

## USING WHATSAPP AS A TRAINING TOOL FOR ARABIC LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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**ABSTRACT:** *The project was designed to assess the effectiveness of WhatsApp as a training tool for Arabic language teachers and to document trainees' attitudes towards its use for this purpose. Qualitative data were collected from interviews with four teachers. The results showed that WhatsApp has potential as a teaching aid because it offers more privacy than other social media applications and allows sharing of various types of information, such as text, videos, photographs, and documents. The main limitations identified by participants related to internet accessibility and restrictions on the size of video messages/files.*

**KEYWORDS:** WhatsApp, training tool, Arabic language, teachers

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### INTRODUCTION

WhatsApp Messenger, generally referred to as WhatsApp, is an instant messaging application that was initially designed for use on the Android OS (operating system) (Karapanos, Teixeira, & Gouveia, 2016). Today it can be integrated into Windows and iOS systems. WhatsApp can be used to send and receive text messages, short videos, photographs and uniform resource locators (URLs). The app uses the smartphone's Internet connection to link one user to other users (Sayan, 2016).

A small number of schools in Australia teach Arabic as a subject in the regular weekly educational curriculum. There are also a number of schools that teach Arabic one day a week (Saturday). Many of these classes are taught by Arabic speakers who are not trained in Arabic language teaching and often have poor literacy skills themselves. Recently, there has been an increase in the number of learners in these schools, and anecdotal evidence suggests that these teachers are struggling to teach students to read and write Arabic because they lack relevant training in curriculum design and teaching methodology.

### Statement of the Problem

There has been growing interest among researchers in the use of WhatsApp in education (Cetinkaya, 2017; Sayan, 2016). WhatsApp allows teachers to communicate privately with each other (So, 2016) and interact by sharing text messages, documents, photographs, videos and voice messages individually or via WhatsApp groups. Despite increasing knowledge of the potential benefits of the use of WhatsApp in education, there has to date been no attempt to implement it to support Arabic language teacher training and development.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the research was to explore the effects of using WhatsApp as a tool to develop the ability of Arabic-speaking teachers to teach reading and writing in Arabic to non-native speaking students. The study also sought to investigate the teachers' attitudes towards the use of WhatsApp in teacher training.

### **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following research questions:

- What is the effect of using WhatsApp to develop teachers' ability to teach reading and writing in Arabic?
- What are teachers' attitudes towards the use of WhatsApp in this training?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study provides an understanding of how WhatsApp can be used to facilitate teacher training in relation to an under-researched topic. The findings will contribute new knowledge about the benefits and challenges of using WhatsApp as a teaching tool in supporting Arabic-speaking teachers to develop skills in teaching reading and writing. This information will also help to identify ways of improving WhatsApp's features and functionalities to increase its effectiveness as a teaching aid.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The various functionalities of social media allow users to meet their needs for interacting with friends and other users, and searching for and sharing information. Research on the use of social media and technology indicates that WhatsApp is more popular than Facebook in terms of its ability to meet users' needs (Karapanos et al., 2016). WhatsApp provides a more private and intimate means for users to communicate with their friends, thereby enhancing user relatedness (Karapanos et al., 2016). Other studies have shown that WhatsApp users prefer it because it provides more behavioural privacy than Facebook (Waterloo, Baumgartner, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2018). WhatsApp can also be used as a lifelogging tool to create a record of memorable events, experiences and interactions (Karapanos et al., 2016). WhatsApp has also been identified as the most reliable and secure social media application (Johnston et al., 2015), which is an important consideration in the context of teacher development.

WhatsApp has emerged as one of the most useful tools for mobile learning, that is, the use of smartphones or mobile phones for open distance learning and blended learning (Gachago, Strydom, Hanekom, Simons & Walters, 2015). It has been shown to be an effective tool for creating immediacy in teaching scenarios and for supporting formal and informal interactions and relationships between tutors and learners (Gachago et al., 2015). The application can be used to define pedagogical models, set out the rules of engagement between the trainer and the trainee and facilitate the coordination of learning activities (Gachago et al., 2015). It can also be used for peer assessment in both anonymous and non-anonymous peer assessment arrangements (Güler, 2017).

Other scholars have shown that WhatsApp is effective in facilitating scaffolding in planned learning environments (Korhonen, Ruhalahti, & Veermans, 2019).

WhatsApp's functional applications make it useful in the learning environment (Cetinkaya, 2017). It has been shown to be an effective tool for enhancing collaborative learning in the context of second language acquisition (SLA) (Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018). It enhances engagement between trainer and trainee in both formal and informal interactions. The technology has the potential to improve learning outcomes in many educational fields. Learners generally have a positive attitude towards the use of WhatsApp for learning purposes (Cetinkaya, 2017; Mali, 2017).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a qualitative research design to collect data from a convenience sample of Arab teachers (three males and one female) from four different schools. Two of the teachers were already participating in a program of teacher development in reading and writing in which they used WhatsApp. The teachers were required to use WhatsApp as a training tool for a period of one month, after which they participated in individual interviews with the researcher. The interviews were semi-structured around four main topic areas: attitudes (favourable or unfavourable) towards the use of WhatsApp in teacher development; effectiveness of the application as a teaching aid; limitations or challenges in using WhatsApp as a teacher development tool; and the effectiveness of WhatsApp as a collaborative tool in teacher development in Arabic language reading and writing. Interviews were conducted over a period of 20 days and each interview lasted 15-20 minutes. A pilot study two weeks before the first interview was used to establish validity and reliability.

### **Determinants**

The study was limited to Arabic language teachers in Saturday schools in Australia. The sample did not include full-time teachers in mainstream schools. The training focused on teaching methods for reading and writing and did not include all Arabic language skills, since students and parents were only interested in these two skills.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analysed using NVivo to categorise the participants' responses under the four themes, namely: attitudes towards the use of WhatsApp; limitations in the use of WhatsApp; effectiveness of the use of WhatsApp in teacher development; and effectiveness of WhatsApp as a collaborative tool.

## **DISCUSSION**

Education scholars have been encouraged to better understand the benefits of using WhatsApp as a teacher development tool in the training process (Nirgude & Naik, 2017). Knowledge of users' attitudes is important because it helps to identify ways of enhancing the effectiveness of WhatsApp as a training tool for non-native Arabic language teachers in particular and for language teachers

in general. The findings from this study showed that WhatsApp's functionalities make it a viable tool for teacher development.

The anchored instruction theory is useful for understanding the role of WhatsApp in teacher development. The anchored instruction theory proposes that learners use technology as a medium for finding solutions to problems they experience in everyday life (Ouyang & Stanley, 2014). The use of WhatsApp enables teachers to apply the content of the training to their work.

## CONCLUSION

The use of WhatsApp in education and training is gaining momentum due to the increased usage of smartphones. This research project was designed to assess the effectiveness of the application in Arabic language teachers' training and development and to document the trainees' attitudes towards its use as a teaching aid. The results showed that WhatsApp has great potential for use as a teaching tool because it offers more privacy than other social media applications and enables sharing of various types of information (text, videos, photographs, and documents). The main limitations identified were Internet inaccessibility and restricted size of video messages/files, but these limitations are outweighed by its versatility as a teaching aid.

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