"What We Faced during the *Whatsapp* Learning": Voicing Students' Thought in *Covid-19* Pandemic

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to present a summary and an overview of students' experience using WhatsApp Group as a learning tool during Covid-19 pandemic based on Gregory's theory by using narrative inquiry method. Students frequently use WhatsApp, a message-sharing social media application, to collaborate on schoolwork. This research involved the 4th semester students from the English Department in UIN KH Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan. The researchers conducted data collection through online and offline interviews which were carried out via WhatsApp and face-to-face interview. The data was then categorized in accordance with the theme by Braun and Clarke. This research concentrated on how students experienced learning through WhatsApp Group. Based on the data obtained through interviews, the results lead to the positive experiences and negative experiences. Four out of five students categorized the experiences into negative one because they faced more obstacles than improvements. Therefore, the results from this data are more dominant to negative experience such as WhatsApp Group did not facilitate students' learning comprehension, Internet connection became problems in certain areas, the WhatsApp Group tended to be boring, and students lacked of teacher's supervision thus they had to understand the materials themselves.

Keywords: experience, negative experience, positive experience, WhatsApp Group, learning tool

INTRODUCTION

Education must incorporate information technology into the created learning system in today's smart globalization period. The present Covid-19 pandemic has created numerous challenges for the learning system to operate. It is difficult to implement the learning model in Higher Education. However, the learning system must continue to be used to educate pupils and help them improve their knowledge. Many teaching staff have investigated their potential to develop existing technology with various trainings in the era of globalization, which is increasingly advanced and fast developing, as it is today. University teaching staff have to be at their best in order to support the online learning system. However, it must consider the needs and circumstances of students because not all students are able to use the media elements that are desired. The most basic issue is the high-cost data bundle required for online learning. As a result, teachers have to be astute in assessing the current situation and maintain their enthusiasm. Parents of kids in the present epidemic period nevertheless want their children to have access to good, high-quality education (Iskandar, 2020).

Social media services and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp make information more accessible and retrievable from anywhere and at any time. This is due to advancements in information and communication technology, which now allow for easy access to data (Fauzi, 2019).

Teachers can use social media to engage with students and include it into their lessons. Through various platforms this can be more interesting, relatable, and interesting (Willbold, 2019). Social networks have arisen as a new way of communication between teachers and students, especially in higher education, and have become essential communicative tools. As a result, technology and social media have become intricately interwoven in our everyday lives (Akcaoglu & Bowman, 2016; Albayrak & Yildirim, 2015).

The recent announcement of a global coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) has   had an influence on all facets of global citizenship, including all Indonesians and numerous scholarly communities. This is in accordance with a World Health Organization resolution (WHO). The case expanded beyond Wuhan's city limits. Approximately 64,000 cases of COVID-19 have been reported across China as a result of the outbreak, with the number continuing to climb. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the new viral epidemic 2019 (2019-nCoV) a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) (Mόzo, 2017). This pandemic is a big and real challenge for the education system, therefore major action is needed regarding policies on learning models (Report, 2020).

The learning model that allows it to be applied during the COVID-19 pandemic is learning through a network system, such as e-learning facilitated by several universities through campus websites or using applications (Prajana, 2017). E-learning is primarily intended to encourage students to take responsibility for their learning and be independent at certain times (Stone & Logan, 2018). E-learning also emphasizes personalization, which includes the ability to adapt to students' skill levels and collect mutually beneficial knowledge resources, allowing students to play a more active role in their education. (Conference, Jamin, & Mudra, 2019). Furthermore, students' adaptable mindsets will allow them to organize themselves more freely, perhaps leading to academic success and achievement (Pratama & Yusro, 2016).

According to Ngalomba (2020), WhatsApp is both cost-effective and user-friendly, and it has a competitive advantage over other social media platforms. WhatsApp is a safe program since it uses end-to-end encryption (E2EE). WhatsApp is a fantastic tool for teaching English to non-native speakers. Students will have more free opportunities to practice English language skills and components, as well as a more personal and full relationship with their professors, resulting in a more sociable individual (Jasrial, 2018). Furthermore, according to Ristanti (2020), WhatsApp is a favored online tool for teaching and learning activities since students are accustomed to utilizing it. With social media apps, WhatsApp offers a lot of capabilities.

WhatsApp's use as an educational tool provides a number of benefits. Short communications, as well as course material files, can be checked, saved, and sent via WhatsApp. A WhatsApp Group can hold a big number of students in a virtual classroom. WhatsApp Group can also be used on a laptop by shooting barcodes on WhatsApp Web. Despite the fact that it is a simple online medium, WhatsApp Group is commonly chosen and utilized in education since it can reach a wide range of learners (Susilo & Sofiarini, 2021).

According to a recent study, WhatsApp is effective and has good views in building learner autonomy, boosting cooperation, and increasing willingness to actively participate for academic reasons (Bere, 2013; Chipunza, 2013; Fattah, 2015; Moreira, et al, 2016; Vavoula & Sharples, 2008). Overall, WhatsApp has evolved into a collaborative platform that

improves accessibility, fosters collaboration, and increases motivation to participate actively in academic projects (Bere, 2013; Chipunza, 2013).

Based on empirical evidences, many students mentioned that during online learning using WhatsApp Group, many of them stated that this is not optimal enough to understand the material through WhatsApp Group. They prefer offline learning as before the Covid-19 pandemic. That is because during offline learning students can understand the material better, unlike when using WhatsApp Groups. In addition, there are frequently a number of obstacles such as the lack of a signal in some places where they live, WhatsApp Group does not increase students' understanding, WhataApp Group was boring, and that students have to understand the materials themselves.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Susilawati & Supriyanto (2020) investigated a similar case regarding the use of WhatsApp groups as a learning medium. According to their findings, during and after the COVID-19 epidemic, blended learning with the usage of WhatsApp resulted in a significant rise in student learning outcomes and enhanced learning motivation. Learning is optimized when students and lecturers use the WhatsApp Messenger platform to communicate and share PowerPoint files, Microsoft Word files, JPG files, Voice Notes, Videos, and connections to other learning resources. That is because WhatsApp is simple, easy to use, and doesn't use a lot of data. Therefore, online learning using WhatsApp Groups is the most effective. This study proposes future researchers to uncover solutions to the problems experienced by students in the online learning process and the development of using other media to make it more effective.

Aduba & Adebara (2021) found in their research that WhatsApp and Telegram were the kinds of online platforms utilized by lecturers to offer lessons during the online learning process. Both systems allow professors to load audio and file attachments, making it easier for them to be available for online learning at all times. Online lectures include the advantages of being able to save lectures and files for later use, exchange learning materials, collaborate on projects, have more freedom in question and answer sessions, and provide a suitable learning environment while at home. Students who do not have an Android phone, on the other hand, will find learning hard. During courses, there are too many notifications and messages, causing some messages to be hidden, and taking too long to attend online lectures makes it difficult to concentrate.

According to Dahdal (2020), WhatsApp became a valuable tool for students to increase active learning when it was utilized in course attendance requirements, with the results of surveys and interviews indicating that they were interacting with an increasing number of students before and after the course. There was a lot of buzz about WhatsApp when it was included in the course. In comparison to traditional and task structures, students felt more occupied with the task, which included the use of WhatsApp in task requests, a mix of comparative observations of both forms of assignments in class, and follow-up surveys and interviews. The task necessitates the usage of the WhatsApp messaging app. Follow-up surveys and interviews were conducted on a small sample and only one class with an emphasis on social media, therefore these findings are exploratory and only provide early data that require additional examination with a bigger sample. Apart from that, WhatsApp is a simple-to-use program that is widely used by students to communicate with teachers and classmates.

According to Famularsih's (2020) findings, students in this pandemic situation have a positive attitude toward using online learning activities. Students viewed online learning as a user-friendly learning tool that enabled them to interact with their professors and peers. By using technology in online learning, students can learn new words and four English skills. The students, on the other hand, indicated that their reading and writing skills had increased rather than their listening and speaking skills as a result of the limited barriers in learning activities.

WhatsApp has been shown to be a useful learning medium in previous studies (Zahra, 2020), with more efficient use as an online class. One of the advantages of the WhatsApp application is that it may connect classes from all over the world while using less internet capacity. This makes taking online classes more convenient for pupils.

Other relevant research, Alami (2020) revealed that the implementation of WhatsApp Group in online learning has a positive effect and its impact is felt by many educators as well as participants or students. Many schools provide a variety of media outlets to meet the needs of their students. Choosing the media to be used during the Covid-19 pandemic based on the will and willingness of teachers and pupils. In the distant learning process, WhatsApp media is highly suggested as a communication medium widely used by the community. It meets the needs of students participating in online learning activities, in addition to its easy-to-understand characteristics.

METHODOLOGY

Setting and Participants

The researchers conducted this research by asking questions through an interview by Whatsapp related to students' experience using WhatsApp Group as an online learning media during pandemic. Another form of interview was in the form of face to face communication. These two patterns were conducted to meet the data required. This study involved students from the 4th semester of English Department in IAIN Pekalongan. The researchers required approximately around 5 students to be the resource persons to provide richer data.

No.	Name (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Age	Description
1.	Atqiya	Female	20	She has used WhatsApp Group during online learning from the first semester until now.
2.	Dira	Female	19	She has used WhatsApp Group during online learning from the first semester until now.
3.	Nuzul	Female	20	She has used WhatsApp Group during online learning from the first semester until now.
4.	Salsa	Female	19	She has used WhatsApp Group during online learning from the first semester until now.
5.	Yulma	Female	19	She has used WhatsApp Group during online learning from the first semester until now.

Table 1.1 List of Participants

Data Collection and Anakysis

The researchers conducted data collection through online and offline interviews depending on the situation and condition of the interviewee. If through online, the interview was conducted via WhatsApp in the form manually typed. Meanwhile, offline interviews were conducted face-to-face and the researchers recorded the answer during the interview. After all the data was collected, the data in the form of recording was transcribed and then coded in generating themes whether it belonged to positive or negative experience. The interview was conducted in Indonesian. The first language of the interview, according to Papadopolou and Vlachos (2014), is Indonesian, which is intended to make interviewing easier and for young pupils to feel more at ease and understand the questions answered.   After the data was collected, they were categorized in accordance with the thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) which consists of coding and generating themes. The results of the data were categorized into positive and negative. For example, if the interviewee found some improvements during learning using WhatsApp Group, the data is positive and vice versa. There are six phases based on Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Familiarization the Data

2. Generating Initial Codes (Coding of the Data)

3. Searching for Themes

4. Reviewing the Themes

5. Naming the Themes

6. Producing the Report

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

After analyzing the data from interview, the researchers identified the students' data related to their experiences during using WhatsApp Group as online learning media. Data from the interview showed that there were two results lead to the themes during their use. These are positive experiences and negative experiences.

Positive Experience	Negative Experience
1. WhatsApp Group helps the students understand the materials clearly. 2. WhatsApp Group can increase students' motivation. 3. WhatsApp Group is the easiest media to use.	1. WhatsApp Group doesn't facilitate students' understanding. 2. Internet connection problems in some areas. 3. WhatsApp Group is boring. 4. Students have to understand the materials themselves.

Table 1.2 Result

Discussion

Positive Experience

WhatsApp Group helps the students understand the material clearly

Based on the result of the interview, one of the participants mentioned that she used WhatsApp Group as an online learning media during the Covid-19 pandemic. As stated by the participant, it can be seen in the following sentence that "*During the learning process using the WhatsApp Group I found it easy because <u>I could understand the material clearly and well</u>, ...*" (Nuzul, WhatsApp interview, 21 February 2022).

The participant's data implied that while using this application, it could help her to understand the material given by the lecturer clearly although sometimes there are some obstacles that arise. This can be seen from the phrase of "could understand the material clearly and well". This is relevant to a previous research stating that as a synchronous learning mode, WhatsApp Group can be considered as an interactive media to learn that might help students in the learning process (Puspitasari et al, 2021).

WhatsApp Group may motivate students

In this section, it can be seen that there was an impact of using WhatsApp Groups that may help student's motivation. This data was based on the results of interviews with participants via WhatsApp.

> *"Yes, there is an improvement. Because in my opinion, <u>group-based learning can increase motivation</u>, interest, and fluency in teaching and learning, the fact is that if there is material presented by the lecturer that is not clear, it can be asked again at any time and the material can also be accessed easily."*

(Nuzul, WhatsApp interview, 21 February 2022)

Nuzul said that she experienced a positive impact during learning using WhatsApp Group, namely it may increase her motivation, interest, and fluency during the learning process. Although there were some teacher explanations that were not clear, it could be overcome by further clarification about the material. This is in line to Susilawati and Supriyatno (2020) who stated that the primary elements that must be considered in the learning process are attempts to boost student learning motivation. WhatsApp is essential to inspire students to be motivated and have a broad knowledge base

WhatsApp Group is the easiest media to use

Based on the results of the interviews, it is very clear that WhatsApp Group is the most favored online tool. It can be found in the sentence of *"The reason is because from what I experienced, WhatsApp Group is <u>one of the easiest media to use</u> and I'm sure all students are familiar with this application."* (Dira, WhatsApp interview, 21 February 2022).

Dira told that her answer about experience using WhatsApp was included into positive experience because it is the easier media to use and also most of the students are familiar with this application. This is relevant to Ngalomba (2020) who stated that WhatsApp is cost-effective and user friendly and has competitive advantages over the other social media. As stated by the participant, it can be seen in the following responses: According to Ristanti (2020), WhatsApp is a favored online tool for teaching and learning activities

because students are already familiar with it. With social media apps, WhatsApp offers a variety of capabilities.

Negative Experiences

The Use of WhatsApp Group did not help students' learning comprehension
In this section, negative experience can be found that WhatsApp Groups do not boost students' understanding. This data was based on the results of interviews with participants who have the same answer via WhatsApp. According to Wiryanto (2020) he stated that students are less able to comprehend the content supplied, making it difficult for them to complete the teacher's assignments, which are part of their ability to think. These can be seen from the data below:

> *"Personally, in my opinion, during learning through WhatsApp groups, <u>it doesn't</u> <u>increase understanding during the learning process</u>, because we also have to really understand the material given by the lecturer ourselves rather than understanding the material in face-to-face learning."*

(Atqiya, WhatsApp interview, 21 February 2022)

The participant mentioned that the use of the group may not facilitate her understanding during the learning process. That was because the lecturers only shared materials to the group without providing an explanation of the material so that students have to understand the materials themselves.

> *"From my experience carrying out online learning for 3 semesters, using WhatsApp Group as a learning medium during this pandemic period, in my opinion, <u>doesn't</u> <u>improve my understanding</u> of the material provided by the lecturer."*

(Dira, WhatsApp interview, 21 February 2022)

Similarly to Atqiya, Dira also mentioned that WhatsApp Group did not ease her in understanding the material provided by the lecturer. This was because students must understand the materials themselves, in contrast to face-to-face learning in which the lecturer would provide a discussion about the material that had been given. In addition, if there is material that is not understood and students are embarrassed to ask it will be difficult for students who are shy and less active during learning.

Internet connection problems in some areas
In this section, it was represented about Internet connection problems while using WhatsApp Groups. This data was based on the results of interviews with participants who have the same answer via WhatsApp and face-to-face interview. Aburezeq and Ishtaiwa (2013) stated that internet access and a lack of participant commitment were two of the most significant issues with such social networking programs. These can be seen from the data below:
From the questions asked to Atqiya, she found the obstacles rather than the improvements experienced during learning with WhatsApp Groups, one of which was an internet connection. It can be found in the sentence of *"There are several obstacles, one of which <u>is an internet connection trouble</u> make the learning process ineffective. If not*

connected, it will hinder the online learning process." (Atqiya, WhatsApp interview, 21 February 2022). This made the learning process hampered and certainly not effective.

Similarly to Atqiya, Dira also mentioned that she encountered obstacles, namely problems with internet connections. It can be found in the sentence of *"The obstacle is the internet network connection which is sometimes problematic."* (Dira, WhatsApp interview, 21 February 2022). This obstacle seems to be very common experienced by students when online learning takes place. According to research findings (Armiati & Budi, 2021), (Sukawati, 2021), and (Asmuni, 2020), one of the challenges students face while online learning is a limited network and internet allowance. Some students are plagued by internet quotas, while students who live in rural areas or far from urban areas also have Internet network limits.

In other interview, Nuzul revealed her experience that there was problem with internet connection as other participants mentioned. It can be seen from the sentence of *"...but sometimes there were also difficulties including sometimes being constrained in the internet network."* (Nuzul, WhatsApp interview, 21 February 2022).

This answer is an excerpt from a question that asks the reason why she categorized her answer as negative. It can be found in the sentence of *"Because when using WhatsApp Groups sometimes there are some obstacles such as difficult signals, unstable network and unclear understanding of the material."* (Salsa, Face to face interview, 24 February 2022) that in her answer she mentioned that during learning through WhatsApp Group there were obstacles in the form of difficult signals, unstable network, and unclear understanding of the material.

WhatsApp Group is boring

In this section, it might be concluded that WhatsApp Group is boring. This data is based on the results of interviews with participants via WhatsApp. It can be found in the sentence of *"... most students tend to focus less on the material discussed and feel bored with the learning media used by the lecturers ..."* (Atqiya, WhatsApp interview, 21 February 2022).

This answer is an excerpt from a question that asked the reason why she categorized her answer as negative. And then in her answer she mentioned that she felt bored during learning using WhatsApp Group because the learning media used by lecturers was monotonous and not varied. According to Amal (2019) students in the classroom are merely passive listeners who take notes on what the teacher says. This creates a stiff, monotonous learning environment in the classroom, with no active communication between professors and pupils so that makes the students feel bored.

Students have to understand the materials themselves

The participant mentioned that WhatsApp Group was boring. This data was based on the results of interviews with participants via WhatsApp. Mawarni, et al (2020) stated that the presence of social distance causes pupils to determine the spirit of learning in themselves. Students were expected to understand the subject independently. The teacher merely sent or exchanged the material files over WhatsApp, and the students were expected to comprehend the content autonomously. Students were able to ask questions via WhatsApp if they had any problems. Despite the fact that they were encouraged to ask questions, many students

nevertheless were hesitated to approach the teacher directly. This can be seen from the data below:

The participant mentioned that students had to understand the material themselves that can be found in the sentence of *"because <u>we also have to really understand the material given by the lecturer ourselves</u> rather than understanding the material in face-to-face learning."* (Atqiya, WhatsApp interview, 21 February 2022). It means the lecturer only shared the material without providing an explanation. Unlike the case with face-to-face learning, the lecturer did not just share material but provided an explanation directly in the classroom. As stated by Nuraeni (2021) the teacher often offers information to students via WhatsApp without describing the content to be studied or assigning assignments by sending pictures via WhatsApp. These made the students do not understand the material provided by the teacher via WhatsApp.

Another participant, Dira answered that the students have to understand these materials themselves. It can be found in the sentence of *"Because <u>we have to understand these materials ourselves.</u>"* (Dira, WhatsApp interview, 21 February 2022). She added that in contrast to offline meetings, the lecturer explained a little more to them. However, she also mentioned that apart from using WhatsApp Groups, sometimes lecturers also made group presentations via Zoom or Google Meet to present explanations from the materials.

While Salsa stated that "*WhatsApp Groups are usually only used as a medium to share material, and <u>students are told to understand themselves</u> so they don't really understand the material and are less efficient."* (Salsa, Face to face interview, 24 February 2022). In the same opinion, she also mentioned that WhatsApp Group is only a medium for sharing material and students must understand the material themselves so that they do not really understand the material given by the lecturer. The similar answer could be found in Yulma's who uttered that *"<u>the lecturers tend to just distribute the material without giving an explanation</u> so it creates confusion for students."* (Yulma, Face to face interview, 24 February 2022). This indicated that the lecturer only distributed material without providing an explanation of the material, causing confusion for students. The lecturers according to her usually shared material, whether it's a PowerPoint file or a YouTube link. After that, the students were asked to understand the material. If there is something they don't understand, they can ask through the group.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion in the previous section, it can be concluded that there are two results belonging to the theme, namely positive and negative experiences. The positive experience include WhatsApp Group helps the students understand the materials clearly, WhatsApp Group can increase students' motivation, and WhatsApp Group is the easiest media to use. While the negative experience is WhatsApp Group does not increase students' understanding, Internet connection problems in some areas, WhatsApp Group is boring, and Students have to understand the materials themselves. Four of the five participants are classified as negative with some of the same obstacles they faced. The most common obstacles encountered during online learning utilizing WhatsApp Group are students' inability to understand the material and internet connection problems.

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