



Research Article

WhatsApp as a Knowledge-Sharing Platform: Insights from Postgraduate Students at the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

G. H. Inoka Dilhani

Library, Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

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Correspondence

libpgiar@kln.ac.lk

ORCID

G. H. Inoka Dilhani

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4221-3798>

Abstract

This study investigates the use of WhatsApp for knowledge sharing among postgraduate students at the Library of the Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology (PGIAR), University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. The focus is on WhatsApp groups as mobile learning platforms that facilitate knowledge exchange, particularly in relation to students' academic activities. The research specifically targets postgraduate students from the 2022/23 academic year, using a case study approach. Data were collected through a multiple-questionnaire method distributed via WhatsApp groups for the PG Diploma and Master's programs. Of the 62 students in these groups, 49 participated, yielding a 79% response rate. The findings suggest that WhatsApp serves as an effective tool for sharing academic resources such as PDFs, videos, audios, and text, with students frequently sharing research insights and study materials. Key motivators for its use included the platform's ease of use, quick feedback mechanisms, extensive reach, and availability. However, challenges were noted, such as non-compliance with group guidelines, which hindered optimal knowledge sharing. Additionally, issues like device dependence, connectivity problems, and reduced community engagement were observed, affecting overall interaction quality. Despite these challenges, WhatsApp was recognized as a valuable tool for mobile learning and knowledge sharing. The study highlights the potential of mobile technologies to enhance blended learning environments, demonstrating that WhatsApp can improve student engagement, collaboration, and access to educational resources. Students expressed positive attitudes toward WhatsApp, appreciating its ability to promote teamwork and support academic communication. While distractions, privacy concerns, and the informal nature of the platform may influence learning, the research underscores WhatsApp's role as a flexible and efficient tool for postgraduate students' academic development.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the use of WhatsApp for knowledge sharing among postgraduate students at the Library of the Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology (PGIAR), University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. The focus is on WhatsApp groups as mobile learning platforms that facilitate knowledge exchange, particularly in relation to students' academic activities. The research specifically targets postgraduate students from the 2022/23 academic year, using a case study approach. Data were collected through a multiple-questionnaire method distributed via WhatsApp groups for the PG Diploma and Master's programs. Of the 62 students in these groups, 49 participated, yielding a 79% response rate.

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II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are:

1. Usage Preferences and Frequency of WhatsApp for Academic Purposes
2. Motivations for Participating in Work-Related WhatsApp Groups
3. Learners’ Perceptions of Mobile Learning Activities on WhatsApp
4. Preferred Features and Formats for Knowledge Sharing in WhatsApp Groups
5. Challenges and Limitations of Knowledge Sharing in Work-Related WhatsApp Groups

III. METHODOLOGY

A Google Form questionnaire was distributed among students enrolled in PG Diploma and Master’s programs via WhatsApp groups. The survey utilized a multiple-choice questionnaire format consisting of 10 questions. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections: Attitude Toward WhatsApp, Usefulness of WhatsApp (i.e., assessing how beneficial students perceive WhatsApp for academic communication and collaboration), and Drawbacks to Knowledge Sharing on WhatsApp (identifying any challenges or limitations experienced by users when sharing knowledge through this medium). It is important to note that this study has certain limitations; specifically, it is confined to users who are registered for PG courses in the library during the academic year 2023/24.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Usage of WhatsApp

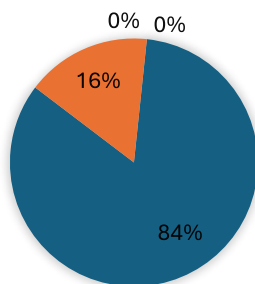


Fig.1 Preference on Using WhatsApp

Figure 1, illustrates that a significant majority of students, specifically 84%, favor using WhatsApp for resource

sharing, including tutorials and research papers. In contrast, only 16% of students express a dislike for its use in this context.

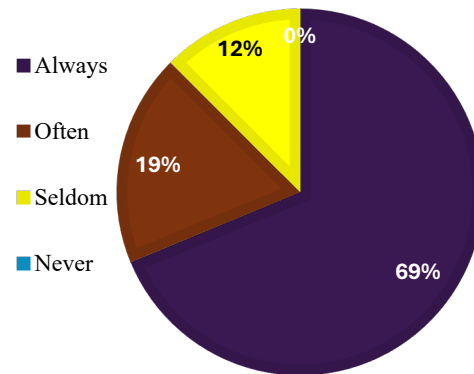


Fig.2 Frequency of WhatsApp Usage/ Rate of WhatsApp Usage

As illustrated in Figure 2, among a total of 49 respondents, 69% of students reported using WhatsApp frequently. Furthermore, 19% indicated that they often use the application, while the remaining 12% stated they seldom utilize it. This data highlights that WhatsApp has become an essential tool that students frequently access.

B. Reasons / Motivations for Participating Academic Related Activities for Using WhatsApp Groups

The results revealed that out of 49 students, 12% use WhatsApp for group discussions and tasks related to assignments and tutorials. Additionally, 10% utilize the app to send information pertaining to their courses, such as syllabi and curricula.

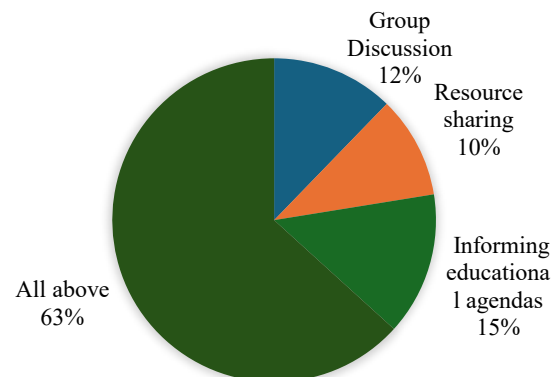


Fig.3 Reasons / Academic Related Activities for Using WhatsApp Groups

Furthermore, 15% of students use it to share information about educational agendas like special seminars, classes, and events. Notably, 63% of students reported using WhatsApp for all of the above purposes.

C. Learners’ Perceptions of Mobile Learning Activities on WhatsApp

In Table I, a significant 44% of students expressed their preference for the brand-new document sharing feature.

TABLE I FAVORITE FEATURES TO SHARED INFORMATION

Features	Percentage (%)
Audio recording/sharing capabilities	26%
Video sharing features	18%
Document sharing abilities	44%
Picture/ emotion sharing options	10%
Expanded typing area	05%
Location sharing	02%

Additionally, 26% of students found the audio recording and sharing feature beneficial. Video sharing was favored by 18%

of students, while only 10% preferred picture or emoticon sharing. Unlike other chat applications, this app allows users to write longer messages or passages. Furthermore, WhatsApp offers location sharing functionality, enabling students to know and share their current whereabouts; however, only 2% indicated this as a preferred feature.

In this section, students were asked to select multiple options regarding the types of multimedia files they share via WhatsApp. As shown in Table II, respondents shared files in various formats. The highest response was for PDF files, with 47 (27%) of respondents selecting this option. This was closely followed by audio and video files, which received 27 (16%) and 33 (19%) responses, respectively. Text and Word document formats were equally preferred. Interestingly, no respondents chose to share files in ZIP format. The results indicate that all multimedia formats are utilized for resource sharing. It is also worth noting that some files shared were not created by the respondents themselves but were received from other contacts and subsequently re-shared or forwarded.

TABLE II PREFERRED FORMAT TO SHARE INFORMATION VIA WHATSAPP GROUPS

Format/ type	Frequency	Percentage %
Text	18	10%
Pictures/photos	20	11%
Audios	27	16%
Videos	33	19%
Word doc	21	12%
Pdf	47	27%
Spreadsheets	08	05%
Zip	00	00%

D. Challenges and Limitations of Knowledge Sharing in Work-Related WhatsApp Groups

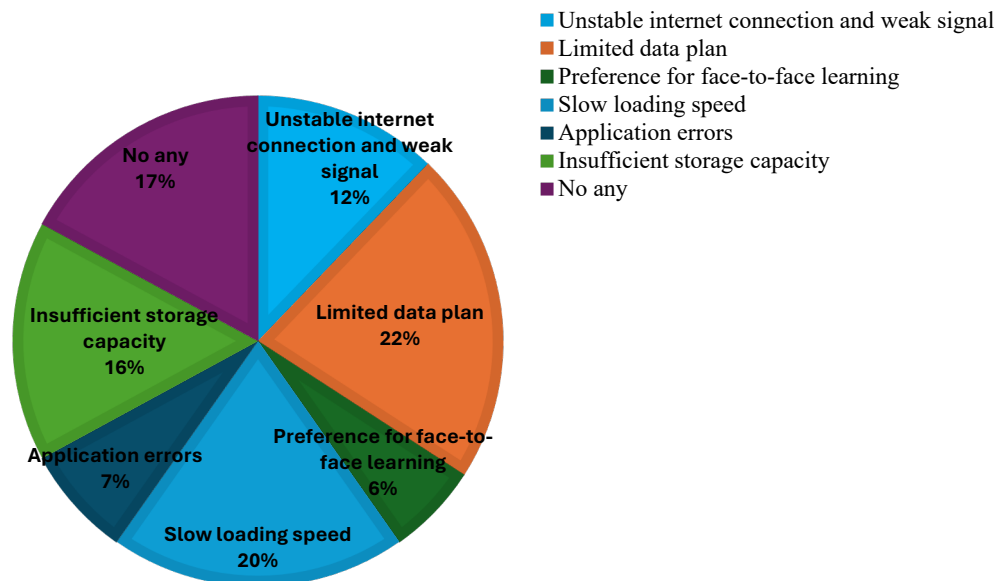


Fig.4 Challenges and Limitations of Knowledge Sharing

In this section, students were asked to make multiple selections regarding challenges they face during online learning. A significant number of students (12%) reported issues with internet connection and signal. Since students are responsible for providing their own internet connection, this posed a considerable challenge. Additionally, 22% of students mentioned that limited internet quotas or plans were a major problem, with many feelings reluctant to use their own data, which hindered their learning. About 6% of students preferred face-to-face learning over online learning. Slow loading times and delayed responses were frustrating for 20% of students, while 7% experienced application errors. Memory storage issues affected 16% of respondents. Interestingly, 17% of students reported having no problems at all. Despite these challenges, most students expressed a preference for learning via WhatsApp, even though they encountered these difficulties.

V. CONCLUSION

In today's tech-driven world, WhatsApp groups have become valuable platforms for knowledge sharing, enhancing teaching and learning. Studies show that WhatsApp improves students' skills and contributes to educational quality, especially compared to traditional classrooms. Students have positive attitudes toward the platform due to its promotion of teamwork and collaboration. WhatsApp's potential extends beyond chatting and information sharing, offering opportunities for educational use, as students are familiar with smartphones and the app. Students view WhatsApp as a tool for mobile learning, evaluating its effectiveness, convenience, and impact on learning. They appreciate its facilitation of communication, resource access, collaboration, and interaction with peers and instructors. Perceptions also consider ease of use, multimedia sharing, and the integration of informal and formal learning. Distractions, privacy concerns, and the platform's overall influence on learning can shape their views. The level of WhatsApp usage includes the time spent on the app and how frequently students use it for academic purposes. Students use it for discussions on assignments and research, sharing course updates, communicating with instructors, and collaborating on course projects.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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The authors confirm that no AI-assisted technologies were used in the preparation or writing of the manuscript, and no images were altered using AI.

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