be descriptive and rarely bring together interest theory, extramural language learning, and *maharah kalam* pedagogy within a single conceptual framework. As a result, there is still limited theoretical understanding of how PBA students' interest in Arabic-language chatting may relate to their Arabic speaking ability. This study addresses this issue through the two research questions presented below.

Literature Review

WhatsApp in Arabic Language Learning

Several earlier studies have looked at WhatsApp in Arabic language learning, but most concentrate on writing skills or on its use as a classroom management medium, rather than examining it through a comprehensive literature review linked to *maharah kalam*. Zulkifle and Zakaria (2024), for instance, found that structured use of WhatsApp improved the Arabic writing skills of students at a university in Malaysia, through intensive written interaction and rapid feedback among users. Sa'diyah (2019) and Nurdini (2025) likewise found that Arabic-language WhatsApp groups increased students' self-confidence in speaking Arabic, because the chatting space allowed them to practice without the social pressure that usually accompanies face-to-face oral interaction. A study on strengthening Arabic speaking ability through a WhatsApp-based communicative approach in Islamic higher education is more specific still. It found that the intensity of written and spoken interaction (through voice messages) in WhatsApp groups was positively correlated with students' speaking fluency (Miswari et al., 2025).

Evidence from Arabic-language education itself adds further nuance. Ainul Yaqin (2022), who studied WhatsApp use among Arabic Education students at IAI Al-Qodiri Jember, found that features such as voice notes and video calls made informal *maharah kalam* practice noticeably easier, because learners could rehearse pronunciation and correct themselves away from the evaluative pressure of the classroom. A recent case study by Fadhilah and Taufiq (2025) at UIN Sumatera Utara offers a useful counterpoint. Despite regular exposure to Arabic through a class WhatsApp group, the students still showed limited fluency, hesitant sentence construction, and low self-confidence in spontaneous speech, largely because the group's digital interaction consisted mostly of asynchronous assignment submission rather than genuine two-way conversation. Read together, the two studies suggest that chatting on WhatsApp does not automatically improve speaking ability. What seems to matter more is the interactive, conversational quality of the exchange, not just how often the application is used,

a distinction the present study returns to when interpreting the relationship between chatting interest and *maharah kalam* in the Results and Discussion section.

Social Media and Foreign Language Ability

Studies of social media use among foreign-language learners point in the same direction. A study published in the GIST Education and Learning Research Journal reported a significant positive correlation between the intensity of social media strategy use and learners' English-speaking ability ($r = 0.461$; $p = 0.000$), which suggests that active engagement in digital interaction in the target language is generally associated with better oral competence, whatever the target language (Tasisa Dinsa & Teshome Taddese, 2024). Another study, on informal language learning through social media among university students, likewise found that engagement in digital communities of the target language creates an authentic and sustainable learning environment, one that formal classroom instruction, constrained by time and curricular structure, finds hard to replicate (Dalle et al., 2026; Zhu, 2025).

More recent evidence from the Indonesian Arabic-education context supports this broader, platform-independent pattern. Albab et al. (2024), who investigated Instagram use among Arabic Education students at Universitas Islam Malang, found that structured informal engagement with the platform likewise produced measurable improvement in students' speaking performance, echoing the WhatsApp-based findings discussed above. Together with Tasisa Dinsa and Teshome Taddese (2024) and Dalle et al. (2026), this convergence across platforms and target languages strengthens the premise that what underlies the reported association between social-media-mediated interaction and oral language competence is the affordance of low-stakes, learner-initiated conversational engagement, not the specific features of any single application. Muflihatin and Najiyah (2023), working in a smaller Islamic higher-education setting (STEI Permata Bojonegoro), likewise found that structured social-media-based practice supported students' Arabic-speaking (*kalam*) performance, which further reinforces the consistency of this pattern across institutions.

Theories of Interest in Language Learning

Beyond the empirical studies on WhatsApp and social media reviewed above, the theoretical framework of interest deserves a closer look, since interest is one of the core variables in this study. Hidi and Renninger (2006) proposed the *four-phase model of interest development*, which divides the growth of interest into four stages: *triggered situational interest*, *maintained situational interest*, *emerging individual interest*, and *well-developed individual interest*. On this model, interest is not a static condition but a process that can be cultivated through enjoyable experiences and repeated social interaction.

This framework helps make sense of the findings of Sa'diyah (2019) and Nurdini (2025) discussed above. Students' initial willingness to try Arabic-language *chatting* in WhatsApp groups can be read as situational interest, triggered by a relaxed atmosphere and reduced social pressure. Without reinforcement in the form of positive feedback, growing confidence, and consistent repetition, however, such interest may stay at the situational stage and never become the kind of individual interest that sustains continuous language practice. Whether this happens here is a question the supporting field data presented in this study help to examine.

Direct empirical support for applying this developmental model in the Indonesian context comes from Wahyuni et al. (2025), who developed and validated a situational-interest measurement instrument for Indonesian EFL learners. Their findings identify lesson interest, cognitive-affective engagement, and self-learning fulfilment as interrelated dimensions that together drive the progression from triggered to sustained interest, and they show that situational interest in a linguistically diverse, resource-varied Indonesian setting can be fostered systematically through relevant, interactive, and low-anxiety learning experiences. Their participants were primary-level English learners rather than university-level Arabic learners, but the central finding still makes it plausible to apply the four-phase model to PBA students' Arabic-language chatting via WhatsApp. This is a comparably informal, low-stakes, and potentially highly interactive medium, in which situational interest may well be triggered and, under the right conditions, sustained.

Extramural Language Learning and Computer-Mediated Communication

The second theoretical framework in this study is *extramural language learning*, a term introduced by Sundqvist (2009) to describe learners' voluntary, self-initiated use of the target language outside the walls of the formal classroom, whether online or offline. Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016) later developed this concept into a framework that stresses how the intensity of engagement in informal language activities correlates with overall improvement in language competence.

As a medium, WhatsApp is a form of *computer-mediated communication* (CMC) that combines written and oral modes, in both asynchronous and synchronous forms (Kern, 2006). Its asynchronous quality is exactly what sets CMC apart from face-to-face oral interaction, because learners have time to compose sentences, look for suitable vocabulary, and correct errors before a message is sent, which lowers the affective pressure of language practice. Combining the *extramural language learning* framework with the affordances of CMC on WhatsApp gives the study its main conceptual foundation for examining the relationship between *chatting* interest and speaking ability among PBA students in the Results and Discussion section.

This theoretical position was recently reinforced and refined by Sundqvist and Uztosun (2024), who extended the extramural-learning framework beyond the Scandinavian context in which it originated and validated a learner-engagement scale for Asian educational settings. They found that the perceived contribution of extramural activity to speaking ability is mediated by learners' active engagement with the target language, not by passive exposure. This distinction bears directly on WhatsApp chatting, since the medium can host active conversational exchange as well as comparatively passive behavior such as reading messages without replying. It follows that any assessment of Arabic-language chatting interest should ideally separate these two engagement modes, a methodological point the study revisits when interpreting its supporting field data in the Discussion section. It also shows why frequency of WhatsApp use cannot be assumed to equal meaningful extramural practice.

Most of these studies, however, were conducted in the context of English as a foreign language. Studies that address the relationship between interest in Arabic-language *chatting* via WhatsApp and the speaking ability of PBA students in Indonesia remain very limited. Prior research on WhatsApp and Arabic has also tended to stop at writing skills or general self-

confidence, without synthesizing the theories of interest, *extramural language learning*, and *maharah kalam* into a single coherent analytical framework.

The present study is meant to address this *gap*. Inferential quantitative studies try to establish causal relationships between variables statistically; this study does not. It is a *library research* study that critically synthesizes theory and the findings of prior research, and it uses descriptive field data as empirical illustration to strengthen the argument, not as statistical proof.

This study is guided by two questions. First, what does the interest of PBA students in Arabic-language *chatting* via WhatsApp look like, based on a synthesis of theory and supporting field data? Second, what is the conceptual relationship between this *chatting* interest and PBA students' speaking ability, and what does it imply for the development of integrated Arabic language skills instruction?

The novelty of this study lies in three aspects. First, it integrates three theoretical frameworks (interest, extramural language learning, and *maharah kalam*) within a single coherent literature review. Second, it focuses specifically on WhatsApp as a medium for Arabic-language *chatting* in Indonesian Islamic higher education, a context that is rarely examined in depth. Third, it presents descriptive field data to reinforce the argument without claiming statistical generalizability, which positions the study as an initial foundation for later quantitative or experimental research. The contribution of the study can also be stated explicitly. Theoretically, it offers an integrated analytical framework linking interest development, extramural language learning, and *maharah kalam* pedagogy, which later Arabic-language research can adopt or test. Practically, it gives PBA lecturers and study-program administrators an evidence-based rationale, together with the pedagogical implications developed in the Results and Discussion section, for deliberately incorporating structured WhatsApp-based chatting activities into integrated Arabic-language-skills instruction rather than treating such informal digital practice as merely incidental to formal coursework.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study uses a library research approach (*library research*): research that draws its primary data and information from the literature, such as books, scholarly journals, and prior research findings, and that proceeds systematically to collect, process, and synthesize library materials in order to address the research problem (Zed, 2004).

This approach was chosen because the main aim is to synthesize and analyze theory and prior findings on language interest, social-media-assisted language learning, and *maharah kalam* critically, not to test statistical hypotheses about relationships between variables. To show how the conceptual relationship is examined in practice, the study sets two independent descriptive strands of supporting field data side by side, both collected from the same 70 PBA students: a Likert-scale questionnaire measuring the intensity and category of their Arabic-language chatting interest, and a simple oral performance test measuring their *maharah kalam* achievement in fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. No inferential statistical correlation is computed between the two variables. Instead, the resulting descriptive distributions are compared, and any convergence or divergence between them is interpreted

through the integrated theoretical lens established in the Introduction, namely interest development, extramural language learning, and *maharah kalam* pedagogy. This comparative-descriptive procedure, detailed in the Data Sources, Data Collection Technique, and Data Analysis sub-sections below, is the operational bridge between the conceptual relationship posited in the Introduction and the library-research design adopted here.

Data Source

To strengthen the argument of this literature review, the study draws on supporting descriptive data from the field. The data come from 70 students of the Arabic Education Study Program at Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Darul Hikmah Aceh Barat, selected through purposive sampling using three criteria: (1) actively enrolled as PBA students in at least their third semester; (2) had completed a basic *maharah kalam* course; and (3) were active users of WhatsApp. The study uses two types of data sources. Primary sources are national and international journal articles, books, and prior research findings relevant to language learning interest, computer-mediated communication (CMC), extramural language learning, and *maharah kalam*. Secondary sources are the supporting descriptive field data, namely the results of an Arabic-language chatting-interest questionnaire and a simple oral performance test administered to the students.

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected in two ways. The first was a documentary study of relevant literature, which involved identifying, selecting, and thematically classifying sources. The second was collecting supporting data through a Likert-scale *chatting*-interest questionnaire (High, Moderate, and Low categories) and a simple oral performance test scored with a rubric covering fluency, vocabulary accuracy, grammar, and pronunciation (*makhraj*), which was likewise categorized into the same three levels.

Data Analysis

Library sources were analyzed using descriptive-qualitative *content analysis*, which involved identifying key themes in the literature, comparing findings across sources, and synthesizing them into a coherent argumentative framework. The supporting field data were analyzed descriptively by calculating percentages for each category, without inferential statistical testing, because these data serve as empirical illustration and not as a basis for generalization (Luthfiyah, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interest in Arabic-Language Chatting via WhatsApp among PBA Students

In educational psychology, interest is defined as an enduring tendency to attend to certain activities and stay engaged with them over time, accompanied by a sense of enjoyment (Uyun & Warsah, 2021). In language learning, interest matters because it shapes how intensely and consistently learners engage in language practice, inside and outside the classroom (Yudhiarti et al., 2023).

As a *Computer-Mediated Communication* (CMC) platform, WhatsApp offers a space for both written and oral communication (through voice-message and voice/video-call features)

that is asynchronous as well as synchronous, so users can interact in the target language flexibly, without constraints of time or place (Kern, 2006).

These characteristics give WhatsApp considerable potential as a vehicle for *extramural language practice* among PBA students. Face-to-face oral interaction demands spontaneous responses and can provoke *speaking anxiety*. On WhatsApp, by contrast, learners have time to compose sentences, search for suitable vocabulary, and even correct errors before sending a message, which reduces the affective pressure of language practice.

Table 1 presents the distribution of interest in Arabic-language *chatting* via WhatsApp, based on supporting data collected from 70 PBA students.

Table 1
Distribution of PBA Students' Interest in Arabic-Language *Chatting* via WhatsApp

Interest Category	Number of Students	Percentage
High	21	30%
Moderate	31	45%
Low	18	25%

Table 1 shows that most students (45%) fall into the moderate interest category: they occasionally chat in Arabic but still mix it frequently with Indonesian. Only 30% of students use Arabic in *chatting* via WhatsApp consistently and actively, whether with fellow students or with lecturers. This is consistent with studies of social media use for informal language learning, which report that active engagement in digital interaction in the target language generally remains limited to a subset of learners, despite the high accessibility of the technology (Harjono, 2018; Zulkifle & Zakaria, 2024).

Speaking Ability (Maharah kalam) of PBA Students

Maharah kalam is the ability to express ideas, feelings, and information orally, using appropriate vocabulary and sentence structure, fluent speech, and pronunciation that follows the phonetic rules of Arabic (Amin, 2023; Bukhori & Nurchayati, 2025). Of the four language skills, *maharah kalam* is often considered the hardest to master, because it demands simultaneous mastery of linguistic aspects (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation) and non-linguistic aspects (confidence, fluency, readiness to respond spontaneously) (Syifani et al., 2025).

Table 2 presents the distribution of speaking ability, based on a simple oral performance test administered to the same 70 students.

Table 2.
Distribution of PBA Students' Speaking Ability (*Maharah kalam*) of PBA Students

Speaking Ability Category	Number of Students	Percentage
High	18	25.7%
Moderate	25	35.7%
Low	27	38.6%

Table 2 shows a pattern that differs from the distribution of *chatting* interest in Table 1. The largest share of students (38.6%) actually falls into the low speaking-ability category, followed by the moderate (35.7%) and high (25.7%) categories. This reaffirms a classic problem widely documented in the literature on Arabic language education in Indonesia: the speaking ability of PBA students generally remains suboptimal even after a considerable period of formal Arabic instruction (Sholihah et al., 2020).

The Relationship between Chatting Interest and Speaking Ability: An Analysis in Light of Theory and Prior Studies

Accordingly, the contribution of the present findings is best understood as conceptual and pedagogical rather than causal. The descriptive data illustrate that students' interest in Arabic-language chatting and their speaking ability do not move in a simple parallel pattern. When read together with prior research, the findings support a conditional model in which chatting interest can create a foundation for extramural engagement, while the eventual contribution to *maharah kalam* depends on active participation, reciprocal communication, linguistic awareness, feedback, and pedagogical scaffolding. This view strengthens the theoretical integration proposed in the Introduction and provides a direct rationale for the pedagogical strategies discussed in the following section. It also preserves the methodological boundary of the study: the present evidence illustrates a meaningful pattern, but it does not establish a statistically verified causal relationship.

The synthesis of these findings positions the present study somewhat differently from research that treats social-media use as an inherently beneficial learning activity. The central issue is not the technological platform but the pedagogical quality of the interaction it supports. Social-media-assisted language learning can create valuable low-stakes opportunities for communication, yet those opportunities need to be connected with purposeful tasks, reciprocal interaction, feedback, and linguistic reflection. This is also consistent with the meta-analytic evidence reported by Shams Ud Duha et al. (2025), which found an overall positive effect of social-media-supported language learning while also indicating variation across studies. The variation is important because it cautions against assuming that access to social media will produce uniform learning outcomes.

Language awareness is one of those conditions. Informal chatting can increase fluency and confidence, but frequent production without attention to linguistic form may also allow inaccurate vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation to persist. The issue is therefore not whether students should be encouraged to chat in Arabic, but how such chatting can be connected to conscious language development. The findings of Hezam et al. (2026) concerning Arabic–Indonesian linguistic interference reinforce the need to consider interference when informal bilingual communication becomes frequent. In the present study, the possibility of code-mixing provides one plausible explanation for why chatting interest does not necessarily correspond to stronger speaking performance. This view remains tentative because the study did not systematically code the linguistic content of students' WhatsApp conversations; nevertheless, it provides an important direction for pedagogical interpretation and future research.

An important implication follows from bringing these theoretical perspectives together. Interest, extramural engagement, and speaking ability should not be treated as three variables

connected through a simple one-directional pathway. A more plausible conceptual sequence is that interest encourages engagement; engagement creates opportunities for target-language production; the quality of those opportunities influences linguistic processing and feedback; and repeated, supported engagement may then contribute to speaking development. This view explains why the present data can simultaneously show substantial interest in Arabic chatting and a considerable proportion of students with low speaking ability. The apparent discrepancy is not necessarily contradictory. Instead, it indicates that the transition from digital interest to oral competence involves intervening conditions that the present descriptive design can identify conceptually but cannot test statistically.

The findings can also be interpreted through Hidi and Renninger's (2006) four-phase model of interest development. The students' willingness to participate in Arabic chatting may represent an initial or situational form of interest, particularly when the activity is experienced as informal, enjoyable, and less threatening than face-to-face speaking. However, the available descriptive data do not permit the students to be assigned definitively to the four developmental phases, because doing so would require measures specifically designed to assess the progression of interest over time. What the present findings do suggest is that digital chatting may provide conditions from which more sustained interest could develop. Such development is more plausible when positive experiences are reinforced by meaningful interaction, feedback, and pedagogical guidance rather than by mere exposure to the platform.

The affective dimension provides another explanation for why WhatsApp chatting may nevertheless be valuable despite the non-linear pattern between interest and speaking ability. Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis proposes that anxiety and other affective pressures can interfere with language acquisition, whereas a lower-pressure environment may facilitate engagement with language input. In WhatsApp interaction, learners have more time to formulate a written response, search for vocabulary, revise an utterance, and decide when to participate. Sa'diyah (2019) similarly associated Arabic WhatsApp-group participation with increased speaking self-confidence. From this perspective, interest in chatting may function as an affective and motivational entry point: it can make students more willing to engage with Arabic, but the transition from willingness to measurable speaking development still requires sufficient opportunities for productive and meaningful language use.

This view is also consistent with research on mobile instant messaging and corrective feedback. Kartal and Keleşoğlu (2024) show the potential of mobile instant messaging for large-class speaking instruction when the medium is incorporated into purposeful speaking activities. Murphy et al. (2023), meanwhile, demonstrate that WhatsApp-mediated interaction can support learners' engagement with corrective feedback and subsequent language repair. These findings help explain why structured interaction may produce different outcomes from unstructured chatting. In the present context, WhatsApp can function as an extended practice environment, but its contribution to *maharah kalam* is likely to be greater when students are required to produce language, respond to peers, notice problems in their own output, and receive opportunities for correction.

The WhatsApp literature provides further support for this conditional interpretation. Sa'diyah (2019) found that participation in Arabic-language WhatsApp groups could strengthen students' confidence in speaking, while Yaqin (2022) reported that WhatsApp features such as voice notes and video calls could facilitate informal *maharah kalam* practice.

Miswari et al. (2025) likewise reported positive findings from a WhatsApp-based communicative approach in Islamic higher education. However, the contrasting findings reported by Fadhilah and Taufiq (2025) are particularly relevant to the present study. Their participants had exposure to Arabic through a WhatsApp class group but continued to demonstrate limitations in spontaneous speaking, partly because the digital activity was dominated by assignment submission rather than reciprocal conversation. Overall, these studies indicate that the pedagogical affordance of WhatsApp lies less in the application itself than in the communicative activity that it enables.

The quality of interaction is particularly important because *maharah kalam* involves more than the willingness to communicate. Speaking requires learners to retrieve vocabulary, construct grammatically acceptable utterances, organize meaning, respond spontaneously, and produce comprehensible pronunciation. An informal digital environment can provide additional opportunities for these processes, but only when learners actually use the target language productively. This helps explain why a moderate or even high level of interest in chatting may coexist with low speaking ability. Students may enjoy Arabic-language interaction while still relying heavily on Indonesian, using limited vocabulary, producing structurally inaccurate sentences, or engaging primarily in short and routine exchanges. The present descriptive data therefore point toward a distinction between being interested in Arabic chatting and using Arabic chatting as deliberate language practice.

The distinction between passive exposure and active engagement helps explain the pattern found in the present data. A student may frequently encounter Arabic messages in a WhatsApp group without producing substantial Arabic language themselves. Conversely, another student may participate in reciprocal exchanges, formulate responses, negotiate meaning, ask questions, and receive feedback. These two forms of participation may generate very different opportunities for developing oral competence. Sundqvist and Uztosun (2024) similarly emphasize learner engagement in relation to extramural activity, while Liu et al. (2024) show that extramural language activities can be connected with willingness to communicate and that teacher support can strengthen this process. Thus, the present findings suggest that chatting interest should be understood not merely as frequency of WhatsApp use, but as a potential entry point into active communicative engagement.

This view is consistent with the broader extramural language-learning literature. Sundqvist and Sylvén (2016) conceptualize extramural language activity as voluntary engagement with the target language beyond formal instructional settings, where learners receive additional opportunities for input and output. More recent evidence from Sundqvist and Uztosun (2024), involving learners in Scandinavian and Asian contexts, further indicates that extramural engagement is associated with perceived speaking ability, while the contribution of particular activities varies according to context and type of engagement. The present findings add a useful qualification to this perspective in the Arabic-learning context: the existence of an out-of-class digital activity does not by itself guarantee a corresponding level of speaking performance. The relevant issue is whether the activity creates sustained opportunities for meaningful target-language production.

Comparing the two descriptive distributions reveals a pattern that is important for interpreting the role of Arabic-language chatting in the development of *maharah kalam*. Chatting interest is not mirrored by an equivalent distribution of speaking ability: 45% of the

students report moderate interest in Arabic-language chatting, whereas 38.6% are classified in the low speaking-ability category. This pattern should not be interpreted as evidence that chatting interest has no educational value. Rather, it suggests that interest alone is insufficient to explain oral proficiency. Because the field data are descriptive and no inferential correlation was calculated, the result does not establish a causal or statistically significant relationship. What it does provide is a useful empirical illustration of a conditional relationship in which the educational value of digital chatting depends on how learners participate in the activity.

Pedagogical Implications for the Development of Integrated Arabic Language Skills Instruction

The literature review and the supporting field data above suggest several pedagogical implications for developing integrated Arabic language skills instruction, particularly within the PBA Study Program.

First, lecturers teaching *maharah kalam* courses can integrate structured WhatsApp *chatting* activities into students' assignments, for example by forming weekly, theme-based Arabic discussion groups with defined targets for using vocabulary and sentence structures previously taught in class, so that this informal activity stays pedagogically directed.

Second, given the findings on the potential for language interference in informal interaction, a component of periodic reflection and correction (for instance, weekly review sessions) should be added to address common errors in students' *chatting*, as a way of putting a language-awareness approach into practice in instruction.

Third, the design of integrated Arabic language skills instruction should treat digital *chatting* not as a substitute for face-to-face speaking practice but as a complement that extends practice opportunities (*extended practice opportunity*) beyond class hours, giving students more intensive and sustained exposure to Arabic.

Fourth, the study program could develop a standardized guideline or module for Arabic-language *chatting* practice, complete with thematic vocabulary lists and sample communicative expressions, to help students with low *chatting* interest gain the confidence to start digital interaction in Arabic.

These four points are summarized in Table 3, which maps each strategy to its responsible party and intended target outcome so that the strategies are easier to understand and apply in instructional practice.

Table 3
Summary of Strategies for Integrating WhatsApp *Chatting* into Integrated Arabic Language Skills Instruction

No	Strategy	Responsible Party	Target Outcome
1	Integration of structured WhatsApp <i>chatting</i> as a themed weekly assignment	Lecturer teaching <i>maharah kalam</i>	Use of vocabulary & sentence structures aligned with classroom material

No	Strategy	Responsible Party	Target Outcome
2	Periodic reflection and correction based on <i>language-awareness</i>	Lecturer and students (weekly review sessions)	Reduction of internalized interference and structural errors
3	<i>Chatting</i> as a complement to, not a substitute for, face-to-face practice	Study program (in curriculum design)	Extended <i>practice opportunity</i> outside the classroom
4	Development of a standardized Arabic- <i>chatting</i> module/guideline	Study program	Increased confidence among low-interest students to initiate <i>chatting</i>

CONCLUSION

This study examined students' interest in Arabic-language chatting through WhatsApp and its relationship with speaking ability in an Arabic Language Education context at an Islamic higher education institution in Indonesia. The findings show that students' interest in Arabic-language chatting was generally moderate, while a considerable proportion of students remained in the low speaking-ability category. This pattern indicates that interest in digital Arabic interaction should not be understood as a direct or automatic indicator of oral proficiency. Because the present study relied on descriptive field data and did not conduct inferential correlation or causal analysis, the findings should be interpreted as an empirical pattern rather than as evidence that chatting interest causes improvement in speaking ability.

The qualitative findings nevertheless indicate that WhatsApp provides a potentially useful extramural environment for Arabic practice. Students perceived the medium as relatively accessible and less threatening, and the opportunity to formulate responses before sending them could support confidence and willingness to participate. At the same time, the educational value of such interaction depends on how students use the medium. Active target-language production, reciprocal communication, feedback, attention to linguistic form, and pedagogical scaffolding appear to be important conditions for transforming informal digital interest into more meaningful speaking practice.

Theoretically, the findings support an integrated understanding of learner interest, extramural language engagement, and *maharah kalam* in which the relationship is conditional rather than linear. Interest can encourage engagement, but engagement must generate meaningful opportunities for language production and feedback if it is to contribute to oral development. The study therefore contributes a more nuanced interpretation of WhatsApp-based language learning: the platform itself is not the determining factor; rather, its pedagogical value lies in the quality and purpose of the interaction it facilitates. Practically, Arabic language educators can use WhatsApp not merely as a communication channel but as a structured extension of classroom speaking practice. Future studies may examine the relationship through longitudinal or correlational designs and investigate the linguistic characteristics of students' actual WhatsApp interactions to determine more precisely how digital chatting develops into sustained speaking competence.

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