

## EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF WHATSAPP AS A LEARNING SUPPORT TOOL IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** WhatsApp, originally designed for personal messaging, has become a widely used tool in educational settings due to its ease of access, real-time communication, and support for multimedia sharing. It facilitates collaborative learning, enhances student engagement, and supports teacher-student interaction. Despite these benefits, concerns such as misinformation, privacy issues, and increased pressure on educators to remain constantly available have been raised. **Material and Methods:** This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional survey to explore students' perceptions of WhatsApp as a learning support tool. The participants were 86 undergraduate students from Government Girls College, Gurugram, selected through convenience sampling. Data were gathered using a structured online questionnaire comprising 16 close-ended items rated on a five-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistical techniques were applied to analyze frequencies and percentages. **Result:** The results indicated a predominantly positive perception of WhatsApp's role in academic learning. A majority (88.3%) used WhatsApp for academic purposes, and over 90% found it easy to use and effective in accessing learning materials and connecting with peers and instructors. Students also acknowledged its benefits in promoting collaborative learning and quick resolution of doubts. However, 57% identified WhatsApp as time-consuming and potentially addictive. Concerns about misinformation, eye strain, sleep disturbances, and compromised privacy were also reported by a significant proportion of respondents. **Conclusion:** While students recognize certain drawbacks, the findings affirm WhatsApp's value as an educational tool. To optimize its impact, educators should adopt structured usage guidelines and provide digital literacy support, ensuring its effective and responsible integration into academic practices.

### INTRODUCTION

Originally designed for personal messaging, WhatsApp Messenger has increasingly become an essential tool for collaborative learning among college students. Its widespread use among adolescents and higher education communities worldwide has enabled it to function as a platform for ubiquitous learning.[1] Through mobile-based group interactions, learners are able to construct knowledge by engaging in questioning, critical analysis, opinion sharing, and active discussions. These interactions promote deeper understanding and help students to explore multiple perspectives, enriching their educational experience.[2,3]

Bajpai et al,[4] highlight a growing trend in the use of instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp within the field of education. With the widespread availability of smartphones, WhatsApp has become

an easily accessible tool that supports teaching and learning anytime and anywhere. Its constant connectivity makes it particularly convenient for both students and educators, enhancing the overall educational experience. WhatsApp has also helped strengthen the relationship between teachers and students, contributing to better learning outcomes.[5] When used for educational purposes, WhatsApp opens up numerous opportunities it promotes peer collaboration, simplifies communication with instructors, and creates an interactive and collaborative learning environment.[6-8] From the students' point of view, WhatsApp is a highly effective tool that supports learning. Its easy-to-use interface and compatibility with different devices make it a practical choice for educational purposes.[9] Students value the platform's ability to support multimedia communication enabling the exchange of text, images, videos, and audio files

which helps create a more engaging learning experience. In a study by Maske et al,<sup>[10]</sup> students reported enjoying learning through WhatsApp and noted that it encouraged more active participation compared to traditional methods, especially when seeking clarification. Pimmer et al,<sup>[11]</sup> found that WhatsApp's informal, real-time messaging environment made students feel more at ease when asking questions, sharing thoughts, and engaging in discussions. Similarly, research by Rosenberg and Asterhan,<sup>[12]</sup> revealed that students appreciated WhatsApp for its ease of access, ability to foster a sense of community, privacy features, and flexible communication options. However, they also pointed out some downsides, such as feeling overwhelmed by excessive messages.

While WhatsApp is a powerful tool for communication and collaboration, it also presents challenges particularly for teachers who must manage multiple group chats and ongoing conversations at once.<sup>[13]</sup> This added responsibility can lead to stress and burnout, ultimately reducing the platform's effectiveness as an educational aid. Another key concern is protecting students' privacy and personal data when using WhatsApp. According to Aizenkot and Kashy-Rosenbaum,<sup>[14]</sup> the platform can expose students to risks such as cyberbullying and the unauthorized sharing of inappropriate content.

Given the potential challenges and concerns surrounding the educational use of WhatsApp, it is crucial to establish clear, effective practices to ensure its safe and meaningful integration into learning environments. This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of WhatsApp as a learning support tool, with a focus on its effectiveness, usability, and overall impact on their educational experience.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Design

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design to explore students' perceptions of WhatsApp as a learning assistance tool. The cross-sectional approach enabled the collection of data at a single point in time, capturing a snapshot of attitudes and experiences within the target population.

### Participants and Sampling

The study sample comprised 86 undergraduate students enrolled at Government Girls College, Sector 14, Gurugram. Participants were selected using a non-probability convenience sampling

method. The sample size was determined based on practical and logistical considerations appropriate for exploratory research. While a formal power analysis was not conducted, the selected sample is consistent with comparable survey-based studies in educational research and was deemed adequate for identifying prevailing patterns and trends in student responses.

### Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The instrument included 16 close-ended items designed to assess various dimensions of students' experiences with and perceptions of WhatsApp as a learning aid. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The use of a Likert scale allowed for nuanced quantification of attitudes and perceptions across multiple facets of WhatsApp usage. Participants who willingly agreed to take part in the study completed the online questionnaire.

### Data Analysis

The collected data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis using frequency and percentage distributions to summarize the responses for each questionnaire item. These analyses facilitated the identification of prevailing trends, patterns, and sentiments among students regarding WhatsApp's utility in academic contexts. The analytical focus was on describing perceptions rather than testing hypotheses or inferring relationships, consistent with the study's exploratory design.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore students' perceptions of WhatsApp as a learning assistance tool. Data were collected using a structured Google Form containing 16 close-ended items related to the perceived advantages and limitations of using WhatsApp in an educational context. The findings revealed a generally positive attitude toward WhatsApp as a supportive learning tool. As presented in Table 1, 88.3% of students (76 out of 86) reported that they were already using WhatsApp for academic purposes. Furthermore, 75.5% of participants agreed that WhatsApp plays an important role in enhancing learning. Notably, 98.8% of respondents indicated that WhatsApp is both easily accessible and user-friendly. These results are consistent with the findings of Hossain et al,<sup>[15]</sup> who observed that around 87% of students found WhatsApp helpful for learning community medicine, citing its convenience, familiarity, and effectiveness in supporting flexible learning.

**Table 1: Students' Perceptions of WhatsApp's Advantages and Limitations for Academic Use**

Advantages & Limitations of WhatsApp	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Using WhatsApp for Academic Purpose	26(30.2%)	50(58.1%)	7(8.1%)	3(3.5%)	0(0%)
Important medium of effective learning	23(26.7%)	42(48.8%)	16(18.6%)	5(5.8%)	0(0%)
Easily available and simple to use	40(46.5%)	45(52.3%)	1(1.2%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Easier to connect with classmates and	42(48.8%)	40(46.5%)	4(4.7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

teachers					
Helpful in collaborative learning with classmates	27(31.4%)	50(58.1%)	7(8.1%)	1(1.2%)	1(1.2%)
Availability of learning material (ppts, videos, notes) is enhanced	48(55.8%)	32(37.2%)	6(7%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Interaction with teacher increased	27(31.4%)	49(57%)	8(9.3%)	2(2.3%)	0(0%)
Inquiries are quickly addressed	21(24.4%)	56(65.1%)	6(7%)	3(3.5%)	0(0%)
Relationship between student and teacher improved	26(30.2%)	43(50%)	12(14%)	4(4.7%)	1(1.2%)
WhatsApp group discussion facilitates learning	20(23.3%)	54(62.8%)	11(12.8%)	1(1.2%)	0(0%)
Online lecture in addition to offline classes leads to better understanding	11(12.8%)	52(60.5%)	18(20.9%)	4(4.7%)	1(1.2%)
WhatsApp is Time consuming and addictive	12(14%)	37(43%)	23(26.7%)	13(15.1%)	1(1.2%)
Inaccurate or false information can be spread	15(17.4%)	37(43%)	20(23.3%)	10(11.6%)	4(4.7%)
Linked with sleep problem and eye strain	15(17.4%)	31(36%)	22(25.6%)	16(18.6%)	2(2.3%)
Privacy of both students and teachers can be compromised	12(14%)	36(41.9%)	24(27.9%)	13(15.1%)	1(1.2%)
Increased expectations of students for teachers to be always accessible on WhatsApp	9(10.5%)	45(52.3%)	25(29.1%)	6(7%)	1(1.2%)

A significant majority (95.3%) also agreed that WhatsApp has made it easier to stay connected with classmates and instructors. Additionally, 89.5% of students acknowledged that WhatsApp facilitates collaborative learning among peers, while 93% stated that the platform improves access to learning materials. These results align with Tulgar's,<sup>[16]</sup> study, which emphasized WhatsApp's role in enhancing communication and collaboration in academic settings through its real-time interaction features and support for group-based learning.

Furthermore, 88.4% of students reported that WhatsApp has increased their interaction with teachers. This finding supports Ujakpa et al,<sup>[17]</sup> who found that WhatsApp fosters greater engagement between students and educators, as well as among peers. Similarly, 89.5% of respondents agreed that questions and doubts are addressed more promptly via WhatsApp. Moreover, 80.2% noted an improvement in their relationship with teachers due to WhatsApp-based communication.

About 86.1% of students believed that WhatsApp groups serve as a valuable platform for discussion beyond the physical classroom. Additionally, 73.3% of participants felt that using WhatsApp in conjunction with traditional offline classes enhanced their understanding of academic concepts. These findings are in line with Gon and Rawekar,<sup>[18]</sup> who identified 24/7 accessibility and facilitator availability as key strengths of WhatsApp-based learning. In their study, over 86% of students recognized these as major benefits.

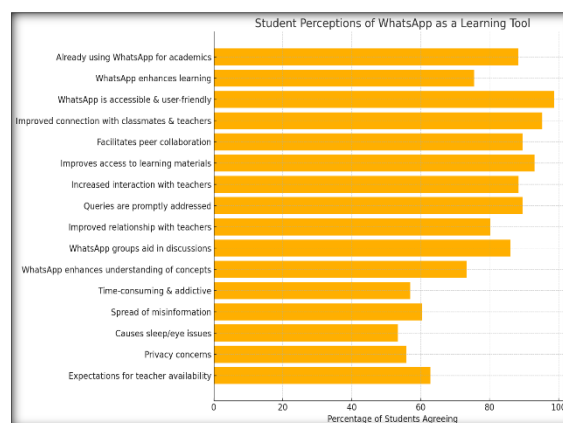
Despite its many advantages, students also acknowledged several challenges associated with using WhatsApp for educational purposes. For example, 57% of respondents indicated that WhatsApp can be time-consuming and potentially addictive. Furthermore, 60.4% expressed concern about the ease with which misinformation can spread through the platform. This mirrors the findings of Herrero et al,<sup>[19]</sup> whose study of 480 adolescents

revealed that users often share content aligned with their interests regardless of its accuracy.

Other reported drawbacks included health concerns: 53.4% of students linked WhatsApp use to sleep disturbances and eye strain. Additionally, 55.9% of respondents raised concerns about the potential violation of teacher and student privacy. Udem et al,<sup>[20]</sup> also highlighted growing unease about the security of personal data shared in WhatsApp groups. In light of these concerns, scholars such as Nyasulu and Chawinga,<sup>[21]</sup> have recommended that educators provide guidance and support to students, especially those less proficient with digital platforms, to ensure safe and responsible use.

Another notable issue raised by 62.8% of respondents was the increasing expectation for teachers to remain constantly available on WhatsApp, even beyond working hours. As noted by Gon and Rawekar,<sup>[18]</sup> such expectations can place undue pressure on educators and complicate the task of timely feedback and individual student support.

Below (Figure 1) is a visual representation illustrating the percentage of students who either agreed or strongly agreed with the statements presented in the questionnaire.



**Figure 1: Student Agreement on the Educational Use of WhatsApp**

Overall, while students acknowledged certain limitations, the majority expressed a strong preference for the benefits WhatsApp offers in enhancing communication, engagement, and access to learning resources. The findings indicate that, despite its challenges, WhatsApp is widely perceived as a valuable tool for supporting learning when used appropriately within structured educational frameworks.

## CONCLUSION

WhatsApp facilitates fast and direct interaction between students, teachers, and peers, promoting collaboration and allowing for quick responses to questions. Despite its benefits, students recognize certain challenges, such as the potential spread of misinformation, concerns over privacy, and the pressure on teachers to be constantly available. Overall, WhatsApp is viewed as a valuable educational tool that supports communication, teamwork, and easy access to learning materials. To further improve teaching and learning outcomes, educators are encouraged to creatively integrate WhatsApp into their instructional strategies. Moreover, conducting structured research is recommended to explore and enhance the platform's role in making classroom education more effective.

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