

Students' Perspective of the Use of WhatsApp Group as an Online Discussion Mode

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Abstract

It is believed that communication through technology applications is very important in the current learning situation. Among the utilized applications, WhatsApp presents as the most used application in the Indonesian teaching and learning circumstance. The purpose of this study was to find out the students' perspective on the use of WA in-class discussion outside the classroom for postgraduate students in the Reading Learning course. The method used a descriptive qualitative case study. Data was taken from interviews and group discussion forums. Data analysis uses data reduction, data presentation, and concluding stages. The results showed that the WA group became a fairly effective medium at the level of student understanding for each of the teaching materials discussed. However, communication within the WA group requires standard rules agreed upon by each student so that the goal of forming a WA group as a learning medium outside the classroom can be achieved.

Abstrak

Komunikasi melalui aplikasi teknologi sangat penting dalam situasi pembelajaran saat ini. Di antara aplikasi yang digunakan, WhatsApp hadir sebagai aplikasi yang paling banyak digunakan dalam situasi belajar mengajar di Indonesia. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui perspective mahasiswa terhadap penggunaan WA dalam proses diskusi di luar kelas pada mahasiswa pascasarjana pada mata kuliah Pembelajaran Membaca. Metode yang digunakan studi kasus deskriptif kualitatif. Data diambil dari wawancara dan forum diskusi kelompok Analisis data menggunakan tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa group WA menjadi media yang cukup efektif pada tingkat pemahaman mahasiswa untuk setiap materi ajar yang didiskusikan. Namun, komunikasi dalam group WA memerlukan standard aturan yang disepakati oleh setiap mahasiswa agar tujuan pembentukan WA grup sebagai media belajar di luar kelas dapat tercapai.

INTRODUCTION

The communication process in online learning between fellow students or students and lecturers is not an easy thing. To support online learning activities through the Learning Management System in the Master's Program, lecturers have used various technological applications in communicating. One of them is WhatsApp (WA) as a very effective social media used for group discussions in learning (Baishya & Maheshwari, 2020). Moreover, online learning activities using

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Zoom Cloud Meeting have limited time. So, learning discussion activities continue using class group WA. Thus, everyone has a different perception of written information in WA, and it is a tool of communication nowadays in the learning process (Sawant & Chari, 2021).

The WA group has been used as one of the communication media in teaching reading classes in the even semester of 2020-2021. Material discussion activities or about practice questions that students must do always continue using WA when the discussion activities on Zoom are finished. However, the results of communication in WA for two months (March and April 2021) showed problems with understanding the information conveyed by lecturers or colleagues. Thus, material discussion activities in WA lasted so long and repeated material explanations with the same topic or information. From the condition of the findings of this problem, researchers are interested in knowing the extent and how WA can help the process of material discussion for students.

Many studies have provided results on the effectiveness of using WA in helping the online learning process. Students and lecturers can be in a position to reach out to each other and have learning interactions through technology that allows instant communication through various messaging service applications. For instance, the use of messaging service applications gives students and faculty the advantage of extending learning beyond classroom contact with minimal time constraints (Matli, 2019). The application of WhatsApp media can improve student learning outcomes, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic (Kartini, 2021; Djamdjuri & Kamilah, 2020). On the other hand, this app allows easy access for students to all the resources shared by teachers, and they can share assignments without much hassle with their subject teachers (Sawant & Chari, 2021). In addition, the use of the WhatsApp application is also quite familiar among students. It does not require a large internet quota to use it so that it can help carry out online learning activities (Daryani, 2021). It can help to learn English material or English vocabulary (Alshammari et al., 2017; Ibrahim, 2018; Surani & Chaerudin, 2020; Safitri, 2021). WhatsApp can also be considered as a possible alternative for flexible learning in the higher education system (Jackson, 2019; Santos, 2021). In recent years, mobile messaging applications have received increasing attention from educators around the world, especially about their ability to support communication, collaboration, and social interaction. A study shows that since January 2014, students have completed practicum courses, internships and graduated from the study program. Their communication and discussion in WhatsApp groups have continued throughout it, with more than 10,000 entries to date (Tamim et al., 2016). This means that WA can be a medium in completing group assignments for students (Bucheli & Terán, 2020).

From this explanation, it can be concluded that WA makes it easy for lecturers and students to carry out learning activities outside the scope of class flexibly. However, the finding of problems in the teaching reading class of postgraduate students provides a different assessment. This research focuses on knowing the WA group's role for postgraduate students in discussing learning materials. The role of WA is taken from students' perceptions as a form of written communication. The extent to which postgraduate students positively view the WA application. Thus, this research is also a form of input for postgraduate students' written communication model on WA. This is a concept that wants to be highlighted in this study.

So, the purpose of this study was to find out the positive impact of WA in the process of class discussion outside the classroom on postgraduate students in the Reading Learning course. The results of this study are also expected to be input for lecturers in developing material discussion communication patterns through technology applications to affect the concept of online learning without using video conferencing applications.

METHODS

Participants are Postgraduate students at Indraprasta University Jakarta in the even semester of 2020-2021 who receive Reading Learning courses. The method used is a descriptive qualitative case study. The study describes the results of observations with the help of searching data

from existing sources through interviews and group discussion forums (Ary et al., 2010). The number of participants is 80 students. Participants consisted of elementary school to university teachers, aged between 25-50 years, and already had a scientific basis on teaching English.

The data collection process uses interviews and group discussion forums through zoom cloud meetings one by one. The components for interview questions are teacher explanation about the material, teachers' intervention on group discussion, communication framework, delivering material, teachers' controlling in online discussion. The Group discussion process is done one semester. The results of the group discussion forums conducted during class hours became the main material as a form of data to determine the impact of WA as an online learning mode. The interaction that occurs between fellow students becomes a support for the results of the interview. Data analysis uses data reduction, data presentation, and concluding stages. Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming data in written transcripts. Generally, a view is an organized and compressed collection of information that allows drawing conclusions and actions. In this step, the researcher concludes the research results based on the research problem

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of interviews conducted face-to-face, and group discussion forums about the role of WA in discussing teaching materials outside the classroom from students concluded that lecturers must be able to innovate in developing communication patterns in online teaching through technology applications. The data is presented in the following percentage table 1.

Table 1. The Result of recapitulation interview and forum group discussion on the role of WA in discussing the material

	Statement	%	Another Finding
1	The teacher's presence in explaining the material through WhatsApp groups is more efficient.	88%	Teachers still maximize teaching even though it is done through written messages or voice notes.
2	The explanation of teaching materials in WhatsApp groups is clearer than face-to-face	50%	Students who are left behind in reading messages often feel that they have lost information because of the large number of incoming messages so that it often causes confusion and repeated explanations
3	It is easier for you to understand the teacher's explanation in the WhatsApp groups.	50%	Students who have a weak grasp of information find it difficult to understand the explanations of teachers and colleagues
4	You feel that the relationship and interaction between friends or with the teacher is not limited	94%	Teachers and students, or fellow students can be more familiar with communicating
5	Communication through WhatsApp groups has a high level of sustainability	88%	The communication process can be done at any time
6	WhatsApp groups provide an opportunity for students who are not confident in their opinion	94%	Students who tend to distrust feel free to speak because they are not facing to face
7	WhatsApp groups make it easy to share material teaching documents	100%	Documents of teaching materials or information on learning resources are very easy to obtain for every student.
8	The teacher does not intervene high if there is a communication violation during the discussion on WhatsApp groups	50%	For some students, the teacher still intervenes in the discussion so that less confident students feel afraid and rarely have an opinion, or they are very careful in expressing their opinions.
9	You find it easy to express what you think during the material discussion process	94%	Students easily describe opinions in discussions
10	If you think you don't feel intimidated even though it's different from your peers	88%	Pendapat tertulis memberikan keyakinan berbeda pada setiap orang

11	There is a positive influence on students' interpersonal behaviour inside and outside the media	85%	Students who have a low level of self-confidence can improve better communication relationships
12	Communication that occurs is more comfortable because it is not formal.	96%	For some students, speaking non-formally is more comfortable in their opinion.
13	Communication in the WhatsApp groups provides an opportunity for teachers and students to get to know each other's personalities outside the classroom so that it creates intimacy in discussions	94%	Teachers and students do not have the rigidity of the situation in the discussion so that they can understand each other's personalities, moreover, the intensity of communication is also quite high
14	WhatsApp groups remain the teacher's way of controlling the behaviour of their students in discussions, even remotely	75%	Behavioural control refers to the level of the content of the discussion material
15	WhatsApp groups have a fairly good social function role in building an understanding of teaching materials	81%	Teachers must understand students' social communication patterns according to their background so that the process of exposure to teaching materials has a positive impact on improving student learning outcomes.

The findings show that WA has become a medium of communication for teachers or students in understanding the teaching materials that have been studied. Moreover, the current Corona-19 pandemic situation has forced human life to communicate through technological devices, namely mobile phones. All jobs in various fields of life are greatly helped by using technological devices such as mobile phones, video conferencing, etc. Students have also shared very varied perspectives. Teachers and students have built intimacy during the discussion of teaching materials even though the familiarity looks stiff. However, the teacher always tries to melt the situation so that the discussion activities in the WA group become more fun. So, teachers must understand the intention of each student's behaviour in using mobile phones for learning activities and the factors that influence it (Kumar et al., 2020).

Chats in WA groups also often lead to the use of certain topics (Seufert et al., 2016). Jain et al. (2016) show that WhatsApp Groups contribute significantly in helping students communicate actively and encourage meaningful learning among users. WhatsApp is an instant messaging application that allows sending files, messages, pictures, videos, photos and online chats like Blackberry messenger. Even though it is an instant messaging application, WhatsApp is unique in that it is a contact recognition system, verification, and sending messages through a mobile number that has been registered beforehand. Applications that continue to be developed at this time are expected to function as social networking applications such as WhatsApp not only for chatting (text closeout) and broadcast chain messages but also for reading interest (literacy) (Mursidi et al., 2018).

The finding gives some recommendations as follow:

1. Teachers can distribute powerpoints equipped with voice notes so that the teaching materials discussed are clearer
2. The teacher must agree on time to discuss teaching materials outside of lecture hours.
3. The teacher should provide rules in opinion so that the explanation of the material discussed is coherent and not repeated
4. Lecturers can make initial observations related to the personality level of students so that during the learning process, they can provide different treatments.
5. Teachers and students can agree on non-formal language contexts so that they stay within the formal corridor
6. Teachers and students have an agreement for discussion content posted in the group either in writing or in document form
7. The teacher must have done a personality and background mapping ready for effective communication

CONCLUSION

From the findings, it was concluded that the students and teachers agreed on the use of the WA group as a medium for communicating and learning. However, the WA group becomes more effective when the chat in WA during the discussion of the material must have rules so that the content of the chat in the WA group still leads to a social function in the process of providing education. The results of data analysis in this study, especially in the discussion of reading learning courses, have illustrated that social media or other technology applications will be very effective when the teacher also acts as a discussion controller. So, various information that is included in the group discussion does not go out of the way of the discussion of teaching materials. Discussions in the WA group have had a positive influence or impact on everyone, both related to communication behaviour in group discussions or for understanding teaching materials. In addition, this research also has implications for the development of the concept of group discussion both in the classroom and outside the classroom or during online learning.

However, this research is still limited to exploring the effectiveness of using WA groups in discussions of teaching materials for Reading Learning courses. It still has shortcomings because the results of understanding the teaching materials studied have not been linked to learning outcomes, so the concept of change in achievement has not been seen. The perspective raised is only on the concept of the effectiveness of the WA group in discussing teaching materials. Therefore, the next researcher can still be developed related to communication behaviour, learning outcomes, or student personality level. Readers can also use the results of this research to develop and manage WA groups related to the concept of online learning.

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