

The Use of Whatsapp for Online Learning among Malaysian Students

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Abstract

Generally, WhatsApp is a social media application that connects people from all around the world. It has become trendy amongst users for all sorts of purposes including for online learning. The aim of this study is to investigate the use of WhatsApp for online learning among Malaysian students. Specifically, the study will focus on the reasons why WhatsApp has become a popular learning tool among Malaysian students, the benefits of using WhatsApp for online learning and the challenges faced in doing so. A hundred students were used as respondents for the study from a local university in this quantitative study. The results show that WhatsApp popularity is attributed to motivation to use by teachers, friends, and the surroundings of students as well as WhatsApp easy to use features. Furthermore, it was found that students found WhatsApp beneficial in locating information for tasks and connecting with peers. The challenge for WhatsApp usage was mainly found in the video and live video conferencing features which had limitations for this App for online learning. It is thus recommended that the usage of WhatsApp should be for short discussions rather than long lectures and video recordings.

Keywords: Online Learning, Mobile Learning, Whatsapp Usage, Whatsapp Benefits, Whatsapp Challenges.

Introduction

Mobile learning supports learning anytime and anywhere that fits the learner's environment. WhatsApp is an online application that offers free messaging and calls for mobile phone users. It is easy to use and these days, it can also be access through WhatsApp web. The app allows for groups or individual contacts to be formed. In recent times, students have been instructed to have their lessons via online learning. Among many applications used, WhatsApp has proven to be among the choice of Malaysian students and instructors for communication, conducting lessons and uploading and downloading class notes.

Mulyono et al (2021) asserted that the use of WhatsApp to facilitate ubiquitous learning has been practiced worldwide. Similarly, Stone and Logan (2018) found that the use of WhatsApp is widespread, helping students to have a sense of connectivity and providing a basis for developing a learning community. In a 2018 report, social media users of social

platforms which included WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook had an increase of 97.9 percent from a total of 132.7 million users (Mulyono & Suryoputro, 2020). Thus, the role of social media platforms such as WhatsApp for online learning is increasingly valuable to support the process of teaching and learning. In line with this, it would be interesting to investigate the use of WhatsApp for online learning among students.

Communication breakdown is a serious problem among instructors and students in online learning. There is a solemn need for good communication between instructors and students in conducting online lessons. In order to learn online, students need to connect to a digital device with an application service that is convenient and user-friendly. There are many applications for online learning on the internet. However, some of the applications can only be used through a computer while others may be accessed through mobile phones.

Among the many apps available especially for mobile phones, WhatsApp is very popular worldwide as a learning tool (Mulyono et al., 2021). Many studies have attested to the practicality of using WhatsApp as a learning tool. In a study by Febriani (2020), WhatsApp was found to facilitate students' learning motivation and increase students' learning participation. Mulyono and Suryoputro (2020) also found that WhatsApp is not only easy but also accessible for teachers and students to communicate and interact. The present study, therefore, would like to investigate:

1. Why is WhatsApp popular among students?
2. How will using WhatsApp for online learning be beneficial?
3. What are the challenges of using WhatsApp for online learning?

As we live at a time where mobile phones are easily accessible, it is only sensible to use the technology to assist students in their learning. Majority of students these days have their own mobile phones and keep them close to them. This study would therefore like to investigate Malaysian students' use of the mobile phone application "WhatsApp" for their online learning. To do so, the following objectives have been formulated for the study:

1. to identify the reasons for WhatsApp popularity among students.
2. to determine the benefits of using WhatsApp for online learning.
3. to examine the challenges of using WhatsApp for online learning.

This study is important to find if WhatsApp is useful in conducting online learning for students. As such, the findings would benefit students, instructors, policy makers and education officers for effective online learning. The data would be significant in contributing to whether WhatsApp can be used for online learning among students, how lessons can be developed by means of using the app, and how students can be helped to develop to their full potential through such learning.

Previous Studies

The wide use of social media in platforms like WhatsApp indicates that there is growing potential for its use as a learning tool for online teaching and learning. Social Media users have been reported to have increased to 97.9 percent from a total of 132.7 million users

(Mulyono and Suryoputro, 2020) which indicates its vast popularity. In fact, Sobaih, Hasanein and Abu Elnasr (2020) found that social media promoted effective sustaining of formal education and forming of online community to support learning.

Social media is said to offer many possibilities including functionality, flexibility and convenience (Elkaseh et al., 2016). Tragant et al (2021) studied how the WhatsApp application was used to extend language learning of 23 EFL (English as Foreign Language) students. The findings showed that WhatsApp allowed students to practice the target language and engage in real communication. Klein et al (2018) conducted a survey of 140 undergraduate students on WhatsApp as an educational affordance and found that WhatsApp possesses five educational advantage such as its ability to facilitate interaction, knowledge sharing, collaboration, ubiquity, and sense of students' presence in learning.

According to About WhatsApp (n.d.), WhatsApp being a free mobile instant messaging application founded by Jan Koum and Brian Acton in 2009, has more than 1 billion users worldwide in over 180 countries. It was first developed for the purpose of communication to get in touch with friends, families, and colleagues anytime and anywhere without barriers. The main features of WhatsApp include sending and receiving text, photos, videos, documents, and location, as well as voice and voice calls. With these features, WhatsApp indeed appears to be a promising teaching and learning tool. As such, the potential for the use of WhatsApp to facilitate learning is tremendous.

Rahmadi (2020) conducted an exploratory study to investigate university students' usage, perception, attitude, and readiness towards the WhatsApp group as a teaching and learning platform. The results showed that students actively use WhatsApp in their daily life but passively use it for learning. They recognize the potential of WhatsApp for ubiquitous learning but are not ready to learn actively, collaboratively, and independently through the WhatsApp application.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Dhawan (2020) found that social media (such as WhatsApp) was used as a bridge to communicate between teachers and students as well as students among students. With regards to this, Rapanta et al (2020) stated that the support from social media during the pandemic provided for teachers and students to have social activity as well as peer collaboration and this inevitably led to the success of online learning. Thus, during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media such as WhatsApp played an important role in facilitating learning by connecting teachers and students and ensuring that learning can still go on.

Theoretical Framework

The framework adopted for this study is the extended Technological Acceptance Model (TAM) which was first introduced by Davis (1989) to explain and predict the individual user's acceptance of a particular technology usage. This model has been widely used to study the acceptance behavior of users towards technology and seeks to answer why an individual's attitude and beliefs influences the acceptance or rejection of technology usage (Soo and Ismail, 2021). Jin (2014) stated that TAM was used to predict the relationships between variable of perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness and other external variables. In the context of social media acceptance, students who are users of

the technology are believed to have performed social media related activities when the social media application is less complicated or simple and easy to use and when the social media application is perceived as beneficial or useful to them (Dumpit and Fernandez, 2017). To study the use of WhatsApp for online learning among students, the Technological Acceptance Model was used to find out the acceptance of use of WhatsApp among students for online learning.

Methodology

This quantitative study applied a survey method with the intention of investigating the use of WhatsApp for online learning among students. The method is explained in relations to the instrument used, the respondents and the procedure to carry out the study and to analyze the data.

Instrument

The instrument used was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was constructed via Google form. There were 4 sections consisting of Section A: Demographic Profile, Section B: Popularity of WhatsApp, Section C: Benefits of WhatsApp for Online Learning, and Section D: Challenges of using WhatsApp for Online Learning. The total number of items was 17. The questionnaire was adapted from Mulyono et al (2021) based on their study on the application of WhatsApp to support online learning during COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia.

Respondents

The respondents were selected using the convenient sampling method as they were all enrolled in a particular local university. The total number of respondents were 100 and they were made up of male and female students from the diploma and degree levels, taking English as a compulsory subject at the university.

Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed via WhatsApp group to the various classes. A link was provided so that the respondents could retrieve the Google Form survey. The Google Form was distributed to 150 students but only 100 forms were returned for analysis. Data collected was analyzed using the Excel spreadsheet for frequencies and percentages and described descriptively to provide for a sound conclusion and recommendations for the study.

Results and Discussion

The results and discussion were based on providing answers to the research questions. First, the results were discussed based on the demographic profile. This was followed by the popularity of WhatsApp, the benefits of WhatsApp for online learning and finally, the challenges of using WhatsApp for online learning.

Demographic Profile

The demographic profile is divided into gender, age, education level, knowledge of how to use WhatsApp and Usage of WhatsApp.

Table 1

Demographic Profile

		Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	24
	Female	76
Age	Below 21 years old	60
	21 years old and above	40
Education level	Diploma	58
	Degree	42
Knowledge of how to use WhatsApp (1 Poor Knowledge to 5 Good Knowledge)	1	0
	2	0
	3	0
	4	32
	5	68
Usage of WhatsApp (1 Seldom to 5 Often)	1	0
	2	0
	3	4
	4	28
	5	34

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. Seventy six percent of the respondents were female while twenty four percent were male respondents. Sixty percent of the respondents aged below 21 years old while forty percent of the respondents aged 21 years old and above. Majority of the respondents were at the diploma level (58 %) while the rest were from the degree level (42 %). Between the range of 1 (poor knowledge) and 5 (good knowledge), the respondents rated their knowledge of how to use WhatsApp as 4 (32 %) and 5 (68%). Between the range of 1 (seldom) and 5 (often), the respondents rated their usage of WhatsApp as 3 (4%), 4 (28%) and 5 (34%). The results thus indicate that majority of the respondents were female, aged below 21 years old and at the diploma level. Most of the respondents rated their knowledge of use of WhatsApp at the scale towards 'good knowledge' (4 and 5). They also rated their usage of WhatsApp towards 'Often' (3, 4 and 5).

Popularity of WhatsApp

As there are many mobile applications available, it was interesting to find out why the students preferred using WhatsApp.

Table 2

Popularity of WhatsApp among students

	Scale*				
	1	2	3	4	5
My teacher asked me to use WhatsApp during online learning.	0	2	18	40	40
My friends asked me to use WhatsApp to support online learning.	0	0	12	46	42
People in my surroundings use WhatsApp to support their online learning.	0	2	4	38	56
I find that WhatsApp is useful to support online learning.	0	2	10	42	46
WhatsApp is an enjoyable learning media.	0	2	22	36	40

*Scale: 1 Strongly Disagree to 5 Strongly Agree (in percentages)

Table 2 shows the popularity of WhatsApp among the students. From the table, it was found that 40 percent of the respondents strongly agreed, and another 40 percent agreed that they were asked by their teacher to use WhatsApp during online teaching. It was also found that 42 percent of the respondents strongly agreed, and 46 percent of the respondents agreed that they used WhatsApp to support online learning because they were asked by their friends to do so. Further, the findings also indicate that 56 percent of the respondents strongly agreed, and 38 percent of the respondents agreed that people in their surroundings used WhatsApp to support their online learning. In addition, the popularity of the use of WhatsApp can also be attributed to the respondents finding that WhatsApp is useful to support online learning (46 % strongly agreed and 42% agreed). Majority of the respondents also found WhatsApp an enjoyable learning media (40% strongly agreed and 36% agreed). Thus, WhatsApp is popular because it is encouraged to be used by teachers and friends as well as people in the students' surroundings. Also, the application itself supports online learning and is found to be an enjoyable learning media.

Benefits of WhatsApp for Online Learning

The survey conducted also considered the benefits of WhatsApp for Online Learning among the students as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Benefits of using WhatsApp for Online Learning among students

	Scale*				
	1	2	3	4	5
Using WhatsApp helps me to obtain information related to online learning tasks and activities	0	2	6	44	48
Using WhatsApp helps me to communicate with other students during online learning.	0	0	2	30	68
I find it easy to use WhatsApp to support online learning.	0	2	2	42	54
I obtain necessary information related to online learning using WhatsApp.	0	0	6	36	58

*Scale: 1 Strongly Disagree to 5 Strongly Agree (in percentages)

In table 3, 48 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that using WhatsApp helped them to obtain information related to online learning tasks and activities. This is followed by 44 percent of the respondents who agreed. Furthermore, 68 percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 30 percent of respondents agreed that using WhatsApp helped them to communicate with other students during online learning. Also, it was found that 54 percent of respondents strongly agreed while 42 percent of respondents agreed that they found it easy to use WhatsApp to support online learning. In addition, 58 percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 36 percent of respondents agreed that they were able to obtain necessary information related to online learning using WhatsApp. Therefore, the use of WhatsApp can be seen to be beneficial to the students.

Challenges of using WhatsApp for Online Learning

The study found that while WhatsApp was popular and had benefits, it was not without challenges as shown in table 4.

Table 4

Challenges faced by students in using WhatsApp for Online Learning

	Scale*				
	1	2	3	4	5
When there are too many messages on WhatsApp, I get lost in my learning.	2	6	26	30	34
It is difficult to have live video conferencing on WhatsApp for recording.	0	0	22	30	48
I face problems downloading some videos and online learning materials from WhatsApp when the files are too big.	6	8	16	32	38

*Scale: 1 Strongly Disagree to 5 Strongly Agree (in percentages)

Table 4 shows that 34 percent of the respondents strongly agree, and 30 percent agree that they faced the challenge of too many messages on WhatsApp which caused them to get lost in their learning. Another 48 percent strongly agreed, and 30 percent agreed that they found difficulty to have live video conferencing on WhatsApp for recording.

Furthermore, 38 percent strongly agreed, and 32 percent agreed that they had problems downloading videos and online learning materials from WhatsApp when the files were too big. Hence, this indicates that the use of WhatsApp for online learning also had challenges.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary, literature has supported the use of WhatsApp and other social media applications for teaching and learning via online (Tragant et al., 2021; Klein et al., 2018; Rahmadi, 2020). The present study has sought to find the reasons for the popularity of WhatsApp among students, the benefits of using WhatsApp for online learning and the challenges that entails.

In relations to the reasons for the popularity of WhatsApp, it was found that WhatsApp is popular among students because their teachers and friends encouraged them to use the application. Also, generally those in their surroundings use WhatsApp to communicate. Furthermore, the application itself was easy to use and supports online learning besides being an enjoyable learning media.

The findings of the study also indicated that there were benefits in using WhatsApp for online learning. The benefits include (1) WhatsApp helps in obtaining information related to online learning tasks and activities; (2) WhatsApp helps communication with other students during online learning; (3) WhatsApp supports online learning; and (4) WhatsApp helps in obtaining necessary information related to online learning.

The study also showed that there were challenges in using WhatsApp for online learning. When there were too many messages on WhatsApp, the students are lost in their learning. Overwhelming information from group members in the WhatsApp group can dampen the learning process. Another challenge that students face is the difficulty in having live video conferencing on WhatsApp for recording. As such, recording of the lessons are limited. It was also found that students face problems downloading some videos and online learning materials from WhatsApp when the files are too big.

Based on the findings and conclusions, it is recommended that WhatsApp be used as a learning tool for short discussions and not long lectures. Also, due to its limited video recording and live video conferencing features, it is suggested that video recording be done using other available applications such as Google Meet, Webex or Zoom. For future studies, perhaps comparison of WhatsApp with other applications can be made with students from different levels of education for a more comprehensive understanding of the use of WhatsApp application in online learning.

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