PERCEPTIONS OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS OF IGNATIUS AJURU UNIVERISITY OF EDUCATION ON THE USE OF USE OF WHATSAPP PLATFORM FOR ONLINE LECTURE IN THE COVID-19 ERA IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the perceptions of postgraduate (PG) students on the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. The study adopted descriptive research design. The population of the study comprised of 122 PG students from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Portharcourt, Nigeria. Three (3) research questions guided the study. The objectives of the study are: to assess the effectiveness of the use of Whatsapp platform as a collaborative tool for online lectures, to identify the perceptions of PG students towards the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures during the Covid-19 lockdown and to determine the challenges faced by PG students in the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures during Covid-19 lockdown phase. Data were collected using online questionnaire and total enumeration sampling technique was used. The validity of the instrument was determined by checking the face and content validity and the instrument proved valid because the items in the instrument were appropriate in terms of subject contents. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to determine the reliability coefficient of the instrument and an index of 0.87 was obtained. This shows that the internal consistency of the instrument was high and good. Data was analyzed with descriptive statistics such as frequency count and simple percentage. The findings revealed that majority of the respondents indicated that the use of Whatsapp platform is an effective collaborative tool for online lectures. On the perceptions of PG students, it was observed that shy students can freely communicate and make seminar presentation through WhatsApp, also Whatsapp learning appears to be the immediate positive response, in the wake of the Covid-19 school closure period and that the Whatsapp platform is cost-effective, convenient and easy to use. This shows that they had positive perceptions about the use of WhatsApp. Slow Internet connectivity, lack of constant power supply to charge phones, high cost of data for subscription and misuse of the platform were some of the major challenges faced by PG students in the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures. Based on the findings, the researchers recommend that Whatsapp platform should be adopted for teaching and learning in our higher institutions and that

Internet service provider should improve on their Internet service provision and provide cheap data subscription so that students can enjoy more access to the internet while at home.

Keywords: Postgraduate Students, Whatsapp Platform, Online Teaching, Covid-19 Pandemic

Introduction

Presently, the world is experiencing Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic which has affected most parts of the world with high rates of death recorded in major countries of the world including the continent of Africa. The Covid-19 pandemic has not only affected human lives but has also affected the educational system worldwide. The pandemic has caused many world governments to issue directives for the closure of public spaces including academic institutions, as part of measures to protect the lives of citizens and to stem the spread of the highly contagious disease (Hackett, 2020). The educational institutions have never witnessed such academic disruption on such a large scale before (Azoulay, 2020) and this has thrown the global academic calendar into a state of disarray. In order to ensure that teaching and learning processes go ahead in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the educational institutions have resorted to online mode of learning, which is an imperfect yet quick solution to the crises (Nagar, 2020). Most academic heads are now promoting online education as a temporary solution to this crisis (UNESCO, 2020).

Many universities all over the world including universities in Nigeria are gradually moving their programmes online, including the use of social media technology applications as the face to face learning method is no longer appropriate during this period of Covid-19 lockdown. Social media technology is becoming more and more used in management and instruction in educational institutions all over the world today, because it offers students with increased choices and opportunities in the context of online as well as offline instruction (Barbora, 2014) especially in this prevailing situation. The social media technologies are very popular among university students which might suggest that they would be suitable and valuable tools which could be used for educational purposes. According to Boahene and Sampong (2019) social networking sites usage is more common in tertiary institutions' settings as lecturers use this technology to further improve their delivery to promote knowledge among students. Social media usage inspires students to participate and make very thorough and detailed learning through communication, critical thinking, and collaboration (Liburd and Christensen, 2013). Also, social media is an effective device in carrying out research and can be used to create groups strictly meant for educational purposes and improve e-resources functions by linking students with collective ideas for the purposes of working together (Brien, 2012). Social media has great potential in higher education in developing countries because of their availability and affordability especially in this covid-19 era.

One of the social media platforms that can provide new drive and with great potentials in higher education to support teaching and learning in this covid-19 era is the WhatsApp Messenger. Whatsapp application has become popular as a learning tool in many institutions (Izyani and Mohamed, 2016) because it is cost-effective and easy to use, giving it competitive advantage over the other social network platforms (Ngalomba, 2020). WhatsApp like other social media platforms constitutes several features which contribute to the learning process, such as encouraging

collaborative learning, active participation in class, learning any time, any place, enhancing relationships, improving learning, motivation and offering personalized course material. (Al-Rahmi and Othman, 2013). It allows users to exchange information using a variety of media including text, image, video, and audio messages (Church & de Oliveira, 2013; Sahu, 2014). According to Bansal and Joshi (2014) the use of WhatsApp can increase students' social interaction with each other and with their lecturers, and this facilitates collaborative learning and can be useful in language assessment and presentation of seminars (Tarighat and Khodabakhsh, 2016). Students can use WhatsApp to record their communication, make seminar presentations by sharing their recordings with their teachers and other students. Barhoumi (2015) observed that WhatsApp facilitate knowledge sharing among peers, improve learners' manipulative skills, facilitate the learning process, foster evaluation process and supports teacher-students relationship. With Whatsapp, the classroom becomes a boundless virtual space and helps to provide the students with improved feedback and support them in achieving success in their academic and integral education (Ariette, 2019).

Thus, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, lecturers have been forced to learn digital methods of teaching and delivering content to students. Covid-19 has become a catalyst to appreciating digital devices, online resources, social media technology and e-learning activities. With the increase in use of Whatsapp platform by few tertiary institutions in Nigeria during the Covid-19 lockdown, it is necessary to assess their effectiveness with regards to teaching and learning from the students. However, Malecela (2016) observed that the use of WhatsApp as a learning tool had the following challenges such as time consuming, high risk of miscommunication, misuse of the platform and it does not involve face-to-face communication. Lack of constant electricity supply and slow connectivity is also a serious challenge in this part of the world. It is on this note therefore, that this current study seeks to explore the perception of PG students on the use of Whatsapp platform for online learning the Covid-19 era in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

COVID-19 pandemic has made us realize the importance of Whatsapp platform for online lectures in our various tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The use of WhatsApp in teaching can greatly improve the quality of learning and able to enhance the learners' critical thinking skills, information handling skills and problem solving capacity. In spite of the fact that WhatsApp provides different advantages and a convenient tool for teaching and learning activities, it has been observed that most of the students from developing countries, including those in Nigeria, were used to the traditional face-to-face mode of teaching and learning (Ananga & Biney, 2017). Hence as first-timers, they were likely going to encounter some challenges in the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures during this Covid-19 lockdown pandemic. These challenges may include unreliable internet and power supply, high risk of miscommunication and misuse of the platform. These challenges could hinder the effective use of the Whatsapp platform for online learning. It is on this note therefore, that this current study seeks to explore the perceptions of PG students on the use of Whatsapp platform for online learning during the Covid-19 lockdown era in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to investigate the perception of PG students on the use of whatsapp platform for online learning in the covid-19 era. The specific objectives were:

- 1. Toassess the effectiveness of the use of Whatsapp platform as a collaborative tool for online lectures
- 2. To identify the perceptions of PG students towards the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures during the Covid-19 lockdown.
- 3. To determine the challenges faced by PG students in the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures during Covid-19 lockdown phase.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

- 1. How effective is the use of Whatsapp platform as a collaborative tool for online lectures during the Covid-19 lockdown?
- 2. What are the perceptions of PG students towards the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures during the Covid-19 lockdown?
- 3. What are the challenges faced by PG students in the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures during Covid-19 lockdown phase?

Literature Review

Whatsapp Messenger has become a very common communication tool among university students in recent years and it has been seen as an effective communication and collaborative tool in the teaching and learning process. WhatsApp Messenger is a smartphone- and web-based instant message application that allows users to exchange information using a variety of media including text, image, video, and audio messages (Church and Oliveira, 2013; Sahu, 2014). WhatsApp platform is particularly designed for educational activities which improve communication, creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills among learners. Barhoumi (2015) stated that WhatsApp enhance knowledge sharing among students, enhance learners' manipulative skills, aid the learning process and foster evaluation process. WhatsApp is seen as an educational mobile tool with great potentials of helping students construct their own knowledge while making use of the digital mobile devices.

Students' perceptions of the use of WhatsApp in the teaching and learning process have been examined in some studies. For instance, Malecela (2016) examined PG students' perceptions of the use of WhatsApp as a learning tool in a university in Malaysia. The study found that the students believed that WhatsApp is helpful in their learning by facilitating easy communication with other students and with their lecturers, collaborative learning and access to and sharing of educational information. Amir and Wijdan (2020) carried out a study on the pedagogical perceptions and attitudes of Saudi Arabia University Students towards using WhatsApp as students-teachers' interactive tool. The findings shows that WhatsApp had a positive effect in enhancing interaction between students and their teachers and it makes interaction between them easier than in the classroom. Lastly the results indicated that WhatsApp is an efficient tool of interaction in cases of distant learning. Patil and Deepthi (2015) conducted a study on the usage of WhatsApp messenger

amongst post-graduate students in a university environment. The result shows that WhatsApp messenger is used by a greater majority of post-graduate students quite regularly for educational purposes.

Yin (2016) investigated the level at which Ipoh higher institutions education students' have adopted WhatsApp and their attitude towards using it for learning, and found that majority of the students had remarkable experiences and positive feelings using WhatsApp for learning. Izyani and Mohamed (2016) in their study on perception of Malaysian students on whatsapp utilization as learning material in English language classroom, noted that WhatsApp utilization is important since it enhances students' proficiency in the use of English language and help them learn the language better. Nitza and Roman (2016) investigated students' achievement and satisfaction levels in a seminar course when learning through whatsapp platform, and observed positive correlation between achievement and satisfaction among WhatsApp users. Kumar, Lian and Vasudevan (2016) investigated the opinions of Medical Perak Royal College of Kuala Lumpur University students towards whatsapp utilization as an instructional tool and found that using whatsapp both within and out of classroom environment improved the learning performance of students since students can use it anywhere- anytime.

Augustine and Nwaizugbu (2018) investigated Whatsapp utilization and academic performance of computer in education trainee teachers in university of Port-harcourt, Rivers State. The interview responses of trainee teachers' perceptions toward using Whatsapp group discussion platform for learning showed that the students' whatsapp group chat participation increased their interest for the course; provided them with easy and round-the-clock access to the course lecturer and coursemates; and helped them in getting quick information about class activities in relation to the course and easy access to course resource links as posted by the course lecturer. Igbafe and Anyanwu (2018) conducted a study titled WhatsApp at tertiary education institutions. The study found that Whatsapp can enhance academic performance through building and improving students' community of learning but can cause academic disruption through addiction to non-educational activities. Abubakar (2020) did a study "without online learning platforms, a few Nigerian universities have switched to WhatsApp". The study found that the students find learning using whatsapp to be interesting and educationally useful especially in this pandemic era. He also stated that some lecturers are using Envivo platform in-combination with other platforms like Zoom, WhatsApp and Telegram The study also indicated that lack of constant electricity supply, money for internet data, smartphones and other devices are serious challenges for students.

So (2016) found that university students who had experience with the formal use of WhatsApp to support their learning and those who had no experience with the use of WhatsApp for learning, had positive perceptions of its use to support teaching and learning in higher education. The students agreed that WhatsApp can be a useful learning tool. Examples of reported possible advantages of the use of WhatsApp for students' learning included: providing immediate messaging support, bringing new opportunities of learning, facilitating communication between students and teachers, enabling fast feedback in learning, providing flexible learning, supporting multimedia learning, and supporting collaborative learning.

Covid-19 pandemic made us realize the importance of online learning for our students. The educational systems need to evolve constantly to cope with the rapid advancement of digital technologies. Universities cannot simply return to the business-as-usual, chalk-and-talk mode of teaching and learning. If universities will not learn today from the unforeseen impacts of Covid-19 on education, then it is reckoned that they never will. Universities must use the crisis as a wake-up call to remind themselves of the need for a contingency plan or plan B. (Ngalomba, 2020).

Methodology

The study employed the descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised of 122 PG students from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUOE), Portharcourt, Rivers State. The researchers developed an online questionnaire titled "Perceptions of Postgraduate Students on the use of Whatsapp Platform for Online Lectures Questionnaire" (PPSWPOLQ) which was used to collect data for the study and the response format is the likert scales and multiple responses. Total enumeration sampling technique was used and the data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency count and simple percentage. The results are presented below.

KEY: SA= Strongly Agree; A=Agree; SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree.

Results

The findings of the study are presented in the following tables with explanations

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Gender	Freq.	Age Range	Freq.
Male	54(44%)	21-30	50(41%)
Female	68(56%)	31-40	52(43%)
		41 above	20(16%)

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Majority of the PG students 68(56%) were female while 54(44%) were male. Most of the respondents 52(43%) were within the age bracket of 31-40years, 50(41%) were within the age bracket of 21-30years and 20(16%) were 41 years and above.

Research Question One: How effective is the use of Whatsapp platform as a collaborative tool for online lectures during the Co^Vid-19 lockdown?

Table 2: Effectiveness of the Use of Whatsapp Platform for Online Lectures

Effectiveness of the use of Whatsapp Platform	Frequency
Very Effective	53(43%)
Effective	57(47%)
Not Effective	12(10%)

Table 2 reveals the effectiveness of the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures. Most of the respondents 57(47%) agreed that the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures is effective, 53(43%) indicated that it was very effective while 12(10%) stated that it was not effective. This implies that the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures is an effective collaborative tool.

Research Question Two:

What are the perceptions of PG students towards the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures during the Covid-19 lockdown?

Table 3: Perceptions of PG Students towards the Use of Whatsapp Platform for Online Lectures during the Covid-19 Lockdown

Perceptions of PG Students	SA	A	D	SD
In the wake of the COVID-19 school closure period, Whatsapp learning appears to be the immediate positive response	47(39%)			
WhatsApp makes interaction between teachers and their students easier than in the classroom				
WhatsApp allows me to academically engage with peers and lecturers at any time and any place				
WhatsApp creates a friendly relationship between the teacher and the students				
WhatsApp can help teachers observe and control the progress of their student	28(23%)	22(18%)	46(38%)	26(21%)
Shy students can freely communicate and make seminar presentation through WhatsApp	50(41%)	60(49%)	12(10%)	
WhatsApp enables me to share information with peers and establish a culture of teamwork and promote student collaboration	36(30%)	55(45%)	25(20%)	6(5%)
Whatsapp is cost-effective, convenient and easy to use	42(34%)	58(48%)	16(13%)	6(5%)
I prefer learning on Whatsapp platform other than the usua face-to-face method	30(25%)	10(8%)	38(31%)	44(36)
Whatsapp allows course content discussions and lecture updates, assignment instructions and submission deadlines as well as changes in mid-semester continuous assessment tests, can be communicated via WhatsApp.	230(25%)	62(51%)	20(16%)	10(8%)
Universities should still continue to use the Whatsapp platform for online lectures even after the covid-19 pandemic	32(26%)	47(39%)	17(14%)	26(21)

Table 3 shows the perceptions of PG students towards the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures. Majority of the respondents, that is, 50(41%) and 60(49%) agreed that shy students can freely communicate and make seminar presentation through WhatsApp, 4769%) and 59(48%) indicated that, in the wake of the COVID-19 school closure period, Whatsapp learning appears to be the immediate positive response and 4264%) and 58(48%) indicated that Whatsapp is cost-effective, convenient and easy to use. This implies that the students had positive perceptions towards the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures.

Research Question Three: What are the challenges faced by PG students in use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures during Covid-19 lockdown phase?

Table 4: Challenges faced by PG Students in the Use of Whatsapp Platform for Online Lectures during Covid-19 Lockdown

Challenges faced by PG Students	Frequency	
Lack of constant power supply to charge my phone	92(75%)	
Slow internet connectivity	100(82%)	
Time consuming.	16(13%)	
High risk of miscommunication	28(23%)	
Misuse of the platform	52(43%)	
High cost of data subscription	52(43%)	

Table 4 reveals the challenges faced by PG students in the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures. Majority of the respondents, 100(82%) agreed that slow Internet connectivity, lack of constant power supply to charge phones, 92(75%) whereas 52(43%) indicated that high cost of data for subscription and misuse of the platform were the major challenges faced by PG students in the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures.

Discussion of Findings

Majority of the PG students indicated that the Whatsapp platform is an effective collaborative tool for teaching and learning. The effectiveness of WhatsApp as a communication and collaborative tool for teaching and learning process is due to its advantages over other forms of social media tools. Barhoumi and Ghailan (2015) indicated that WhatsApp facilitate knowledge sharing among peers, improve learners' manipulative skills, facilitate the learning process and foster evaluation process. WhatsApp is an educational mobile tool with great potentials of helping students constructs their own knowledge while making use of the digital mobile devices. WhatsApp application is specially designed for educational activities which enhance communication, creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills among learners. This finding is in agreement with the study of Akpan and Ezinne (2017) who also found that WhatsApp application is an effective collaborative tool which can be used for teaching and learning.

- Most of the respondents agreed that shy students can freely communicate and make seminar presentation through WhatsApp, that, Whatsapp learning appears to be the immediate positive response, in the wake of the Covid-19 school closure period, and that Whatsapp platform is cost-effective, convenient and easy to use. This implies that the students had positive perceptions towards the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures. The positive perceptions would make it easier to integrate WhatsApp into their learning. Students' enjoyment of the use of a technology is an important factor in the success of its adoption (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1992). Secondly, the use of WhatsApp in higher education does not require costly infrastructure for the students or their universities, as the students have the required software and hardware in their hands all the time. The availability of software and hardware is a significant consideration in developing countries, in which higher education institutions have difficulty providing students with expensive ICT that might be used to support their learning. This study is in conformity with the study of Joicy and Sornam (2018).
- Majority of the students stated that slow internet connectivity, lack of constant power supply to charge phones, high cost of data for subscription and misuse of the platform were the major challenges faced by PG students in the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures. However, the problem of slow internet connectivity, epileptic power supply and high cost of data for subscription can be said to be perennial problems in Nigeria and these are the major challenge that hinders the effective use of Whatsapp platform for online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. This finding is in conformity with the study of Abubakar (2020).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study investigated the perceptions of postgraduate students on the use of Whatsapp platform for online lectures during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. This study found that the use of Whatsapp platform is an effective collaborative tool for online lectures and the students had positive perceptions towards it use. Some of the challenges faced by the PG students are slow Internet connectivity, lack of constant power supply to charge phones, high cost of data for subscription and misuse of the platform. The researchers wish to recommend that Whatsapp platform should be adopted for teaching and learning in our higher institutions. The internet service providers should also improve on their internet service provision and provide cheap data subscription so that students can enjoy more access to the internet while at home. It is thereby concluded that Whatsapp online teaching is feasible, cheap, convenient and must be made a part of the postgraduate training in Nigeria beyond the prevailing lockdown.

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