

THE USE OF WHATSAPP AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL MEDIUM IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigates the use of Whatsapp as an instructional medium in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Whatsapp instructional medium is a modern technology innovation that is rapidly gaining awareness globally. It is a very useful alternative application for communication and teaching between lecturers and students without making direct contact and be able to support learning needs in today's digital era. Whatsapp facilitates discussions between lecturers and students and among students with direct communication through tests / group messages, video or audio calls. These create excitement among learners and motivate them to study harder. The study is written in an opinion form, using the human capital theory as a fulcrum. Among the benefits arising from the use of Whatsapp are WhatsApp instant messaging facilitates online collaboration and cooperation between online students connected from school or home in a blended mobile lecture, it is a free application that is easy to use, and groups connected to WhatsApp instant massaging can share learning objects easily through comments, texting and messaging. Discussions are related to the course content taught 100% in-class. Also, the challenges include lack of ICT facilitates in schools such as computers, projectors and android phones, knowledge in the use of online media platforms by some lecturers; and epileptic power in the country. It was thus recommended among others that ICT facilities should be fully installed in tertiary institutions in the country, lecturers should key into the use of whatsapp as an instructional platform, steady power should be available in schools for online instructional applications; and Whatsapp should be used in giving assignments

Introduction

The Whatsapp platform is one of the interactive social media that can be used as an institutional medium of communication between two or more people. It enables chatting with friends, creating groups and transmitting content in the form of text, image, video or audio; and represents the most widespread and diverse new communication model in its communication uses, so that it has become difficult to dispense with. Young people use WhatsApp via smart mobile phones to build networks of friends, coordinate with them, spread information and ideas and thanks to the instant nature of the application, it is increasingly used among lecturers and students for teaching/learning outcomes in tertiary institutions.

Today, WhatsApp, has over a billion active users (Abdullah, 2021); it has replaced SMS messages with small messages within an eponym application. These multimedia messages are OTT (over-the-top tell) messages that are transmitted over the Internet, non-stop to the telephone operator. Also, WhatsApp requires internet connectivity for its service(s). Once it is downloaded into one's phone, one can start sending messages to other users having the same application (Aishareef, 2018). This implies that WhatsApp messages can only be received by its other users; and its service replaces the normal SMS text messages. Likewise, it enables users to interact with friends and relatives across nations free of charge; once users subscribe to an internet data plan, it uses the same for email and web browsing, thereby attracting no cost to messages sent to others. Similarly, WhatsApp enables users to create groups, exchange images, videos and audio or written with less stress (Makoe, 2010).

Technology has simplified most processes of instruction in tertiary institution (i.e. universities and polytechnics) hence, WhatsApp is one of the learning tools made possible by the technological innovation of the 21st Century (Almosa & Almubarak, 2015). This is due to some of the popular messaging app's attributes that make it an ideal solution for lecturers and students in the teaching-learning process. However, the major reason for WhatsApp is communication, and this makes it one of the fastest and most effective instructional media of interaction and learning between lecturers and students in tertiary institutions (Barhoumi, 2015). WhatsApp facilitates communication and is efficient means of dispersing educational resources and information to students.

The tertiary institutions comprise special features which influence the behaviours of human beings. The human components include the learners, lecturers and administrators among others. As a social system, it is characterized by the existence of both institutional and individual goals and in several instances, these goals are similar; which is to produce graduates with high academic performance. This is realizable when its leaders carefully structure and ensure that lecturers groom the learners thoroughly using the tool of education.

Education, being the cornerstone / epicentre for development in any society, aids in literacy, skills acquisition, technological advancement and is a tool which helps to harness human and material resources toward the achievement of societal goals. The quality of any society depends on the educational development of its citizens and Nigeria is not an exemption. Both Akpan and Etor (2013) asserted that education is a process by which abilities of individuals are developed; these abilities might be physical, intellectual, emotional or social. It is the systematic training of the individual in order to produce positive changes in his behaviour and become a fulfilled person. It plays multifaceted roles in the society including nation building and development and helps in building students into societal giants who make positive impacts. This can be actualized through quality teaching in the lecture rooms.

Teaching on the other hand, connotes a group of activities which a teacher may engage in the process of practicing his occupation. The very acts of teaching itself; as in explaining, demonstrating, illustrating, dramatizing, rewarding, punishing, motivating etc. aim at helping the learner to acquire or change some skill, attitude, knowledge, ideas or appreciation. Abeya (2017) opined that teaching involves bringing about or facilitating desirable change in

learners. It requires the teacher to step out of the realm of personal experience and enter the world of the learners.

Teaching is concerned with human beings and the development of their minds and potentials (Abuka, 2014; Bhagwat, 2016). Individuals differ in intelligence, attitude, aptitude, interest, motivation, needs and temperament among others. Consequently, what may interest one may not interest another, what may challenge one, may not challenge another. This is the background of the complex nature of teaching. Thus, the recognition and appreciation of this fact of individual differences is the first step of teaching effectiveness. Lecturers are able to give room for creativity, intellectualism, hospitality, love for wisdom and the ability to understand the theme of individual differences. These days, online teaching is gradually replacing the face to face method of teaching in institution of learning (Abas et al, 2019; ACRL, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Theory by Adam Smith (1776)

The human capital theory was postulated by Adams Smith in 1776 and developed by Gary Becker in 1964. It stipulates that man's ability to perform different tasks is based on the skills and knowledge inbuilt in him and external forces such as education, training and incentives which help to boost his qualities. Human capital theory suggests the combined stock of competencies, knowledge, social and personal attributes embodied in an intrinsic measure of economic value. It considers individuals as economic units that are important in any economy. The basic concept of human capital theory is that investments in individuals can be measured based on the economic value that they are able to contribute to the society.

Becker (1964) stated that in every society, there is the urgent need for growth; hence, human capital theory asserts that there is a significant relationship between the growth in the stock of a nation's human resources and the growth of national output. It is therefore advantageous that countries which want to attain specific level of socio-economic manpower resources, invest in their human resources (e.g. lecturers and students). The scholar further stated that the educational system should be able to generate the right type of manpower in the right proportion, quantity and time for national growth and development.

This theory is premised on the assumption that skills and competences acquired by people is a factor of production comparable to other factors of production such as machine and land. For instance, teaching-learning outcomes are dependent on the instructional roles of lecturers among other factors. Thus, this proposal of human capital theory observes that human resources are invaluable assets to a society that tend to enhance its productive capacity; which follows that human capital forms the tools that enable all other resources to survive. Consequently, this can only be when human capital is well harnessed and properly utilized. The theory further takes into cognizance the use of online teaching media such as the Whatsapp in the course of acquiring quality education. It shows that if students are built, a nation is built.

In further relating the theory to present study, the educational goal of every society relies on the development of individuals to be moral and effective citizens with equal access to qualitative education, building up persons who can be totally integrated into their immediate environment and other environment. It is obvious that if lecturers appropriately utilize their instructional expertise, is strengthened through educational / instructional online platforms such as the Whatsapp, it will greatly assist in the management of human resources particularly the students for higher academic performance and societal development in general.

Concept of e-Teaching

E-teaching is among the educational outcomes that has surfaced from the development of ICT. Its general concept is essentially teaching and learning which involves the usage of any electronic device, from computers to mobile phones and which might or might not involve the usage of the internet (Websites + other applications) or an intranet (Local network system). (Garcia & Escofet, 2013).

E-teaching is the delivery of teaching through technology and the internet (Gros & García-Peñalvo, 2016). It is the use of information and communication technologies in diverse processes of education to support and enhance teaching and learning in schools and includes the usage of information and communication technology as a complement to traditional classrooms, online teaching or mixing the two modes. E-teaching enables students to undertake education at any time, in virtual groups or isolation and discuss contents with teachers via synchronous and asynchronous mechanisms. Therefore, it supports self-managed work frameworks and improve efficiency of learning management system (Weichhart et al, 2018). E-teaching as a concept covers a range of applications, teaching methods and processes. It uses telecommunication technology to deliver information for education and training. As information and communication technology progresses, e-teaching is emerging as the paradigm of modern education. (Smith, 2015; Singhal, 2016).

The advancement in e-teaching started through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for students, society and the industry since 2012 (Chen, 2010). MOOCs are recognized as a significant development in schools, as millions of students are taking the benefits and uplifting their existing skills (Gupta & Gupta, 2020). E-teaching platforms are playing a crucial role in the world. Its aims include to help instructors and schools to facilitate student learning during academic and non - academic periods. The success of any information system however depends on its usage by the users.

Algahtani (2011) described the completely online mode as “synchronous” or “asynchronous” by the application of optional timing of interaction. The synchronous timing comprises alternate on-line access between instructors and learners or between learners; and the asynchronous, to him allows all participants to post communications to any other participant over the internet. The synchronous type allows learners to discuss with the instructors and also among themselves via the internet at the same time with the use of e-learning platforms such as the Whatsapp, Zoom, Go-to Meeting, video conference and chat rooms. This type according to Almosa and Almubarak (2015) offers the advantage of instantaneous feedback. The asynchronous mode also enables learners to discuss with the instructors as well as among

themselves over the internet at different times. It is therefore not interaction at the same moment but later, with the use of platforms such as thread discussion and emails, with an advantage that learners are able to learn at a time that suits them whilst a disadvantage is that the learners will not be able to receive instant feedback from instructors as well as their colleague learners.

The e-teaching system completely reduces the issues of insufficient classrooms for lectures as students can easily take the lectures online at their convenience. Also, it affords students and lecturers the opportunity to participate in class in their comfort zone with basic amenities they need when compared to the traditional teaching method where sometimes these basic amenities are unavailable (Leaynan & Emily, 2020).

WhatsApp History

The WhatsApp app was designed by Brian Anton and Jan Koom (both Yahoo employees) and launched in 2009 (Lu & Churchill, 2014). The producers' story has been a major success; which has been supported by an 8 million dollar investment by Major Sequoia, one of Silicon Valley's most fashionable investors' holding companies. WhatsApp as a concept is coined from the English phrase "What's up?" meaning "What's new?". It is an instant messaging application for smartphones that enables users to exchange images, videos and audio or written messages using their Internet connection as well as share photos with other users over the internet. According to Chokri (2015), WhatsApp has positioned itself as a superior alternative to SMS messaging, which can be very expensive when utilized in foreign countries due to roaming charges.

Both lecturers and students can create a WhatsApp group chat for easy access and communication between teachers and students, students and students, lecturers and parents, and among parents. WhatsApp lecturers help to facilitate the creation and sharing of video, audio and text messages among users. It is a free, multi-platform messaging app that enables users send and receive text messages, make video and voice calls, share their status and more with a Wi-Fi connection. Part of what makes this app appealing is that it works on various phone and computer operating systems, so that one can continue one's conversation anytime and anywhere. It can also take advantage of Wi-Fi and cellular data to make one-on-one or group calls, reducing the need for expensive calling charges (ACRL, 2018).

Furthermore, WhatsApp uses a phone's cellular or Wi-Fi connection to facilitate messaging and voice calling to nearly anyone on the planet, alone or in a group, and is very nice for small collaborative workgroups. The app enables one to make calls, send and receive messages and share documents, photos, and videos. Also, WhatsApp is absolutely free - with no fees or subscriptions - since it uses a phone's 5G, 4G, 3G, 2G, EDGE, or Wi-Fi connection instead of a cell plan's voice minutes or text plan. Likewise, if one is connected via Wi-Fi, it will not eat into one's data plan.

Benefits of Whatsapp Platform for Instructional Activities

Several valuable reasons have been advanced and listed by scholars such as Barhoumi (2015) and Bhagwat (2016) for the adoption of WhatsApp in the classroom by educators. Some of them are:

- i. Groups connected to WhatsApp instant messaging can share learning objects easily through comments, texting and messaging. WhatsApp group chats feature can be used to create learning, virtual classes and study groups for students; particularly, those students who are sick and not capable of coming to physical class can use this feature to connect with the classrooms.
- ii. Lecturers can use the group chat to make possible discussions with the students outside their classrooms.
- iii. Students can make use of the group chat to solve problems arising from lecturers' take home assignments by asking and clarifying issues.
- iv. It can be used to create both text-based messages and audio-based lessons for students, which can be made available directly to them. This can be original lesson prepared by the lecturer or recorded lecture already presented to students in the class. The students that missed the lecture can then listen to it repeatedly, thereby given them the opportunity to learn more.
- v. It creates equal opportunities for all levels of students to get access to their lecturers with minimal cost.
- vi. It facilitates immediate feedback to students' assignment, which may be returned via text and audio files respectively.
- vii. It gives unrestricted messaging to all phones that have Internet connections.
- viii. It is a good avenue for class timing.
- ix. It could be used directly over the Internet via WhatsApp, Web and WiFi with ease.
- x. It enables instructors to send graphics (pictures/photos), videos, audio messages and charts to students/learners.
- xi. Students use WhatsApp platform to clarify doubts arising from instructors' class assignments
- xii. Lecturers and students can be in constant touch outside the classroom, and also within and outside the territorial boundaries.

Also, the findings by Smith (2015) and Singhal (2016) in their separate empirical studies on the application of mobile and wireless technologies revealed that using the mobile learning tool system was an effective educational tool that contributed to the success of students. In addition, the learners achieved a great improvement in reading comprehension, motivation towards learning as well as in fostering knowledge sharing, enhancing peer support on educational affairs and nurturing knowledge communities.

However, other uses of Whatapp according to Chokri (2015:223) are:

- WhatsApp instant messaging facilitates online collaboration and cooperation between online students connected from school or home in a blended mobile lecture.
- WhatsApp is a free application that is easy to use.

- Groups connected to WhatsApp instant messaging can share learning objects easily through comments, texting and messaging. Discussions are related to the course content taught 100% in-class.
- WhatsApp provides students with the ability to create a class publication and thereby publish their work in the group.
- Information and knowledge are easily constructed and shared through WhatsApp instant messaging.

Challenges

Some of the challenges observed when using Whatsapp as an instructional platform include:

- i. Lack of ICT facilities in schools such as computers, projectors and android phones.
- ii. Lack of knowledge in the use of online media platforms by some lecturers
- iii. Epileptic power in the country.
- iv. Reluctance/indifference to use digital technology during teaching.
- v. Willingness on the part of students to learn using online platforms.

Conclusion

Online media platforms such as the Whatsapp are gaining more awareness with regard to instructional activities globally and are fast replacing the traditional face to face medium of teaching. The system is innovative and enables both lecturers and students to teach and learn collaboratively from any part of the world and sometimes at their own pace. The benefits as have been enumerated are enormous some of which include interacting with peers/students from different climes, sharing knowledge together, quick dissemination of information, storage of information for eternity among others. Tertiary institutions therefore, will do well by incorporating this education platform and use it effectively in improving teaching learning outcomes.

Suggestions

The following are hereby suggested:

1. ICT facilities should be fully installed in tertiary institutions in the country.
2. Lecturers should key into the use of Whatsapp as an instructional platform.
3. Steady power should be available in schools for online instructional applications.
4. Whatsapp should be used in giving assignments.
5. It should be used in conducting exams.
6. It should be used for class activities.

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