

THE IMPLICATIONS OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS FROM A TEACHERS' POINT OF VIEW

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ABSTRACT

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Digital communication has been popular among general Malaysian users. It comes as no surprise that digital communication is taking over in educational settings. Parent-teacher communication is very important, because both parties play a big role in children's learning wellbeing. Thus, this study explores the advantages and disadvantages of using WhatsApp groups as a digital communication tool for parent-teacher communication. Because WhatsApp groups are not yet considered a formal medium, there are no rules or regulations in place to govern communication. Therefore, this study aims to guide teachers on managing digital communication between parents and teachers so that the alternative can be utilised efficiently. This qualitative study involved six teacher informants responsible as class teachers for any grades or levels in national and government primary and secondary schools located around Johor Bahru. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and were analysed using thematic analysis. Based on the findings, there are both advantages and disadvantages to using WhatsApp groups among parents and teachers. WhatsApp groups offer benefits such as information being delivered easily and quickly; parents and teachers accessing information in WhatsApp groups from various locations; and immediate interaction between parents and teachers. The conveniences that WhatsApp group functions offer can foster cooperation between parents and teachers. However, there are several disadvantages to using WhatsApp groups that are the unintentional extension of teachers' working hours caused by the flexibility of WhatsApp groups, an invasion of teachers' privacy and its contribution to any discussions on trivial matters. WhatsApp groups should set rules and restrictions to improve the groups' effectiveness and efficiency for parents and teachers. Teachers should serve as the group's host and administrator in order to preserve the semi-formal relationships between parents and teachers. Because teachers' healthy work-life balance is also important, establishing good practice for managing WhatsApp groups is essential.

Keywords: Parents-teachers communications; digital communications; WhatsApp usage; WhatsApp groups

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is essential for effective family-school relationships (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019). In the educational environment, the effectiveness of communication between teachers and parents has tremendous importance in student achievement and attendance (Ozmen et al., 2016). Furthermore, better and more frequent communication between parents and teachers can increase parental involvement in their children's education and it also influence their academic performance (Wuong et al., 2022).

Particularly in Malaysia, according to Rafidah et al. (2009) and Ong et al. (2010) lack of parental and family support, lack of monitoring of students' homework, and taking no responsibility for helping the younger siblings with their homework were a main reasons why Malaysian students performed poorly on examinations.

Effective and ongoing communication between parents and teachers is considered helpful because it allows parents to have more opportunities to take care of their children's education (Ihmeideh et al., 2020). As such, it can be concluded that communication between parents and teachers is essential if parents want to actively participate in their child's daily academic advancement (Kuusimäki et al., 2019a).

However, when considering factors related to the school environment, studies have found various obstacles to effective communication between parents and teachers in the school environment. For example, Ozmen et al. (2016) found that while "individual" barriers were encountered by teachers on a "generic" level, other "socio-cultural" factors, issues about "accessibility", and "field and status" related barriers with no discernible gender or branch differences were discovered merely at times. This finding did not correspond with that of Abu Ziden et al. (2020). His research found that time constraint is the main reason why parents do not sufficiently involve with their children's school-related activities, and parents' work schedules were the most frequent explanation for lack of parental involvement.

Several solutions and communication channels have emerged to cater to the various obstacles to effective communication between parents and teachers. The exponential growth of information and communication technology (ICT) and its indispensable role in our lives (Kumar et al., 2020) have transformed how communication happens today. The use of digital media for parent-teacher communication is increasing and the flexibility of digital media communication allows parents and teachers to communicate at times. Because this way of communication suits both parties, it encourages parents and teacher to communicate more frequently (Kuusimäki et al., 2019a). However, many teachers and parents are still reluctant to use such media to enhance these two-way communications between parents and teachers (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019).

Previous studies have proved many advantages of utilising digital communication platforms to improve parent-teacher communication. Kuusimäki et al. (2019a) stated that digital communication facilitates timely online information exchange and immediate feedback among parents and teachers. Besides that, digital communication also provides easy information storage and allows teachers to communicate simultaneously with the entire class community Kuusimäki et al., 2019a).

Despite the mentioned benefits, digital communication among parents and teachers possibly leads to miscommunications (Chan et al., 2020). Because of the limited time during the school day, the communication between the two parties follows teachers from school to home, and results in blurring the boundaries between work and leisure (Kuusimäki et al., 2019b).

Thus, the objectives of this study are; (1) to explore teachers' points of view on the use of WhatsApp groups with parents, and (2) To explore ways teachers can optimise the benefits of using WhatsApp groups with parents.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A study by Deslandes et al. (2015) found that the link between parents and teachers is crucial in ensuring students' learning develops at school and home. According to a study by Gartmeier et al. (2016), parents and teachers should constantly interact to receive correct information regarding students' mental health as well as their learning environment.

2.1 Class teachers' roles and their communications with parents

Other than that, Moses et al. (2012) noted that teachers can anticipate that pupils will complete their assignments regularly, which might result in some improvement of their grades. From this angle, parents might start to view the teacher as a resource.

In Malaysian government school systems, it is common for school administrators to assign a teacher to handle a particular class of students. These class teachers are responsible for managing students in a specific class, their main responsibilities, other than curriculum matters, are administrative such as taking students' daily attendance (Apandi & Mohamed, 2012), managing the classroom (Goh & Wong, 2014), ensuring pupils

receive their educational materials (Jan, 2020) and school's related information, and communicating with parents (Jothinathan et al., 2021).

Class teachers communicate most and directly with parents as school representatives (Ihmeideh et al., 2020). They relay information from school administrators to parents and often need to handle a group of parents at the same time. Class teachers are expected to be the person who passes on important information from school administrator to parents. With this expectation, the class teacher's responsibility is to make sure that all parents involved receive the information and take action as needed. And, vice versa, parents often reach out to class teachers first, before going to school administrators, if there is a matter that they need attention.

Regarding information blasting, not all parents can be approached or reached similarly (Ankrum, 2016). According to earlier research conducted in Malaysia, parents' and teachers' engagement was only adequate (Abu Ziden et al., 2020). Schools must, therefore, use various flexible communication tactics that may be adjusted to the needs of the parents and their schedules (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019).

The communication route between parents and teachers happens in the two aspects: from one set of parents to a teacher and from a teacher to many sets of parents. Here, the group messenger function in the WhatsApp application played a role in easing communication between parents and teachers.

2.2 Digital communication in Malaysia and teachers' work-life balance

In 2020, the Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) reported that there were 88.7% internet users, and 1.3% increase from 87.4% in 2018. Among these, most online activities involve online communication that means 98.1% of text and 81.1% are voice or video communication (MCMC, 2020). The influence of this phenomenon included educators.

Digital communication is being used more frequently in educational settings. A survey of 352 secondary school teachers in Malaysia found that 336 (95.5%) use messaging applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Viber and WeChat, while 296 (84.1) use other social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram (Yusof et al., 2019).

However, according to the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, WhatsApp is the most widely used instant messaging service in Malaysia, with 98.1% of all smartphone users actively using the app (MCMC, 2020). As of July 2019, there were around 1600 million active users of WhatsApp. This makes it the most widely used social media messenger (MCMC, 2020).

Statistics show that the use of WhatsApp applications among smartphone users in Malaysia is very high. WhatsApp is famous as a digital media communication platform among general users. With 68% of the market penetration, Malaysia was the second-largest WhatsApp Messenger user in the world in 2017 (Chan et al., 2020). It also shows that WhatsApp will be utilised for many years. As most smartphone users are WhatsApp users, the existence of WhatsApp groups specifically for parents and teachers is inevitable.

However, in Malaysia, parent-teacher communication typically takes the form of traditional verbal and written communication (Johari et al., 2022). Even with this fast-paced technology development, when the usage and utilisation of smartphones by Malaysian people at all socioeconomic levels are increasing rapidly, digital communication among parents and teachers is still in the infancy phase (Johari et al., 2022).

The lack of exact rules and limited expertise in digital communication among teachers and school administrators (Kuusimäki et al., 2019b), make this type of communication, which should be easier, a better kind of platform, and with many advantages, not as seamless as it could be. Therefore, it renders digital communication not the first choice of medium according to many Malaysian parents and teachers (Simon, 2017).

Digital communication tends to lead to misunderstanding (Kuusimäki et al., 2019a). Teachers need to focus more on writing styles and consider how the message is received rather than how it is delivered (Kuusimäki et al., 2019b), which seems like miscellaneous issues when talking directly face-to-face with parents.

Thus, to enhance the use of digital media, teacher training must focus on getting teachers to foster positive attitudes among parents rather than on the advantages of digital technologies (as many of the beliefs about such media are already positive) (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019).

Other issues with digital communication are teachers' wellbeing and work-life balance. Being accessible and reachable significantly impacts teachers in managing their working hours, dealing with work stress, and, ultimately, taking care of themselves (Kuusimäki et al., 2019b). When deciding whether to contact parents through digital communication, teachers must use pedagogical tact, especially in sensitive situations. Things need to be discussed about.

Therefore, this study is important for digital communication in Malaysia, especially between parents and teachers. This study will describe teachers' perspectives in handling WhatsApp groups with parents and their experience in balancing their work-life balance with the involvement of digital communication.

2.3 Conceptual framework

According to Eipstein's definition of a parent-teacher partnership, this study defines parent-teacher communications as a two-way, meaningful, transparent and ongoing process by which information about academics and extracurricular activities is shared between home and school (teachers, administrators, counsellors) (Abu Ziden et al., 2020).

The review of teachers' points of view on digital communication in this study was based on Kuusimäki et al. (2019a) concerning teachers' view on digital communication and the advantage and disadvantages of digital communications in teachers' wellbeing.

According to Kuusimäki et al. (2019a), although communication and feedback methods have changed, teachers still lack enough training in digital communication techniques, occasionally, and this results in miscommunications between parents and teachers. It is crucial to comprehend and learn more about digital communication between parents and teachers from the teachers' point of view since teachers are the ones who work in situations involving these types of communication. It is important to understand how teachers feel and how the study can help ease teachers' difficulties.

Digital communication has several advantages over traditional modes of communication because it enables quick online information exchange and provides instructors and parents with immediate feedback. Moreover, it also allows between parents and instructors to communicate at their convenience, while having easy information storage and the ability to share with the entire school community at once (Kuusimäki et al., 2019b). Among these advantages, a few disadvantages are reported, such as it is time-consuming, and it follows teachers from school to home, thereby blurring boundaries between work and leisure.

This study extends the context of Kuusimäki et al.'s (2019a) research by conducting the framework in the Malaysian educational setting context, using Malaysian teachers' samples and digital communication among Malaysian parent-teacher relations, and specifically using WhatsApp group, which serves as the medium of communication. Since parents' and teachers' communication is ultimately a crucial issue for students' development, this research seeks to comprehend teachers' points of view on group digital communication as a more efficient channel for parents' and teachers' communication. The findings of this study are hoped to increase the effectiveness and relevancy of current digital communications between parents and teachers.

3. METHODOLOGY

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants. Purposive sampling is not non-theoretical or a not random technique that needs no an exact number of informants (Bernard, 2002). The researcher decides what must be known and built out to find a voluntary individual to provide the information as to the integrity of education or experience (Khoo et al., 2022). A total of six teacher informants were interviewed for this study. The informants consisted of teachers who work as class teachers to any grade or level in national secondary schools (daily) located around Johor Bahru. The selected teacher informants must also have used or still use the WhatsApp application to handle the class's relationship between teachers and parents.

The researchers used a qualitative design to answer the research questions in this study. Qualitative methodologies allow researchers to study complex phenomena in context using approach tools. When the approach is applied appropriately, it will be a very valuable method for researchers. This approach includes developing theories, evaluating programmes, and developing interventions (Baxter & Jack, 2008). According to Holloway, a qualitative method is a form of social research that is based on and focuses on human interpretations and logical thinking of experiences and the environment in which they live. Qualitative research also allows study participants/informants to explain the situation from their point of view (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

In this study, data were collected using a semi-structured interview session method. In qualitative research, there are many data collection methods such as observation, text or visual analysis and interviews (individual or group). However, the most frequently used methods for qualitative approaches are interviews and focus groups (Gill et al., 2008).

The interviews provided researchers with rich and detailed qualitative data to understand the participants' experiences: how they told stories about those experiences, and the meaning they made from those experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Qualitative research with interview method can provide a framework in which informants can express their understandings and knowledge in their own way. An interview is a face-to-face interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee to obtain relevant and valuable information orally.

The interview sessions were recorded with audio recorders and were transcribed. Before the interview session, the researcher should consider discussing with the informant the date, time, and location of the interview because this step helps the researcher develop a good relationship with the informant. The informants will thereby feel confident and comfortable in conversing with the researcher until the interview session is underway. In addition, before conducting interviews, the researcher should also prepare an interview protocol as a guideline during interview sessions. The researcher interview protocol is an instrument of inquiry for specific information that the researcher thinks is relevant to the study's objectives, as well as an instrument for a conversation about a particular topic (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Here are the questions asked during the interview:

1. What is your perception as a teacher about using WhatsApp groups with parents?

Probe: What are the advantages and disadvantages of using this application?

2. To what extent can this WhatsApp group help your job as a teacher?

Probe: How do WhatsApp groups help simplify your job as a teacher?

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analysed using thematic analysis in this study. Thematic analysis is a method of analysis that allows data to be identified, organised, and offers a point of view into patterns with meaning, commonly known as themes, across data sets. By focusing on meaning across a set of data, thematic analysis allows researchers to see and find the accuracy of meaning or collective or shared experience. This method is one of many ways to identify commonality in how a topic is discussed or written and how it makes sense with all the similarities (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

For this research, inductive thematic analysis, in which all themes would be developed solely from data collection and information received from informants was used.

Braun and Clarke (2012) provide a six-phase phase guide, a very useful framework for conducting this analysis. The six steps of analysis are shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Braun and Clarke's (2012) six steps analysis

Stages	Description
1. Become familiar with the data	I. Narrative preparation II. Re-reading data collected and jotting down the initial ideas from the interview transcribed
2. Generate initial codes	I. Coding interesting points and organized the data collected in meaningful and systematic ways II. Collating the data collected into relevant code
3. Searching for themes	I. Collating code into potential themes II. Gathering all the relevant data into a potential theme
4. Reviewing the themes	I. Checking if themes have any relation with the coded data II. Checking if themes have any relation with the entire data set III. Reviewing data to search for additional themes IV. Building a thematic "map" of the data analysis
5. Defining and naming themes	I. Ongoing analysis; refining the specifics of each theme and the overall story, the analysis shows II. Generating clear definitions and names for each theme
6. Producing Report	I. Selection of vivid, compelling codes examples II. Final analysis of selected codes III. Relating the analysis to the research questions, objectives and previous literature reviewed

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings and discussions of the study are presented according to the order of the research objectives.

5.1 Teachers' points of view on the use of WhatsApp groups with parents

Figure 1 shows the findings of the study, it is showed that teachers' points of view on using WhatsApp groups with parents can be divided into two categories: the advantages and disadvantages of this practice.

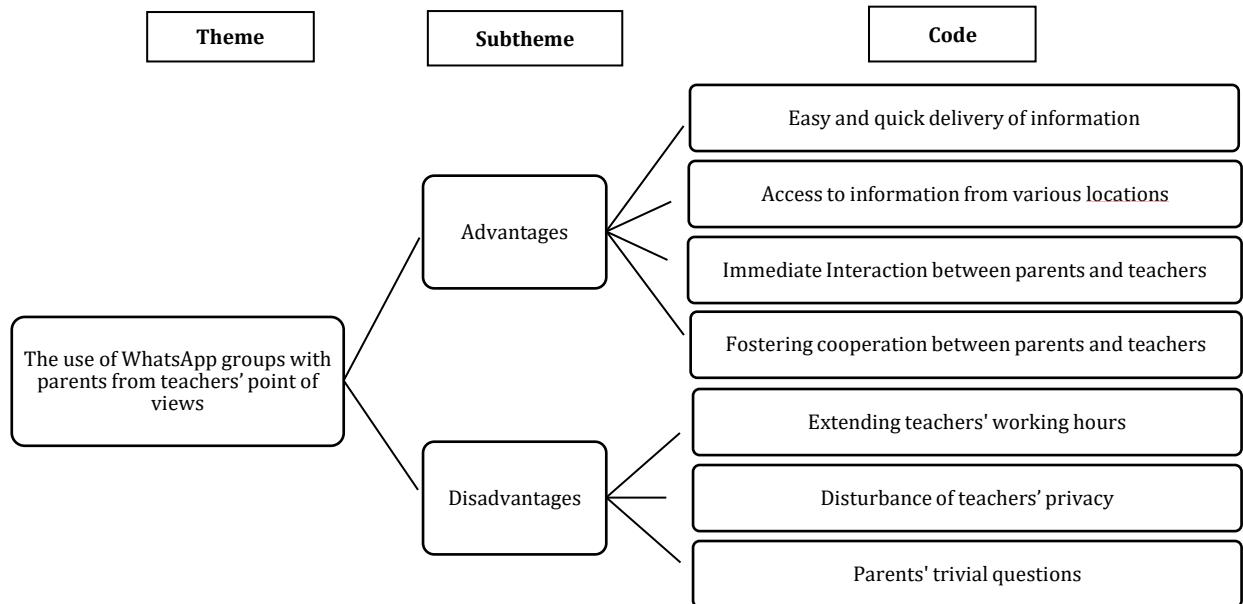


Figure 1: Teachers' points of view on the use of WhatsApp groups with parents

5.1.1 Advantages

This study found that there are four advantages of using WhatsApp groups as a medium of communication between parents and teachers, namely that the information delivery can be done easily and quickly, the information can be accessed anywhere and everywhere, parents and teachers' interaction can take place immediately and fostering cooperation between parents and teachers.

5.1.1.1 Easy and quick delivery of information

Teachers used the group for communication in a variety of ways; they used it to discuss topics relating to homework issues, the teachers' availability, and other notifications (Mazana, 2018). The majority of the teachers interviewed agreed that, with the use of WhatsApp groups, the delivery of information can be done easily and quickly.

Groups WhatsApp gives the benefit of sending multiple messages simultaneously, making the information delivery process easy and the messages being delivered and received immediately (Mazana, 2018). Teachers can inform parents about students' homework through groups without having to send the same messages to parents individually.

This statement is supported by Teacher 1 with the quote below.

...(it) helps me convey information about the school or any matter related to the school more easily and quickly. More importantly, I can send it to one group, and everybody will receive it... (Teacher 1)

Teachers can also update their availability and other school notifications through one channel. Before the use of WhatsApp groups, school notifications and information blasting were made by distributing the information on printed papers and passed them to students. Students would then deliver the notice to their parents. WhatsApp application is a big improvement to the traditional method.

...Some of these notice letters ended up unknown. I had received complaints from parents not knowing when the PIBG (Persatuan Ibu Bapa Guru) meeting was held... (Teacher 6)

5.1.1.2 Access to information from various locations

Furthermore, with the use of WhatsApp groups, information can be accessed from various locations. With smartphone mobility and Malaysia-wide internet coverage today (Bordalba & Bochaca, 2019), WhatsApp applications can be accessed from almost anywhere (Hassan et al., 2021).

Teacher 1 supported this statement in the quote below.

...When I received information from the school's admin that needed to be delivered to the parents, but I'm on leave, I can still manage to get in touch with all the parents from home and get the information blasted... (Teacher 1)

5.1.1.3 Immediate interaction between parents and teachers

When a situation arises at school, and teachers need parents' attention and feedback immediately, the WhatsApp group can be the medium for such conversation. Teachers can reach out to parents immediately and expect parents' feedback as soon as possible.

This immediacy of digital communication is the biggest advantage of this type of communication, compared to the traditional one (Mazana, 2018). As smartphones have become essential gadgets, almost everybody has one, and with the multitasking function it provides, people and smartphones have become inseparable. Thus, messages through WhatsApp are normally quickly detected by the recipient, which can increase the percentage of immediate feedback on the messages. In addition, feedback can be obtained quickly with the various functions offered by this application to facilitate users, such as sending documents, texts, pictures, and voice messages (voice mail) (Saleh et al., 2018).

...interaction with parents happens without having to wait for teacher's day... (Teacher 5)

...If a problem arises, we can discuss the matter together immediately, without having to make schedule, arrange time for meeting, finding time that works for all the related parties; it's such a hassle... (Teacher 2)

5.1.1.4 Fostering cooperation between parents and teachers

With WhatsApp, parents could respond to the information presented, and teachers and parents could contact them whenever convenient. The WhatsApp group, according to teachers, allows them to ask for parents' help in reminding pupils to do their homework and other assignments, exchanging solutions and speaking with their children (Johari et al., 2022). These advantages of WhatsApp groups have significantly improved parents' and teachers' communication.

When information delivery efficiency increases and conversations with teachers become convenient, teachers reported receiving more numbers and better feedback from parents (Ozmen et al., 2016).

This statement is supported by Teacher 3 and Teacher 4, as quoted below;

...getting the cooperation of parents to help students study/complete homework... (Teacher 3)

...as interaction becomes easier, my relations with my parents become better. Some parents who are committed to their children's conditions and situations will always keep in touch with me, and with some, I become their friend.... (Teacher 4)

Cooperation between parents and teachers plays a pivotal role in fostering students' development (Đurišić & Bunjevac, 2017). When parents and teachers collaborate effectively, they create a supportive environment that enhances learning outcomes (Adams et al., 2016). This cooperation enables a holistic approach to education, where both home and school environments complement each other (Marchant et al., 2001). Parents and teachers can share valuable insights about the student's strengths, weaknesses and individual needs and this cooperation allows for tailored support (Bang, 2018). Additionally, consistent communication ensures that students receive consistent guidance and reinforcement of learning goals, leading to greater academic success. Moreover, when parents and teachers work together, students perceive education as a priority, leading to increased motivation and engagement in their studies (Gonzalez-Dehass et al., 2005). Overall, the synergy between parents and teachers positively impacts students' cognitive, social and emotional development.

5.1.2 Disadvantages

Despite the advantages found, this study also acknowledges the finding of disadvantages of the usage of WhatsApp groups. Data collected showed that there are three disadvantages that concern teachers with the usage of WhatsApp groups. The disadvantages are as follows: it extends teachers' working hours, it compromises teachers' privacy and it gives parents too much opportunity for interaction, resulting in trivial questions.

5.1.2.1 Extending teachers' working hours

One disadvantage of using this WhatsApp group from a teacher's point of view is that it extends the teacher's working time. Although most teachers spend more time looking at messages on WhatsApp after work hours, most do not agree with the need to attend to parents' concerns via WhatsApp outside work hours except for emergencies and urgent matters. The interview results found that parents are less concerned with this

issue, sending messages through WhatsApp groups after the teacher's working hours, sometimes with a higher frequency than during the school session (Wasserman & Zwebner, 2017), as noted in the quote below.

...until the evening, there are still messages coming through the WhatsApp group... (Teacher 5)

5.1.2.2 Disturbance of teachers' privacy is compromised

There is no denying that, with the unintentional extension of teachers' working hours through the use of WhatsApp groups, teachers' privacy is also disturbed (Kuusimäki et al., 2019). Parents expect a quick response from the teacher regardless of the teacher's time (Wasserman & Zwebner, 2017).

...asking for their children's reports every time, sending messages regardless of the time and situation, and seriously disturbing the teacher's privacy... (Teacher 4)

5.1.2.3 Parents' trivial questions

Not only that, but the use of WhatsApp groups also encourages parents to ask teachers about trivial matters. With the ease of the application's interface, communication with teachers can be carried out easily, making parents feel free to communicate (Mayangsari & Aprianti, 2017). This often happens to teachers of students between Grades 1 to 3. On the other hand, parents expect excessive attention from teachers to their children, have unfounded concerns, and use opportunities such as WhatsApp groups to ask and give frivolous instructions to teachers. For example, a mother sent a message in the class WhatsApp group asking all the parents in the class to check their child's school bag for a missing pink coloured pencil belonging to their child. It is unreasonable and trivial and can even cause arguments in the WhatsApp group run by the teacher.

... parents expect us to monitor even minor situations in the classroom, such as when their children leave their stationary at school, they ask us to find it for them... (Teacher 6)

5.2 Ways for teachers to optimise the use of WhatsApp groups with parents

Figure 2 shows the study findings that there are two subthemes of ways for teachers to optimise the usage of WhatsApp groups with parents. They are (1) only teachers should act as admins of the groups and (2) specific rules need to be established and acknowledged within the groups.

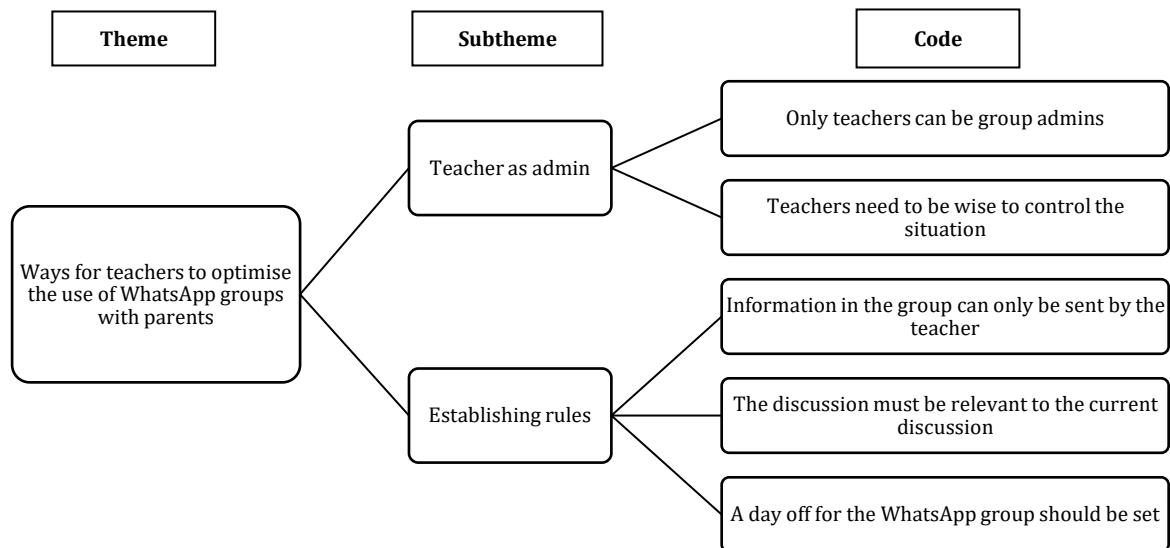


Figure 2: Ways for teachers to optimise the use of WhatsApp groups with parents

5.2.1 Teacher as admin

According to teachers' point of view, there are two criteria of teachers as admin of the WhatsApp groups: only teachers can be group admins and teachers need to be wise in controlling any situations that may occur in the groups.

5.2.1.1 Only teachers can be group admins

With the various advantages of using the WhatsApp application in the relationship between parents and teachers, it is beneficial for teachers to have a way to optimise this application further. From interviews with informants, the following are some ways teachers believe can further reduce the application's effectiveness.

In managing the WhatsApp group of teachers and parents, the teacher informants unanimously agreed that only the teacher could act as an admin to the group (Wasserman & Zwebner, 2017). Only the class teacher has the power to manage the group.

...only teachers become admins and limit activities in WhatsApp groups... (Teacher 4)

5.2.1.2 Teachers need to be wise in controlling the situation

As an administrator, teachers must also be wise in controlling the situation. Teachers must always maintain professionalism in handling WhatsApp groups and be careful in using language and procedures in handling virtual relationships (Simon, 2017; Hassan et al., 2021). If there is an argument between the parents, the teacher needs to be smart and quick in making decisions. The following is an excerpt from the interview session with an informant.

However, teachers who act as administrators need to be wise in controlling the situation. (Teacher 3)

For teachers to have such skills, it is important to acknowledge the need for teacher training and professional development programmes that actively support improving teachers' communication skills (Ozmen, et al., 2016) and WhatsApp group management skills. Teachers' training should include courses that help teachers build such skills to professionally handle the WhatsApp group in case of any situation arises in these groups.

5.2.2 Establishing rules

According to teachers, there are three rules that need to be established within the members of the WhatsApp groups, namely that only teachers can send information in the group, the discussion in the group must be relevant with the current topic and there should be a day off for the WhatsApp groups.

5.2.2.1 Only the teacher can send information in the group

In addition, in managing a WhatsApp group with parents, the WhatsApp group must have a set of rules that are clear and agreed upon by all members (Mazana, 2018). Among the regulations highlighted by the informant is that only the teacher can send information to the group.

Only the teacher who can send information in the WhatsApp group can control the active frequency of the WhatsApp group. Such rules can prevent the WhatsApp group from being misused. For example, some parents take advantage of the existence of this WhatsApp group to use it as an online business advertising platform they run (Johari et al., 2022).

Only the teacher has the authority to send information...if there are messages from parents deemed inappropriate, the teacher also has the authority to delete the message. (Teacher 5)

5.2.2.2 The discussion must be relevant to the current discussion

Second, the discussion must be related to the current discussion, and this rule can prevent WhatsApp group discussions from not having the final say. When a topic is discussed, off-topic responses should not be given attention until the first discussion is completed. If not, all discussions are conducted simultaneously. Online discussions are challenging to manage if all members respond about different things; eventually, the discussion becomes inefficient, and time is just wasted (Mazana, 2018).

... limit the question and answer session in the group. When issues arise, the teacher tries to answer only relevant questions... (Teacher 5)

5.2.2.3 A day off for the WhatsApp group should be set

Lastly, the informant also suggested setting a day off for the WhatsApp group. This is to give teachers back their right to have privacy and to maintain their work-life balance.

...set one day in the week the WhatsApp group cannot be active... (Teacher 5)

Teacher informants also mentioned during the interview that the activeness of some parent-teacher WhatsApp groups sometimes made it difficult for them to spend quality time with their families (Ramly et al., 2021).

...some parents use the weekend to follow up on their children's school matters because that is when they have free time, but the weekend is our time for our families... (Teacher 6)

It is important to help teachers maintain their work-life balance to improve their work performance, help them maintain a healthy mental state to manage their workload, and communicate with parents. Work-life balance is just as crucial as the relationship between parents and teachers to improve the learning environment for students at home and school (Ramly et al., 2021).

6. CONCLUSIONS

WhatsApp groups can be very helpful and useful tools for communication between parents and teachers. However, the limits of using WhatsApp groups must be clarified (Wasserman & Zwebner, 2017). There are many advantages of WhatsApp group usage for parents and teachers such as it quick and easy medium, fast information spread, ensuring ongoing communication between parents and teachers, and thus helping boost cooperation between parents and teachers.

Despite these advantages, the excessive and uncontrolled condition of WhatsApp groups can also harm the relationships between parents and teachers. Most of the disadvantages of WhatsApp group usage affect teachers more than parents. Teachers' workload increases as parents and teachers can communicate anywhere and whenever. Teachers working hours and privacy hours boundaries become blurry, and the easiness of this type of communication reduces formalities between parents and teachers, resulting in increased informal enquiry from parents.

To increase the efficiency of WhatsApp groups for parents and teachers, WhatsApp groups should establish rules and regulations. To maintain the semi-formal relations between parents and teachers, only teachers should be the host and admin for this group involving parents and teachers. Good practices in managing WhatsApp groups are essential to be established in developing healthy work and life balance for teachers (Kuusimäki et al., 2019b).

Overall, it can be concluded that WhatsApp groups can be a successful and interactive communication medium between parents and teachers and can support a better learning environment for children.

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