

The WhatsApp Group for Online Class in the Covid-19 Pandemic

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COVID19 pandemic influenced Indonesia many schools and universities to adopt online classes for their learning process. This research revealed students' experiences in the online class and their opinions on using WhatsApp Group (WAG) as the social media application for the teaching learning process. It explored the views of twenty students and three lecturers of UIN Sunan Kalijaga in their TOEFL course in the Language Centre Program. This research used an online ethnography qualitative data approach that described the effectiveness of online classes using WAG, especially for the improvement of E-education. It was concluded that a WAG can used as online class tools. It has effectiveness in online class pedagogically, and is easy and popular technology. WAG provides access to users starting the online class, and helps in sharing learning material, resources and ideas, and implementing interactive online discussions.

Key words: *WhatsApp, student, Online Class.*

Introduction

The pandemic of Covid-19 has changing the dimensions of life in the world. The way of spreading the virus made people stay at home and physically distance. The school and university have closed buildings and made online class for their students, so the system of learning has changed immediately and become problems both for students and teachers. They have used internet and smartphones to make the online class easier, because almost all students and lecturers are had it before. This popularity can help educational programs if they are used effectively, especially in this pandemic.

The trend in the development of global digital technologies has influenced both the norms of interpersonal communication and the factors of human socialisation. In recent decades, (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Susilo, 2014; Lieberman & Schroeder, 2019; Elodie, Gentina & Chen, Rui & Yang, Zhiyong 2020), there has been a shift from personal communication between people to online and offline interaction, digital communication, and interaction in online social networks. In this regard, the issue of studying the process of digital socialisation

of the younger generation has become relevant. Social networking applications have become popular with the rise of Web 2.0. There are many applications like messenger and WhatsApp that have helped users in collaborating and sharing their daily communication. The people of all ages use it for their job and social activities.

According to Jadhav et al. (2013), messenger applications on Android phones pose certain problems in education areas. These problems are mainly about control of the students activities when they have online class, ineffective assessment functionality, and the absence of information learning topic messages. Messenger applications like Skype, Google Meet, Zoom, and WhatsApp have more users during this pandemic. It was interesting to analyse the purpose, and user experience of these applications for education, especially in online class. The analysis explained the use of the application for education should be increased and these problems should be resolved to improve the experience of millions of mobile users.

One of messenger applications is WhatsApp (WA). It is increasingly used for social communication, which has rapidly transformed the way people connect with each other. WhatsApp use for education has raised flexibility and a growing collection of positive practices. Many studies (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Aharony, 2015; Appiah, 2016; Andujar & Cruz, 2017; Annamalai, 2018) offer knowledge in using WhatsApp for an online class, and comprehensive and critical arguments have examined new situations about the effectiveness of WhatsApp in teaching and learning activities. The different features of WA made it possible for groups to communicate within its boundaries. It attempts to provide an easy way of conducting an information-sharing activity via online discussion using WA groups. The creator of the group becomes administrator, and has the privilege to add and remove members without approval from other group members. WA enables the members to receive an alert for each message sent. All of the participants in the group enjoy equal rights to share ideas and information between group members.

The study analysed WhatsApp's abilities for online class at a state Islamic university. It described the students' activities in online class and their feedback when having WhatsApp groups as the platform for their activity in online class. The subjects of research were Indonesian students that should stay at home to avoid spreading the pandemic of COVID19. The overall purpose of the study was to find the potential and challenges of WhatsApp-group as a social media application that supported the education process especially in online class during the pandemic of COVID19.

Literature Review

Millennial Generation and Education Change

One of the greatest challenges for millennial Generation learning will be in the area of technology in education. Digital socialisation is a process mediated by all available information technologies of mastering and appropriating social experience by persons acquired in online contexts and forming their digital identities as part of a real person. They believe it is necessary to note that in the modern world, the Internet is not just a technology, it is a living environment that acts as a source of development and a factor of human socialisation. Many experts (Soldatova, 2018, Korableva et al., 2019, Stornaiuolo, 2017) define digital socialisation as a process of personal development, adaptation and integration into the social system of the information society, and the internet space is intended for the teenagers' development and socialisation.

As students become more technologically advanced, education institutions must be technologically ready to meet student needs. However, many institutions are from earlier generations with different learning and teaching styles than those of the millennial Generation. In addition, the life experiences, expectations, and technological expertise of many institutions and the students they are to teach are significantly different (Susilo & Kaufman, 2014). In the advanced approach education paradigm, the mission and function of teaching and learning activities was to produce learning, not to deliver instruction. The role of education institutions is to design learning methods and environments, rather than to be primarily lecturers. Worley (2011) argued that nowadays higher education faculty and administrators have a challenge with their students about using information technology. They are part of what is known as the Millennial Generation (Net Gen), and are familiar with internet and web technologies to find information.

Experts (Palloff and Pratt, 2007; Gunga and Ricketts, 2008; Beldarrain, 2006; Susilo and Kaufman, 2014; Gainutdinova et al, 2020) stated that many educators were using new tools that could improve learning environments in the field of distance education. Education institution members are using synchronous collaboration tools, including text, audio and video conferencing, to help create a borderless learning environment in which students are encouraged to think critically and learn collaboratively through global partnerships. These tools in e-learning can compete with face-to-face learning in terms of psychosocial and emotional flexibility. Asynchronous tools bring the online experience a step closer to being face to face. Recent improvements in synchronous technology have increased the advantages of this technology in education communities through the delivery of online courses or classes.



Using WhatsApp in Online Class

One of the most complicated academic challenges in transmission pedagogies is to generate democratic participation of all students and the public expression of silenced voices. Mobile phones especially mobile instant messaging (MIM) as a new way to communicate, and encourage academic participation have pushed the researcher to analyse the collaboration of MIM into classrooms. Academic uncertainty about MIM was often predicated on its perceived distractive nature and potential to trigger off task social behaviours (Rambe & Bere, 2013). One MIM is WhatsApp. WhatsApp is a smartphone application for instant messaging. The application has risen in users right now. One of the unique features of the application is its ability to enhance communication within a group.

Nowadays, especially when the pandemic of Covid-19 happened, many experts (Bouhnik and Deshen, 2014; Rambe & Bere, 2013; Church and de Oliveira 2013) stated the popularity of smartphones in the market have increased the user base of WhatsApp as a communication platform. More recently WA groups as used by teachers and their students constitutes a type of “simple social network” for the online class. The use of WhatsApp in a South African university class registered positive feedback from students who claimed that it was an easier way to communicate with their teachers and the rest of the class, that it was productive for fruitful discourse on relevant issues in an informal environment where students could learn intimately and authentically. Fun was also listed among the many reasons why people adopted WhatsApp as their main communication channel rather than alternatives (such as SMS or other social networks). The ability to send an unlimited number of messages of the application combined with low cost, immediacy, the capacity to conduct an on-going conversation and video call with many friends simultaneously, the knitting together of a community of friends or family, and a sense of privacy relative to other social networks, were also noted. The researcher also said that the users also mentioned a number of disadvantages, such as the flooding of irrelevant or nonsensical messages and the feeling that the application is not a formal channel for communication.

Much research exists regarding its influence on interpersonal communication in general since WhatsApp was a relatively a new education tool (Aharony, 2015; Appiah, 2016; Andujar & Cruz, 2017; Church & de Oliveira, 2013; Bere, 2013; Bouhnik & Desen, 2014; Chipunza, 2013; Plana et al., 2013; Salem, 2013, Susilo & Kaufman, 2014). Overall, WhatsApp has become a shared platform that enhances accessibility, encourages cooperation, and intensifies motivation to take an active part in academic assignments. A study conducted among students in Spain examined the use of WhatsApp in English language studies. It reported that students have high motivation and a greater enthusiasm for reading in a foreign language. Still, not all responses were positive. A study conducted in Kuwait, showed a negative effect on the students’ ability to develop writing skills in English as a foreign language. WhatsApp, as a

relatively new tool in education, has similar positive characteristics as previous technological tools implemented, but it seems that WhatsApp has some up-to-date features that encourage teacher and students to use it in order to enhance understanding. All studies show that WA has the academic potential, especially in online class. It helped the teaching and learning process especially in sharing the material study, submitting tasks, discussion between all students, and controlling the presence of students.

Research Method

This study uses the term ‘virtual ethnography’ from Garcia, Standlee, Bechkoff, & Cui, (2009). It describes the basic principles of ethnography, but for online interaction. Ethnography involves “a holistic description of cultural environment” (Singer, 2009). Virtual ethnography is the practice of ethnography, but in a virtual or online setting (Bosch, 2009). The research has analysed WhatsApp groups usage for online class, relevant activities, and the way that they affect both educational and academic processes. It has examined in depth students’ and lecturers’ communication in WhatsApp groups that related with online class activities. Therefore, the researcher has provided an argument to find out the differences in theory and reality about using WA as tool for education online.

The research used a qualitative method. Half-structured in depth interviews and questioner surveys were used to get the data, which aimed to find out the real phenomenon and understand the grounded meaning of human and cultural realities (Sugiyono, 2013). The researcher asked the students and lecturer to fill the survey, and has interviewed the 20 students and 3 lecturers for 30 minutes each. The questions function to get opinion and a description about online device availability, WAG as a platform in online class, capability of WAG to support online class, and WAG as tool for building educational communication in online class. Especially, the question where used to detail the characteristics, feelings, opinions, perceptions in the usage of WAG for online class among lectures and students.

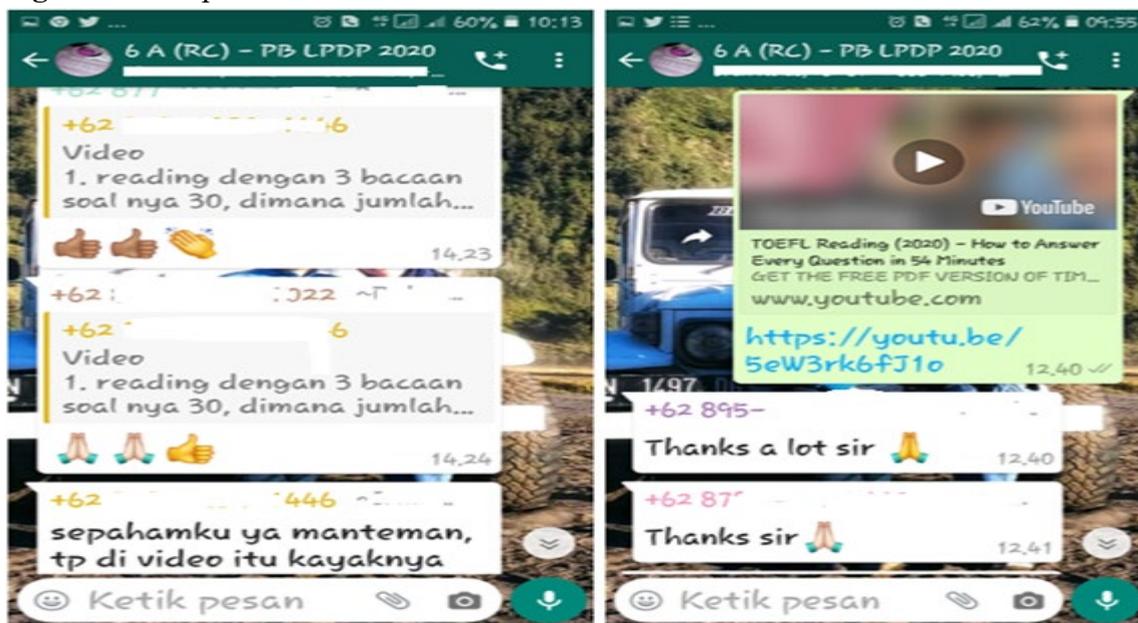
They answered the questioners and told their story in a flowing narrative that gave us information about the realities and the phenomenon. Data analysis has provided the presentation of self to others. In this case, WAG were viewed as a tool for online class, despite potential ethical opportunities, the virtual ethnography was important to describe the field and triangulate the findings from the interviews and surveys. Respondents’ confidentiality was guaranteed. The research was intended to described an overview of experience, and gave an explanation about the effectiveness of WA use in online class with no specific references to the content of the individual’s description.

Result and Discussion

Result

Online class of TOEFL using WhatsApps Group (WAG) in UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta was held begin in 16 March 2020 till now. The 20 research participants were Indonesian students and 3 lecturers of the program. They used WA in their daily life. Since the pandemic COVID 19 the institution formally used WAG as a tool to give online classes beside other applications like Google Classroom, Webex, and Zoom. Most students and lecturers choose WAG because they are familiar with the application. The communication forms on the observed groups mostly was verbal, with some of emoticons, and images. They used less audio video files. The use of location information was almost non-existent. Sometimes, Lecturers shared URL or YouTube links for learning materials. See figure 1.

Figure 1. Examples of Communication in WAG



Based on the answers of respondents, there are many opinions about online device availability, WAG capability to support online class, and how students communicated with lecturers using WAG. See detail in Table 1, which will be described in the discussion.

Table 1: Findings interview

Respondent	Online Device Availability	WAG Capability to Support Online Class	How Students Communicated with Lecturers Using WAG.
S1	Fine	Help me understand the material Ask and discuss task to friend	Easily, informal
S2	Nice	Ask and discuss task to friend Ask to teacher about the skill in reading comprehension Love it to discuss with friend	Lovely lecturers
S3	Easy but sometimes the signal is lack	Ask and discuss task to friend Help me understand the material	Like to discuss
S4	Good	Discuss with teacher and friend Ok I like study use WA	Easy and can discuss easily
S5	Fine	Help me understand the material See the theory and find the good video for understanding material	Teacher is hard to fine
S6	Sometimes, my mobile data empty and phone's battery made me frustration.	Help me to discuss the material with friend easily	Like and easy to say in WA with him
S7	Easy	Ask and discuss task to friend	Easy
S8	Good	Ask and discuss task to friend Ask to teacher about the skill in reading comprehension	Like
S9	Spend more money for mobile data	Help me understand the material Ask and discuss task to friend	Ok
S10	Easy	Discuss with teacher and friends	Easily, informal
S11	Fine	Help me understand the material See the theory and find the good video for understanding material	Little awkward
S12	Nice	Help me understand the material Discuss the task with friends	Like to discuss

S13	Easy but sometimes the signal is lack	Ask and discuss task to friends Ask to teacher about the skill in listening and reading comprehension Help me understand the material	Easy and can discuss easily
S14	Good	Little bit boring because teacher only give the task	Easily, informal
S15	Fine	Discuss with teacher and friends Help me understand the material	Little awkward
S16	Good	Help me understand the material See the theory and find the good video for understanding material	Like to discuss
S17	Fine	Boring	Easy and can discuss easily
S18	Sometimes have to find the signal	See the theory and find the good video for understanding material	Afraid to ask
S19	Sometimes forgot	Discuss with teacher and friends Help me understand the material	Embarrassed to ask
S20	Good	Help me understand the material See the theory and find the good video for understanding material	Afraid
L1	Good	Easy to share the material Find out the students' knowledge about the topic based on the discussion	The student has communicated with me freely and kindly.
L2	Fine	I can share every material like URL for the learning topics, pictures, and voice. The students can discuss freely and I can controlled it.	The student has communicated with me freely and kindly.
L3	Good	Easy to share the material Find out the students' knowledge about the topic based on the discussion although not all of students actively comment in discussion	The student has communicated without boundaries

Discussion

a. Online Device Availability

The online device viability surveyed and interviewe indicated that students accessed WhatsApp from their notebooks or smartphones through either WIFI-enabled networks or Mobile networks. Sometimes, mobile connection providers often gave slower connectivity compared with home networks. Students were frustrated with slow networks connectivity when they have online class.

The general experience of WhatsApp Group availability for online class was pleasant, but there are bad experiences in the result interviews. The lecturers have no problems in using the WhatsApp for online class activities but some of students had connectivity difficulties like limited mobile data capability, internet speed and short battery life. They also have problems with accessing the Internet because of their parents or get sleepy in the early morning because it was Ramadhan: "Sometimes my mobile data is empty. So, I cannot connect with internet. My phone's battery sometimes made me frustration. It drowned fastly so I didn't finished reading the topic and made my phone suddenly shut down itself" (S6). Moreover, a student did not have enough with their allowance and it was a financial burden for them. He explained: "I have to spend more money for mobile data for the online class. I do have an allowance for buying mobile data, but it was limited because I have to buy something else like foods, daily needs and etc" (S9). Another problem for online device availability was Internet connection. Some students said, "the connection has gone for a while and reparation happened in a long time. So I missed the class(S3)". As a consequence, they lacked interactions with their peers in the online class for pandemic time.

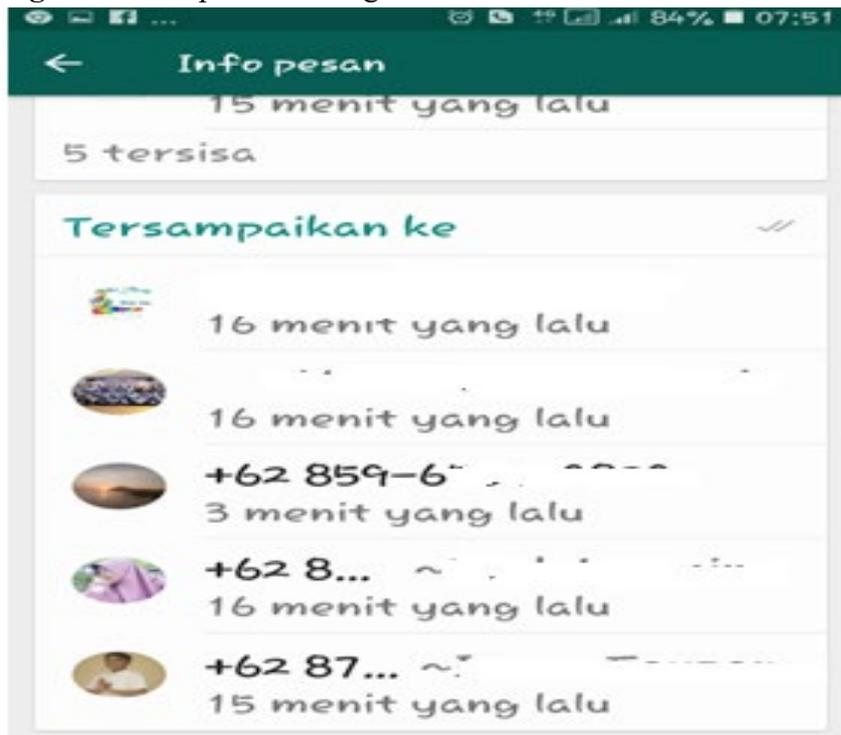
It shows that it is actually the online device availability that posed problems when using WhatsApp in the online class. It seems that WhatsApp has advantageous features such as accessibility, efficiency, and simplicity in online class, although sometimes the lack of mobile providers, and limited time to study especially in Ramadhan has disadvantages for online class.

b. WAG Capability to Support Online Class

Student use of WAG as an online class support multiple access in learning topics and media. It gives students' the ability to discuss with friends and the lecturers at the same time. Smartphone's connectivity offers a persistent supply of texts, and ways to find information tasks and learning resources, which enabled online networked learning and multiple peer-based feedback. Students stated that WhatsApp Group discussion could to reflect thoroughly and briefly on questions and the task before giving their opinions. This phenomenon was synchronised with the Rambe & Bere (2013) argument that WA is potentially available for

forum discussion in spontaneous responses in lecture interactions. WhatsApp enables the easy and quick transfer of links to learning materials, unlike any other technologies which often don't work or other forms of communication that students don't use. Lecturers send all learning materials in WAG messages, and ensure everyone gets message by message info on the application see figure 2.

Figure 2. Examples of message info in WAG



The flexibility to do any task related to online class program was one of advantages using WAG for online class. Lecturer 1 taught Reading Comprehension Skill in TOEFL. He made a WAG with 20 participants connected on teaching and learning activities about reading comprehension TOEFL test. Students were instructed to do their module in fifty-five minutes and discuss it in the last fifty minutes of online class time. Lecturers 2 and 3 used two other social media applications to conduct the lessons: WhatsApp and e-mail. They put up WAG to give instructions about the task for the students, to discuss, and to communicate on the topic of learning. The learning media was in the form of documents, slide presentation, link URL, and videos shared in WAG. For submission, the lecturer used e-mail. The researcher is concerned with students experienced in online class using WAG. The lecturers chose e-learning using WAG and e-mail as tools for online class, but it was not used for assessment. WhatsApp was merely used for the student' discussion related to their tasks and for the assessment they have limited offline times to do the TOEFL-like test.

The flexible time and no boundaries between lecturers to the students' questions could potentially enhance the learning process. Respondent stated, "I ask many questions to lecturer easier and no boundaries," "When WhatsApp groups used for my online class, I was free and not shame to ask my lecturer not like in the classroom." WhatsApp gave the opportunity to learn beyond the classroom's borders. One of respondents said, "a discussion always arises about the task from lecturers. When the discussion happened, I was keep quiet and tried to understand what the group have discuss." Bouhnik & Deshen (2014) stated that WhatsApp offers simultaneous participation between students and lecturer in the same time. The lecturer found that the messages posted was accepted, although the students were offline, lacked internet connection or their devices were switched off. Thus, they could participate any time irrespective of context. Multiple interaction modes and diverse temporal times widened opportunities for student involvement without missing conversation flows.

WA was useful for online class. Students reflected that they were already using much time on WA. They could check the topic of the online class while still connected in personal communication. In general, WAG for various academic purposes benefit students. First, students said that they can ask their WAG friends for learning materials, and to discuss and answer questions in online class. Other students felt that WA allowed them to asked questions in personal message to their friends, which they might not feel comfortable asking in a formal online class. Second, students used the WAG to know the topics of learning or the instructions of task, then moved to the WA individual to ask another student privately about the learning task and topic so they can actively answer or disscuss in online class WAG. The students also used WA during weekends or break time for connecting with others to prepare for the next online class in a little group discussion and to share study notes.

The main benefit WAG for lecturers was the ability to share many forms of education materials instantly. In response to informal interviews, lecturers indicated sharing medias, tasks, online materials was easy, and that the discussing the topics were more effective because students had flexibility and no boundaries to give their opinions. They were also very positive about WhatsApp as a media for online class and have assumed that the teaching learning process has been good for an online class. The lecturers designed learning activities beyond the traditional classroom approach online. It can be said that WhatsApp was a good media for online education especially in the pandemic time.

c. Attempting to Communicate with Lecturers Using WAG

WhatsApp allowed students to cooperate and study as a team. The spontaneous dialogue between students or directed by the lecturers, gave an atmosphere of cooperation and solidarity. One student, for example, responded that, "I can freely ask and work together with my friends in WAG when I do not understand about the task or learning material." Other students compare

their lecturer in the class and in online class: “I was afraid and shame to talk with lecturers whom I saw daily. Even if I have to talk about the learning topics or the instruction of task.” Students assumed that the lecturers will ignore their questions, and those lecturers preferred to use the online tutorial to interact with students. The main phenomenon about WAG was that students used it to communicate each other and that it can be a platform of teaching learning process and discussion for their online class.

WhatsApp gave opportunities for communication and learning without boundaries between lecturer and students. Respondent said, “while discussion was raised in the classroom, I was just keep quiet and follow it, but by WhatsApp Group I could give my opinions freely without afraid to make mistakes.” Another student described, “We’re doing a comparison between video and module. They talked different opinions and shared their knowledge for the entire group to understand it.” The students described their communication experiences through WhatsApp exceeded that of the traditional classroom because they felt the WA online class was more conducive and flexible. “Yes. I find informalities WA online class made it easier to accept other’s opinion and compare it with mine in order to be better understanding about the topic and material study,” said one of respondent.

It was provided that mobile learning especially WAG bridges informal and formal education. In fact, Annamalai (2018) Mills, Knezek & Khaddze (2014), and Wong, Mildrad & Speecht (2015) highlighted the internet as a new way to connect people and provide an alternative approach for teaching and learning methodology. It was to contribute to the opening of education institution to entire countries. Further, mobile internet offered better interactions between schools and families and provided good communicating between teachers and students which facilitates students to learn freely anytime and anywhere.

Conclusion

There are two benefits of WhatsApp for Online Class during the pandemic of COVID-19: first, WhatsApp is an easy and cheap online application for online class. The possibilities to make the group for learning and to share any task, audio-visual media, or learning topic URL in synchronised time between lecturer and students presents greater opportunities for lecturer creativity in the learning process. The flexibility time to access and understand the topics in the learning process has given opportunities to lecturers and students to work and study in simultaneous and continuously, although the time for the class meeting has ended. Second, WhatsApp was effective in bridging communication between students and lecturers. This WAG online class provides opportunities in communicating and learning without a boundary between lecturer and students. However, it is still lacking in terms of student device availability especially on unstable connectivity of mobile provider. There are possibilities for WAG to be seamless online platform learning and be the future of learning. This research was a case study



on using WAG for online class so several studies still need to indicate that mobile technology has opened up opportunities for online classes.



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