



## *WhatsApp Classroom Groups as Learning Communities: Challenges, Prospects and Ethical Concerns*

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### Abstract

This research was conducted to examine the prospects, challenges, and ethical concerns of students regarding WhatsApp classroom groups as learning communities. A quantitative research approach was adopted, utilizing a descriptive research design. Class WhatsApp groups were established as a learning community at the beginning of the semester, and at the end of the semester, students were asked to share their experiences regarding the prospects, challenges, and ethical concerns associated with using WhatsApp as a learning tool within this community. A total of 108 students of B.Ed (Hons) classes participated in the survey. The purposive sampling technique was used for selecting the sample size. Results showed that most students agreed on the potential of WhatsApp as a learning community, such as offering flexibility in learning, improving online communication skills, increasing student motivation and engagement, fostering discussion and informal learning, and allowing access to professional consultation from teachers, which is effective for sharing knowledge and learning from classmates. Major challenges students faced in WhatsApp classroom groups as learning communities were information overload, internet connectivity issues, diverse learning preferences and styles, indiscipline behaviors and distractions in the online environment, and handling irrelevant off-topic messages. Students faced ethical concerns about intellectual property rights, respectful communication, online etiquette, confidentiality of expressed opinion, and transparency in online collaboration. Major recommendations were that teachers may set rules and regulations with participative decision-making with students regarding WhatsApp groups as a learning community to avoid undisciplined behavior and distractions in the online environment, and training may be provided to both students and teachers regarding online safety.



## Introduction

The role of learning communities is to bring together potential professionals, students, faculty, healthcare professionals, etc., to learn from each other about various fields. Although it is gaining appreciation as a beneficial learning strategy, it is still not widely seen in all fields. The advantages of learning communities include enhanced critical thinking, improved educational performance, improved problem-solving capacities, improved communication skills, and increased student confidence. It provides opportunities for self-reflection, personal growth, mentorship, and professional development of students (Stevens, 2024). Leadership requires certain characteristics for the sustainability of the professional learning community. Professional learning communities can be achieved with sustainable leadership by distributing responsibilities, jointly reflecting on past experiences, caring for the emotional well-being of the school community and establishing relationships with educational institutions (Olmo-Extremiera et al., 2024).

Social networking platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube are mostly preferred by students in universities. Now, virtual communities are trending, and WhatsApp groups can be a useful tool for supporting and creating virtual communities. WhatsApp as a learning community needs attention in the context of participants, participation reason, messages nature and learners' experiences about the usefulness of WhatsApp as a learning community (Cronje & Van Zyl, 2022). Online communities face many challenges. There are many contexts of online community, such as community strength, relationship to technology, issues of attachment, emotion and motivation for participation. Key elements of online community are connection to others, interaction, commitment, agency, reciprocity and consequences (Hammond, 2017).

WhatsApp was a useful asynchronous learning tool during COVID-19. Moreover, Teachers face pedagogical opportunities and technical challenges while using WhatsApp in teaching.

One of the advantages of WhatsApp is that teachers can use it anywhere and anytime. Major challenges in reading through WhatsApp are inactive students and the nonavailability of handphones in online classes during the pandemic (Indiran et al., 2022). WhatsApp is beneficial for language learning. Learning activities via WhatsApp groups can be used to improve the idiomatic competence of learners. WhatsApp groups are effective for learning English idioms. The WhatsApp application has potential benefits for idiom learning and overcomes challenges faced by students in classroom learning, such as learning outside the classroom, lack of motivation, and limited class hours. WhatsApp is a significant informal learning tool (Almogheerah, 2020).

WhatsApp groups have academic effectiveness as well as burdens on students. Teachers' presence in WhatsApp groups impacts the functioning of the group. WhatsApp groups with teachers and without teachers serve mostly for educational tasks. In addition to educational discussions, WhatsApp groups are also used for extracurricular activities, entertainment purposes and congratulations/wishes. The teacher's presence in the group significantly affects conversation among students. WhatsApp groups sometimes become a liability due to their high time consumption and are also unavoidable. WhatsApp groups also provide information about exams, classes, breaks, etc., with non-educational activities (Baishya & Maheshwari, 2020). Effort expectancy, performance expectancy, facilitating conditions, and social influence are predictors of WhatsApp usage to support learning in remote teaching. However, before conducting instructional activities on WhatsApp, the



faculty and management of academic institutes ensure suitable conditions, such as the availability of mobile or other WhatsApp-supported devices. WhatsApp chat provides opportunities for students to discuss tutorial sessions and course content to improve learning (Yeboah & Nyagorme, 2022).

New media technology adoption is becoming a trend in the education field. Students domesticate and incorporate WhatsApp class groups for learning. WhatsApp class group primarily provokes collaborative learning. The leading challenge of WhatsApp class groups is irrelevant posts or content (Udenze & Oshionebo, 2020). New technologies are facilitating scholarship, improving performance and discovering new learning paths. University students' readiness, perception, usage and attitude concerning WhatsApp class groups are important for learning purposes. Unfortunately, WhatsApp usage among students is mostly for non-academic purposes and less for learning purposes. However, they have a positive attitude towards this application for teaching and learning purposes. Major challenges with WhatsApp usage are that students are reluctant to learn collaboratively, independently and actively via WhatsApp groups (Rahmadi, 2020). WhatsApp is beneficial in improving foreign languages such as English. Students view WhatsApp as a source of enhancing writing skills and helpful in learning grammar (Khan et al., 2024). WhatsApp instant messaging facilitates not only learning but also teaching. WhatsApp application is an efficient, powerful communication media that provides authentic, meaningful and engaging learning experiences in online English learning classrooms (Sujarwo et al., (2024).

The instant WhatsApp messaging application enables interactive, quick, personalized group participant interactions. However, it is important to know about the purposes, nature, conflicts, affordances and limitations of discourse in these platforms and their effects on teacher-student relationships and social class climate. Teachers prefer WhatsApp messaging applications over other social media platforms for academic matters (Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018) as digital platforms like WhatsApp have become instrumental in the learning and teaching process (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Research studies are needed to emphasize learning through social network sites used for learning and teaching (Greenhow & Askaril, 2017)

Integration of WhatsApp for social networking among pre-service teachers can enhance learning processes and can be used to cooperate with other members through Web communication (Konyefa & Nwanze, 2020; Naidoo & Kopung, 2020). Observational learning based on social learning theory allows learners to gain information or skills through observations and others' experiences (Li et al., 2023). According to learning from the experiences of others helps in adopting new behaviors to effectively deal with challenging and tough tasks (Bandura, 2009; Li et al., 2023). Teachers mostly use WhatsApp in blended learning models such as the station rotation and flipped classroom (Nida et al., 2020). Considering the above-mentioned research studies, the present research explored the challenges, prospects and ethical concerns of using WhatsApp classroom groups as a learning community.

### Objectives

1. Explore the prospects of using WhatsApp classroom groups as a learning community.
2. Investigate challenges faced by students during WhatsApp classroom groups as a learning community.



3. Analyze students' ethical concerns about using WhatsApp classroom groups as a learning community.

### Research Questions

1. Do WhatsApp classroom groups work as a learning community prospect for students?
2. Are there any challenges students faced during the use of WhatsApp groups as a learning community meant for classroom-related tasks/assignments?
3. Are students having ethical apprehensions about using WhatsApp classroom groups as a learning community?

### Significance of Research

Present research is important because it makes a valuable contribution to the literature on the use of social media platforms for academic purposes among undergraduates, especially WhatsApp. The results of the study may help teachers, students, and administrators benefit from the positive aspects, address the challenges, and consider the ethical concerns of WhatsApp before using it as a tool for academic learning. Teachers may also gain insights into working with the digital generation. More importantly, this research can serve as a useful reference for future researchers to support their studies and identify research gaps.

### Literature Review

The literature review section of the study aimed to analyze the challenges, prospects and ethical concerns of WhatsApp classroom groups. High smartphone access promoted the use of WhatsApp groups among teachers and students, which supports learning by providing access to online resources. Various media such as voice notes, videos, and pictures, in addition to the availability of an instructor regardless of time and place, make WhatsApp an effective tool for learning as well as teaching. With all this WhatsApp usage for teaching and learning, there are both advantages (instructional, educational, or technical) and disadvantages (eyestrain and message flooding). However, these disadvantages can be resolved. Enhancing the effectiveness of WhatsApp as a learning tool may be done by enabling Wi-Fi in the college (Gon & Rawekar, 2017).

New technologies are growing in popularity in educational settings. Social media platforms are pertinent in developing the future of education. The WhatsApp platform can stimulate collaborative learning among students. Use of WhatsApp is engendered due to its usefulness and ease of use among students. Students use WhatsApp class groups mostly for collaborative learning. However, students also face challenges in class WhatsApp groups such as sharing of irrelevant content and posts. WhatsApp groups in the context of class are used to enhance learning (Udenze & Oshionebo, 2020).

University students are mostly using the WhatsApp platform as a tool for collaborative learning. WhatsApp is also facilitating educators for learning in Malaysia. The use of WhatsApp among students of higher education promotes a learning environment that affects their academic effectiveness. WhatsApp is becoming popular among Malaysian university students. Mostly, students use this platform for use for educational and social purposes. It is easy to use and effective in improving team effectiveness and academic achievement. Moreover, it has a limited influence on openness and cohesion of team effectiveness (Mahmud & Burnard, 2019).

A longitudinal study of two years was conducted by Durgungoz and Durgungoz (2022) on the use of WhatsApp in promoting a sustained learning environment among mathematics teachers in their secondary school classes in Turkey. Students in the





WhatsApp group interact mostly after school hours. Teachers play a communicative role in leading and encouraging group members to continue engagement. The teacher's sincere and informal representation on social media is crucial through a constructive communication style with students, as it connects the students even after school hours for learning purposes.

WhatsApp among university students could be used as an effective platform for facilitating communication, promoting interaction, and alliance between teachers and students. WhatsApp provides versatile modes of communication to promote learning activities, for example, text messaging, group chats, video calls, and voice calls (Vyas & Vyas, 2017) inside the classroom and especially outside the classroom (Al-Sayed & Al-Zoubi, 2017). WhatsApp can be actively used across various subjects. Aktas and Can (2019), in a research study, identified that WhatsApp use in the English course affects students' self-efficacy beliefs and attitudes in both listening and reading skills. Students prefer the WhatsApp social media platform for educational purposes over Twitter or Facebook due to its ease of communication style and access. It can be used for official communication by the teachers sharing announcements and coordinating learning activities (Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018).

WhatsApp usage for educational purposes has become popular among educational institutions in the COVID-19 era. It helps in developing students' networks to facilitate learning and enhance the academic engagement of students. WhatsApp focuses on a community of learning to enrich academic presentation (Chitanana, 2024). WhatsApp groups provide opportunities to students to conduct discussions regarding course areas even outside of class time, which increases pupils' time on tasks. However, in case all subjects have their own WhatsApp groups, then it would be difficult for students to engage and manage all activities. In most cases, students were asked to share their opinions regarding WhatsApp usage, but in the case of teachers, results would be different (Binsuhaim, 2025).

In Small WhatsApp groups, students gain more confidence and show willingness to take part as compared to larger groups. In larger groups, information becomes confusing due to overlaps of threads. Sharing of other resources, such as websites and YouTube videos, makes the information more useful on WhatsApp. It is also used to support online meetings (Cronje & Van Zyl, 2022). Students get more involved in out-of-class WhatsApp activities as compared to in-class activities. Students may learn activities, such as technical skills, communication skills, and managerial skills. WhatsApp serves multiple purposes, for example, discussions, information sharing, assessment, feedback, and serves as a flipped classroom concept (Nirgude & Naik, 2025).

WhatsApp can also be used to share subject-related material as a social scaffold to others. WhatsApp is a suitable means of communication with a comfortable learning atmosphere that provides peer learning support, facilitates exam planning, and a sense of belonging. It also has drawbacks that should be addressed to maintain its effectiveness. WhatsApp groups facilitate a traditional learning environment and provide opportunities for student engagement, which is difficult in the traditional classroom due to time constraints. Discussion and teamwork among classmates help them to develop knowledge to improve the learning process (Binsuhaim, 2025).



### Research Methodology

The present research followed a quantitative research approach with a descriptive research method. A research questionnaire was designed to explore the students' perspectives about prospects, challenges, and ethical concerns about using WhatsApp classroom groups as a learning community. A total of 108 students of B.Ed (Hons) classes participated in the survey. The purposive sampling technique was used for selecting the sample of students. Class WhatsApp groups are made at the beginning of each semester. Throughout the semester, these WhatsApp groups were used as learning communities, and various subject-related discussions were conducted in these groups among students. At the end of the semester, students were asked to share their experiences about prospects, challenges, and ethical concerns regarding part of WhatsApp classroom groups as a learning community.

### Research Instruments

Researchers developed a closed-ended research questionnaire based on three sections: prospects, challenges and ethical concerns regarding part of WhatsApp classroom groups. There was a total of 37 research question items. Fourteen items were under the category of Prospects, fourteen were under the category of challenges of WhatsApp group as a classroom learning community and nine statements were under the category of Ethical concerns of using WhatsApp groups as a classroom learning community. The research instrument was a point scale ranging from Strongly agree to Strongly disagree. For interpreting the mean values, Nyutu et al. (2021) research study was taken as baseline. The means are as follows: Strongly Disagree is interpreted in the range of 1.00 - 1.80, while the point range of Disagree is from 1.81 - 2.60, the point range for Neutral is 2.61 - 3.40, for Agree point range is 3.41 - 4.20 and for Strongly Agree point range is 4.21 - 5.00.

### Data Analysis

**Table 1: Prospects of WhatsApp Group as a Classroom Learning Community**

S. No	Statements	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Enhances teamwork and collaboration skills	3.64	1.115	Agree
2	Provides feedback to students	3.61	1.040	Agree
3	Supports convenience and flexibility in learning	3.65	1.017	Agree
4	Provide personalized support and learning	3.61	1.109	Agree
5	Increases access to diverse viewpoints	3.69	1.098	Agree
6	Improves online communication skills	3.81	1.086	Agree
7	Increases the motivation and engagement of students	3.76	1.118	Agree
8	Helps in enhancing discussion and informal learning	3.70	1.096	Agree
9	Provides access to professional consultation from teachers	3.80	1.021	Agree
10	Effective for sharing knowledge and learning from classmates	3.70	1.096	Agree
11	Develop professional links between teachers and students	3.64	1.063	Agree
13	Increase access to learning resources	3.72	1.101	Agree
14	Enhance problem-solving and critical thinking	3.62	1.048	Agree

In Table 1, the results of the mean scores showed that most students agreed on the potential of WhatsApp as a learning community. They believed that WhatsApp as a learning platform enhances teamwork and collaboration skills, provides feedback to



students, offers convenience and flexibility in learning, delivers personalized support and learning, grants access to diverse viewpoints, improves online communication skills, increases student motivation and engagement, fosters discussion and informal learning, allows access to professional consultation from teachers, is effective for sharing knowledge and learning from classmates, develops professional connections between teachers and students, increases access to learning resources, and enhances problem-solving and critical thinking.

**Table 2: Challenges of WhatsApp Group as a Classroom Learning Community**

S. No	Statements	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Excessive messages and information overload	3.57	1.193	Agree
2	Difficulty in staying engaged and focused	3.46	.990	Agree
3	Technical problems, such as connectivity	3.52	1.046	Agree
4	Communication difficulties or language barriers	3.41	1.085	Agree
5	Diverse learning preferences and styles	3.53	.952	Agree
6	Conflicting viewpoints among group members	3.43	.978	Agree
7	In-disciplined behavior and distractions in the online atmosphere	3.53	1.080	Agree
8	Limited support and feedback from teachers	3.44	.930	Agree
9	Conflicts in scheduling group discussions and meeting times	3.51	1.018	Agree
10	Confirming the equal participation of students	3.48	1.018	Agree
11	Handling irrelevant off-topic messages	3.51	.991	Agree
12	Limited access to resources	3.37	.963	Neutral
13	Balancing offline and online tasks	3.50	1.081	Agree
14	Difficulty in seeking out clarification or asking questions	3.52	.981	Agree

In Table 2, the results of the mean values showed that students agreed that using WhatsApp as a classroom learning community posed challenges such as excessive messages and information overload, difficulty in staying engaged and focused, technical problems like connectivity issues, communication difficulties or language barriers, diverse learning preferences and styles, conflicting viewpoints among group members, indiscipline behaviors and distractions in the online environment, limited support and feedback from teachers, conflicts in scheduling group discussions and meetings, ensuring equal participation by students, handling irrelevant off-topic messages, balancing offline and online tasks, and difficulty in seeking clarification or asking questions. Moreover, students responded Neutral to limited access to resources as a challenge.

**Table 3: Ethical Concerns of Using WhatsApp Groups as a Classroom Learning Community**

S. No	Statements	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	Intellectual property rights	3.52	1.054	Agree
2.	Respectful communication and online etiquette	3.55	1.097	Agree
3.	Anonymity and confidentiality of expressed opinion	3.42	1.033	Agree
4.	Cheating and academic integrity	3.38	1.074	Neutral
5.	Authority relationships and power dynamics	3.44	1.088	Agree



6. Online safety and security	3.33	1.023	Neutral
7. Boundaries between academic and personal spaces	3.44	1.035	Agree
8. Accountability and transparency in online collaboration	3.40	1.041	Agree
9. Potential for disinformation and misinformation	3.46	1.054	Agree

In Table 3, the results of the mean value showed that students responded in the category of agree while responding to ethical concerns of using WhatsApp group as a classroom learning community. Students showed ethical concerns of intellectual property rights, respectful communication and online etiquette, anonymity and confidentiality of expressed opinion, authority relationships and power dynamics, boundaries between academic and personal spaces, accountability and transparency in online collaboration and potential for disinformation and misinformation. Moreover, students responded in the category of Neutral about cheating & academic integrity and online safety & security,

### Discussion and Conclusion

Present research analyzed the prospects, challenges, and ethical concerns of students' classroom WhatsApp groups as a learning community. Stevens (2024) research study strengthened the present research by explaining the need for learning communities as a helpful tool for enriching critical thinking, problem-solving capacities, and professional development of students. Cronje and Van Zyl (2022) are of the view that WhatsApp groups as a community are effective in facilitating relationships, access, and vision. Students in WhatsApp groups like interactivity and sharing of content. Messages of students on WhatsApp learning communities are both administrative and academic in nature. However, further research studies are required to find out how students support one another outside of WhatsApp groups. Almogheerah (2020) found WhatsApp as a significant informal learning tool and suggested further research studies to conduct on the effectiveness of WhatsApp in support of formal classroom learning.

Udenze and Oshionebo (2020) also identified in their study that the WhatsApp platform can stimulate collaborative learning among students due to its usefulness. Students mostly use WhatsApp class groups for collaborative learning. However, students also face challenges in class WhatsApp groups such as sharing of irrelevant content and posts. WhatsApp groups in the context of class are used to enhance learning.

Results of Binsuhaim (2025) study supported the results of the present research and claimed that WhatsApp can be used to develop an understanding of course content to provide social support to students. Students also perceive it as a valuable tool. However, certain disadvantages should be considered while using WhatsApp in academic settings. Present research highlighted various challenges of using WhatsApp groups as a classroom learning community. Rahmadi (2020) research study also supported the results of the present research that students become reluctant to learn collaboratively, independently and actively via WhatsApp groups. Gon and Rawekar (2017) revealed that the drawbacks of WhatsApp are eyestrain and message flooding, which can be fixed.

The present research identified the perception of students, while teachers are also key players in the teaching and learning process, which is one of the limitations. Moreover, students' learning outcomes were not considered. Additionally, only views of students were taken about WhatsApp groups which are administered by teachers, while students also make their own groups for academic purposes, which can be discussed in future studies.





### Recommendations

1. Teachers may set rules and regulations with participative decision-making with students regarding WhatsApp groups as a learning community to avoid undisciplined behavior and distractions in the online environment.
2. Teachers may also set time for communication in WhatsApp groups outside of the classroom and school, so maximum benefit can be achieved.
3. Teachers may discourage irrelevant posts and encourage relevant discussion in WhatsApp as a learning community group.
4. Teachers may provide credit to those students who share useful information to intact the intellectual property rights of students.
5. Training may be provided to both students and teachers regarding online safety.

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