Use of Whatsapp in Teaching Sepedi Home Language at a South African University

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ABSTRACT:
This study aims to investigate the experiences of fourth-year students regarding the use of WhatsApp group chat for teaching and learning of Sepedi Home Language drawing from social media theory. Qualitative method approach was adopted in this study and data was collected through semi-structured interviews with six fourth-year pre-service teachers registered for a Bachelor of Education in Senior Phase and FET degree majoring in Sepedi Home Language and Life Orientation. Results indicated that the use of the WhatsApp mediation was more effective than the regular instruction in improving the critique writing and reading proficiency of the participants which helps in increasing their motivation for learning. The implication of this study is that lecturers can draw from the findings of this study that technology can be effective in improving Sepedi Home Language pre-service teachers' academic literacy and interpersonal skills. Future research that could emerge from the present study could examine the use of other social media platforms in Sepedi Home Language classroom to facilitate the process of students' acquisition of academic literacy skills.

Keywords: WhatsApp group chat, pre-service teachers', COVID-19 lockdown, academic literacy, interpersonal skills.

Introdution

Coronavirus pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide resulting in widespread closure of schools, colleges and universities as a measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Motlhaka, 2021). Coronavirus pandemic has been declared as world pandemic, referring to the WHO decision as stated by Abidin, Rumansyah and Arizona (2020) that the cases spread outside the city of Wuhan in January 30, 2020. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the 2019 novel virus outbreak (2019-CoV) an International Public Health Emergency (PHEIC) outbreak. COVID19 made the world to realize that in the present world one does not have to wake up and go to school but with added resources, education can be a realized irrespective of one's location. During the pandemic, learning was carried out online (Muliani 2023:9). Kheryadi, K. (2018), also states that the world shifted the mode of education from traditional to online because of pandemic.

Social media as a learning platform makes it possible for students to do self-study, exchange ideas, give comments, and submit the assignments in order to improve their grammar knowledge and writing ability (Al-Jarrah et al., 2019). This resource enables sharing audio voice, images, texts, documents, links, emoji's and creating groups with a 256-person limit (Blog WhatsApp, 2022). 4IR has taken the world by storm and many things are made simple and

quicker. It is much simpler and quicker because it does not depend on location of a person but technology can bring people close to each other and provides students with the ability to get more useful information to connect with learning groups and other educational systems to make education convenient (Dahdal, 2020; et al., and Yadav, 2021). Even when the Lecturer or a student is in hospital but having access to phone and internet, the hospital can turn into a classroom. Even the relationship between the Lecturer and the students could be more closer because of the use of WhatsApp. WhatsApp is an app which allows communication between people. As one of the technological advancements in mobile communication, WhatsApp is often employed as a learning tool in various fields of study. Lai (2016) investigated the use of WhatsApp in vocabulary building and found a significant correlation between a learner's chat and vocabulary gain. The use of WhatsApp as a technological tool facilitated the strategies and methodologies of teachers to teach, as well as helping students to use this tool for their learning. Rubio et al. (2021). Given the above background, this study aims to investigate the use of WhatsApp in teaching Sepedi Home Language at South African university.

Aim of this study

This paper aims to investigate the use of WhatsApp in teaching Sepedi Home Language at South African university

Questions of the study

1. How does WhatsApp group chat assist students in developing their academic literacy skills?

2. How does WhatsApp group assist in developing students' Sepedi Home Language proficiency?

Research Method

In this study, qualitative research method was used, which Haradhan (2018) says that form of social action that stresses the way people interpret, and make sense of their experiences to understand their social reality.

Sampling

The sample of this paper included one Sepedi Home language lecturer and 6 fourth- year students were sampled using simple random sampling method from rural South African university..

Data Collection

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews to investigate the use of WhatsApp in teaching Sepedi Home Language at a South African university.

Data analysis

Data analysis is when the investigator prepares all the collected data to be more understandable and manageable (Modiba, 2018). The study used the thematic data analysis to analyse the collected data to identify, analyse, and report patterns within the collected data in determining the effect of the use of WhatsApp in teaching Sepedi Home Language at a South African university.

Discussion Of Fidings

The aim of this paper is to investigate the use of WhatsApp in teaching Sepedi Home Language at South African University. The findings of this study are presented in accordance with research questions as indicated below:

How does WhatsApp group chat assist students in developing their academic literacy skills?

This research question seeks to determine how WhatsApp group chat assist students in developing their academic literacy skills. The respondent indicated the following:

Lecturer: "WhatsApp group chat assist students in developing their academic literacy skills because they can regularly read from where they are and they also have their peer students and the lecturer who will assist at any given time in case they need help."

According to the response of the lecturer, the students benefit more in terms of the knowledge and skills of reading and writing without any hindrance as they will be learning Sepedi Home language because they can regularly read from where they are and they also have their peer

students and the lecturer who will assist at any given time in case they need help. This findings concur with Motlhaka (2020) who found that WhatsApp group chat allows students to communicate, collaborate and encourage remote learning to disseminate knowledge. In other words, WhatsApp group chat is a good place to check class notes or homework posted by the lecturer and engage in academic discussions in order to improve students' academic performance. This suggests that students are always having access to the WhatsApp group and they are always expected to communicate (reading and writing) on the group. Their participation will ensure that they end up knowing everything about the language because the lecturer is always in class with students at any given time.

How does the WhatsApp group assist in developing students' Sepedi home language proficiency?

This research question seeks to determine how WhatsApp group assists in developing students' Sepedi Home Language proficiency: The respondent indicated the following:

Lecturer: It helps with the Sepedi Home Language proficiency because they can communicate with their peer student and ask questions at any given time if the need arise, irrespective of the time and distance. Sharing of knowledge and transference from the lecturer stays on the WhatsApp for long making the students that take time to understand to have access to a repetition of listening or reading.

According to the lecturer as indicated above, the communication between the lecturer and the students and the students with their peer students makes the students to be highly skilled in Sepedi Home language. They can able to share the knowledge and transference from the lecturer stays on the WhatsApp for long making the students that take time to understand to have access to a repetition of listening or reading. The findings concur with Khan (2021) who state that WhatsApp develop vocabulary for speaking performance. In addition, Saville-Troike and Barto (2016) assert that proficiency in speaking skills learners need to have the adequate vocabulary to convey meaning or to take part discussion. This eliminates the feeling of being wrong or embarrassed among the learners. The other important aspect is the access to the repetition of the message or reading the text, which will allow the students to revisit the information until they understand them. In case of not understanding, questions can still be posed at any given time to get more clarity for more understanding on Sepedi Home Language.

As a lecturer what helps you to see whether students are with you during WhatsApp class session?

This research question seeks to determine what helps lecturers to see whether students are participating during WhatsApp class session. The respondent indicated the following:

Lecturer :"During WhatsApp class sessions I use my voice as a tool of teaching, I can choose any students to answer a question if I have one and that will enable me to see if they are present or not. I also have a class list that I use to call out all students before, during and at the end of the class to ensure that all of them attend my lessons."

The lecturer indicates that he/she uses his/her voice, meaning either the students might also use voice notes or write in their responses and comments. The lecturer indicates that at the beginning of the class and at the end of the class, he/she call out all the students using the class list. This will help the lecturer to know the students who attended the class and those who did not attend. These findings concur with Afzal's (2023) findings which state that WhatsApp group chat acts as a bridge to facilitate communication inside and outside the classroom in addressing the needs of Sepedi Home Language students.

What is the biggest role of WhatsApp in teaching students?

This research question seeks establish the role of WhatsApp in teaching students. The respondent indicated the following:

Lecturer: "The biggest role of WhatsApp in teaching students is to ensure that they are able to communicate with me as the lecturer and their peers without being challenged by the meeting place and the amount of the time allocated for the class, because if there are questions and answers, they continue even when the class is over".

WhatsApp has proven to be useful because according to the lecturer, the communication between the lecturers and students are not challenged by the meeting place accessibility and the class time allocation, because the students and the lecturers communicate wherever they are at any given time. The above findings are similar with Sari and Safitri (2023) who state that WhatsApp applications help students in learning during online classes. In addition, Motlhaka (2020) found that WhatsApp is the most preferred collaborative learning platform and valuable tool for communication of pedagogical information among students and lecturers. This also gives the students the chance to revisit the WhatsApp and ask or comment on anything that needs to be attended. Upon revisiting, new perspectives may arise and that makes the usage of WhatsApp more important. WhatsApp can facilitate synchronous communication: Instructors can reach out to learners, learners can reach out Instructors and also reach out to their peers as well (Ujakpa, 2018).

What encouraged you to use WhatsApp in learning Sepedi Home Language?

This research question seeks to investigate what encouraged students to use WhatsApp in learning Sepedi Home Language. The respondents indicated the following:

Student 1, It is an easier tool to communicate and also to share study materials on. In that way I got encouraged to actually use it because I was assured that it would not waste my time.

Student 2, It becomes easy for us to learn Sepedi Home Language, because we communicate with purely, read and write using WhatsApp.

Student 3, We are able to do oral presentation in pure Sepedi. Our lecturer can be able to monitor and correct us if we use wrong words because we use recordings.

According to student 1, it is more easier to communicate and to share study material through WhatsApp and it is not time consuming. Student 2 mentioned that it become easy for them to learn Sepedi Home Language because they communicate purely, read and write with WhatsApp. Student 3 stated that they are able to do oral presentation in pure Sepedi. The lecturer can be able to monitor and correct them wrong words because they use recordings. The finding complements what Saritepeci et al. (2019) and Fischer and Yang (2022) found that WhatsApp use on reading comprehension among EFL learners has been largely unexplored. In addition, Bouhnik and Deshen (2014) asserted that the WhatsApp group the learners used improved interaction; promoted the social atmosphere; fostered dialog, increased sharing among learners and created an enjoyable atmosphere and a profound collaboration with peers.

Did the usage of WhatsApp as a learning tool improved your understanding in Sepedi Home Language? How?

This research question seeks to determine the usage of WhatsApp as a learning tool improved your understanding in Sepedi Home Language: The respondents indicated the following:

Student 4, "WhatsApp for reading Sepedi activities, I've improved in my reading comprehension skills. The discussions, interactions and inputs with my classmates and Lecturer have helped me better understand the text."

Student 5 "I haven't noticed a significant improvement in my reading comprehension skills since using WhatsApp for reading Sepedi activities. I still prefer reading the text on my own and then discussing it with my classmates and Lecturer face to face."

According to the student listed above, to use WhatsApp as a learning tool helped them to improve in their understanding of Sepedi Home Language. Student 4 indicated that the improvement was created by the discussions,

interactions and inputs of the peer students and the lecturer. Students 5 is adamant that improvement is not evident because in his/her case, preference is still on the face to face discussion not WhatsApp. This suggests that there is still an issue of adapting to the usage of WhatsApp, where there are people who are still not comfortable or do not see the need of the usage thereof. These findings concur with earlier findings of Hamad (2017) because he stated that students agreed that WhatsApp helped them to develop their reading skill, but is for those who have smartphone.

How does students access reading materials from lecturer and to other students?

This research question seeks to determine how does students access reading materials from Lecturer and to other students. The respondent indicated the following:

Student 6 "I access a variety of Sepedi reading materials on WhatsApp, including fiction and non-fiction books, as well as articles and news updates. I enjoy having a range of materials to choose from."

The above response demonstrates that it is important to give students Sepedi reading materials that will help them to improve their reading and writing skills. Likewise, the delivery of materials is commonly done by sharing files through WhatsApp messages. In support of the findings, Mujayanah (2023) states that the reason for using WhatsApp is to access reading materials, practices reading comprehension skills, and receive feedback from peers and teachers. Furthermore, Ujakpa (2018) mentions that WhatsApp helps to make access to lecture materials, informed lecture activities and schedule focus group. The findings of this study revealed that the students benefit more in terms of the knowledge and skills of reading and writing without any hindrance as they will be learning Sepedi Home language because they can regularly read from where they are and they also have their peer students and the lecturer who will assist at any given time in case they need help. They can able to share the knowledge and transference from the lecturer stays on the WhatsApp for long making the students that take time to understand to have access to a repetition of listening or reading. The findings of this study are also confirmed by Saritepeci et al. (2019) and Fischer and Yang (2022) who argue that WhatsApp helped to make access to lecture materials, informed lecture activities and schedule focus group.

Conclusion

This study investigated the use of WhatsApp in teaching Sepedi Home Language at South African university. The study found that WhatsApp usage encourages students education related conversations and channel the students to use WhatsApp in the useful way and it restores the right usage of language because the WhatsApp usage came with its language that poses a threat to the languages. Motlhaka (2020) and Rambe, Chipunza and Ng'ambi (2020) suggest that online learning enhances academic agency of students to interact with their peers and facilitators in which learning materials and activities are collaboratively co-created, shared and opportunities to learn socially from each other are created.

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