

Component 2 - Research Report

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Digital Skills and Research Methods.

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1. Introduction

In today's academic setting, technology plays key component for student performance and collaboration (Costley, 2014). Universities, world- wide have decided to implement using numerous platforms, aiming to stimulate and assist students exchanging opinions with their lecturers and peers, altering the classroom in an interactive space (Kurt, 2010). Furthermore, the usage of technology in universities, unlocks the potential of gathering additional, relevant data and information, which students may employ towards their assignments, exam etc. Technology may also assist students in improving their mental and physical health, by gaining and improving their learning and cognitive skills, which are in direct correlation with their academic achievements (Lim, 2021). For example, in the case of UWTSD, the university uses Moodle as a platform to foster direct interaction between students and lecturers, by exchanging information and thoughts regarding the modules, sharing assignments' briefs, researching materials, providing students with feedback etc. UWTSD also encourages their students to use other platforms such as Microsoft Team, and OneDrive for collaboration with their peers. Usually, before joining UWTSD, students already own digital, communicational, critical, and problem-solving skills, which assist them using those digital platforms encouraged by the university. Students' digital skills inspires them to use other social platform outside of university's reach such as WhatsApp (Baishya and Maheshwari, 2019), Telegraph, Facebook etc, where they create students' groups meant to assist and exchange opinions and resources with each other's.

This research looks deeper in the applied technologies in UWTSD and aims to determinate whether students and lecturers feel confidence using the digital platforms provided by UWTSD for collaborating, exchanging ideas and working on group assignments

2. Research design

This report is based on an online questionnaire, created by the help of Microsoft forms. The focus group were students at level 4, studying the module Digital skills and research methods, who were invited to take participation via e-mail.

2.1. Research Question

As elaborated in the introduction, this report aims understanding students' standing grounds in relation to employing technology to collaborate during their academic performance at UWTSD. In other words, the chosen research question is: Are students confident using the provided technology by the University to collaborate, exchange ideas and feedback, and working on group assignments? Considering that technology is a broad term, the focus would be put on MS Teams, OneDrive, MS word, Moodle, and WhatsApp.

2.2. Method

For the purposes of this research, the quantitative research method was adopted. This type of research confides on gathering and analysing numerical data with a purpose to explain, predict, describe, or control a social phenomenon of interest (Gay, Mills and Airasian, 2009). Alan Wilson (2018), defined the quantitative research as a research method which is conducted through the usage of structured research approach on a population sample, intending to generate quantifiable insights in attitudes, behaviours, and motivations. What makes this research to be structured and more rigid is the fact that it has tendency to use predefined questions, shared with every participant (Hamburger, 2019). The other characteristic of this research is that usually it involves a larger scale of participants. The outcomes of quantitative research approach could be easily replicated and allows the researcher to make comparison between the results, as the gained data can be quantified. Naturally, this causes for the analysis of quantitative research to be statistical. There are few methods within the quantitative research of gaining data such as surveys/ questionnaires (online, phone, face- to- face, in the streets, mail, e-mail, SMS), observations etc.

For this research, the chosen technique for gathering data was a questionnaire, by using the survey method. According to Pritha Bhandari (2022), a questionnaire represents a selection of questions or items employed to collect data from respondents about their opinions and attitudes, based on their personal experiences. Toepoel (2015), suggested that surveys can find use in answering a question about a great sample of people from the population and/ or to generalise the gained data as to create inferences out of the sample to the public.

The used questionnaire which was created by MS forms and shared via e-mail with the invited participants to join it. The focus group were level-4 students studying the module of

Digital Skills and Research Methods. The questionnaire was consisted of the following questions and statements, aiming to understand students` grounds of using technology to collaborate and understand their preferred digital tool:

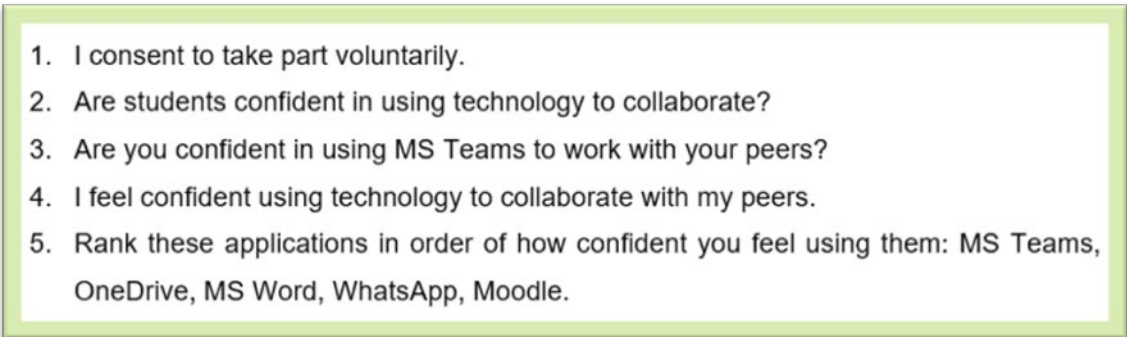
- 
1. I consent to take part voluntarily.
 2. Are students confident in using technology to collaborate?
 3. Are you confident in using MS Teams to work with your peers?
 4. I feel confident using technology to collaborate with my peers.
 5. Rank these applications in order of how confident you feel using them: MS Teams, OneDrive, MS Word, WhatsApp, Moodle.

Figure 1 Preview of the survey questions

2.3. Ethical Considerations

During this research there were taken few ethics in consideration. The first thing taken in consideration was asking the participants for their consent, affirming that it was their voluntary will. This was done by incorporating a starting question in the survey shared with them. The second consideration was- making participants understand that the data collected would be used to support this research only. This was done with a message invited participants received in their e-mail when the survey link was shared with them. At last, participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the process at any point, without requiring from them to list a reason for doing so.

3. Results

Although the link with the survey was e-mailed to every student in the same group at level- 4 studying the module, only 14 students brought decision to participate in the research and share their opinions.

The first question asked for participants to affirm whether their part of the research was done voluntarily. 100% of them affirmed that it was a consensual decision (Figure 2).

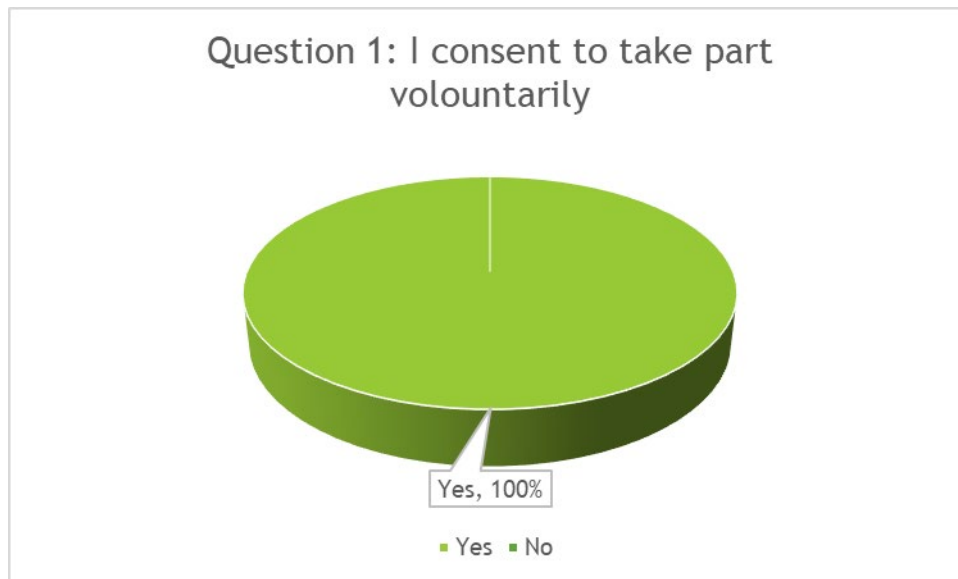


Figure 2 Visual presentation of gathered data

The second question was general and asked for the participants opinion whether they believed students in general were confident in using technology to collaborate. 64.28% answered with yes. 28.58% of them were not entirely certain, answering with maybe. Only 7.14% disagreed and finding lack of confidence in students when using technology to collaborate (Figure 3).

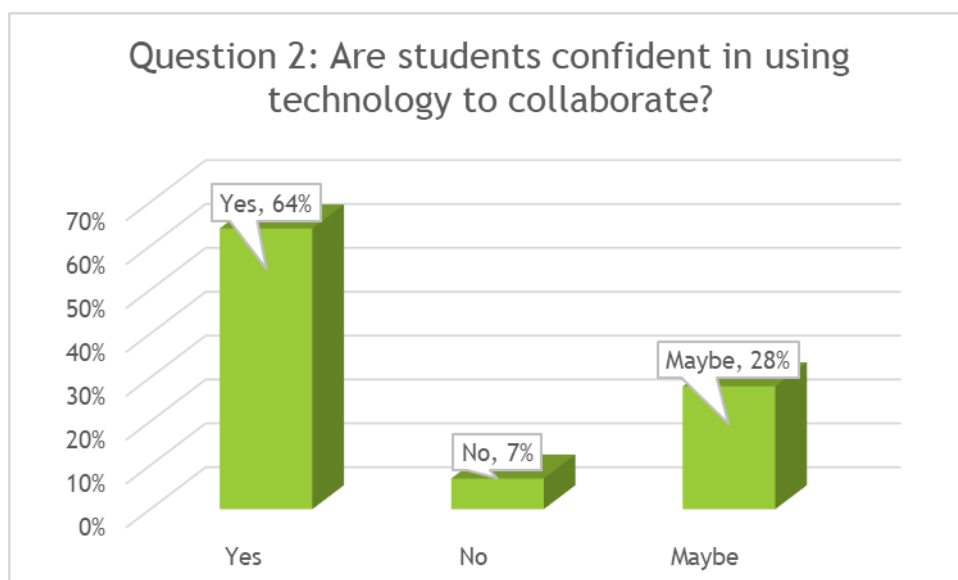


Figure 3 Visual presentation of gathered data

The third question requested from students to answer if they felt confident using MS Teams to work with their peers. 64.28% from the students expressed that they felt confident using

the platform. 14.28% answered that they did not feel confident using MS Teams, while 21.43% demonstrated uncertainty answering `maybe` (Figure 4).

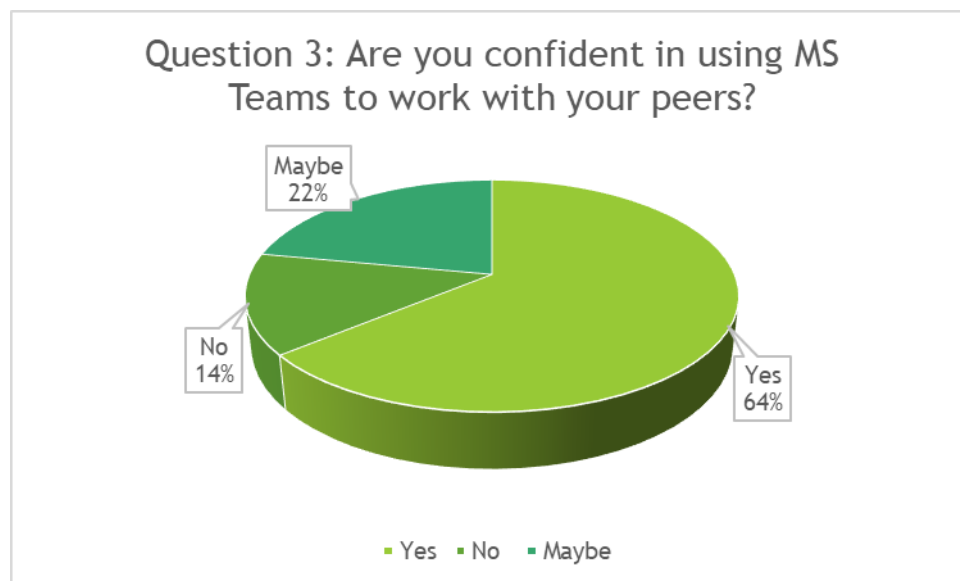


Figure 4 Visual presentation of gathered data

The fourth question asked the participant if he or she felt specifically felt confident using technology to collaborate with their peers insinuating on their personal experiences. 42.86% strongly agreed that they felt confident using technology, while 57.14% agreed (Figure 5).

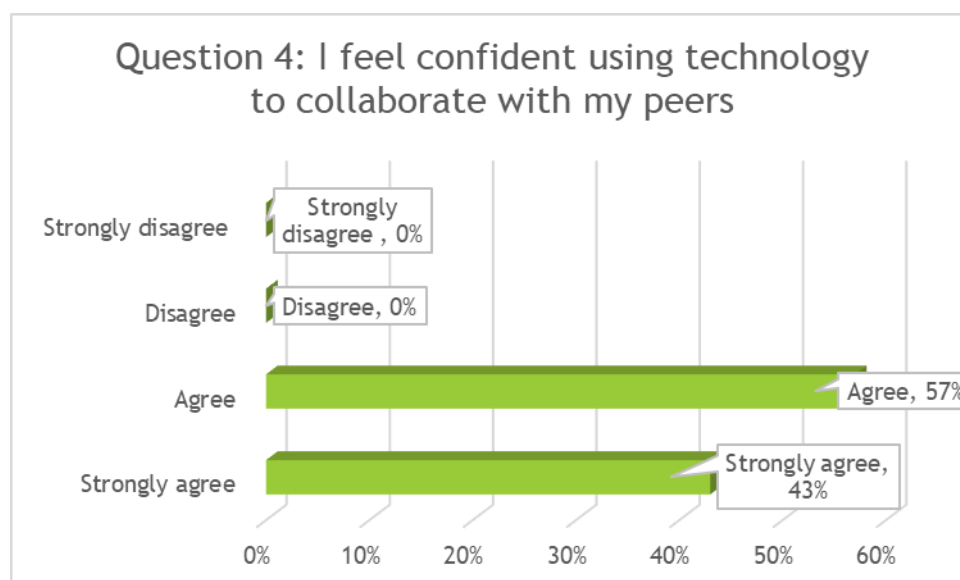


Figure 5 Visual presentation of gathered data

The last question asked the students to rank different applications in order of how confident they felt using them. On the first rank came MS Word with 33.3% of the students placing it on top of their rank. On second place was places WhatsApp with 16.7% of the students choosing it. The third place according to the gathered data was given to OneDrive with 8.3% from the students choosing it. According to the collected data no student ranked Moodle or MS Teams (Figure 6).

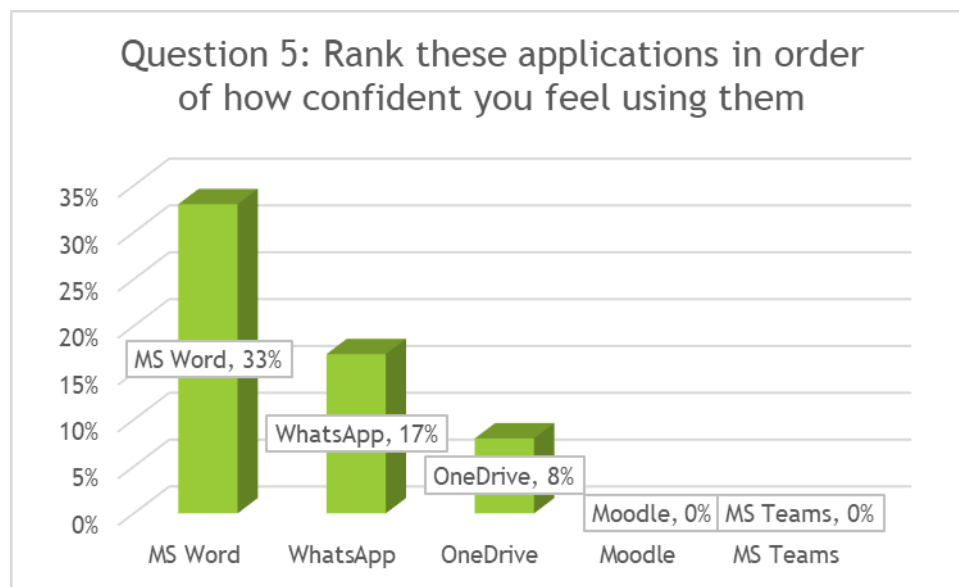


Figure 6 Visual presentation of gathered data

4. Discussion

The theory shared at the beginning of this research, suggested that technology has key role in the education nowadays (Costly, 2014). Further the findings suggested that this recognition done by the university have been manifested with introducing to students' different platforms, transforming the classroom in an interactive space, also stimulating students' performance and collaboration (Kurt, 2010). Findings explained the benefits of the technology in classroom as a way of improving students' mental and physical health, by assisting them gain and strengthen their cognitive and learning skills (Lim, 2011). The further findings used as an inspiration for this research, suggested that not only universities recognise the benefits of the technology, but students also work towards gaining different digital skills, which help them collaborate with their peers, as the case of WhatsApp for instance (Baishya and Maheshwari, 2019). Based on this, a question got raised if UWTSD's

students are confident and comfortable enough to use technology and enjoy the benefits of applied technologies at academic environment while obtaining an undergraduate/ graduate degree.

The research was structured through quantitative method, by the usage of surveys. The surveys then were shared with level- 4 students in order based on the gathered data, a more general idea to be gained.

The findings suggested that students generally believed that students find confident in applying technology, with 64.28% of them agreeing to it, and 28.58% of them believing it could be the case. This got confirmed by the data gathered on another question wondering if the participant felt confident themselves using technology to collaborate. All the participants agreed that they felt confident using technology to collaborate. Perhaps, the percentage was not that high when asked if they believed every other student was confident, taking in consideration different factors such as their personal experience with peers, the age difference among students and technology competence etc. While this data confirms that students feel confident themselves using technology, it should be looked deeper in why they thought generally not every student would find the same confidence.

Further, the research had a purpose to determinate whether students felt confident using MS Teams, as one of the digital applications insinuated to be used by the university, not just for student- to- student collaboration, but also in circumstances where face- to- face lectures should be moved online etc. The findings suggested that only 64.28% were firm in their confidence using the digital tool. While the percentage is still high, this should be something investigated by the university and potentially further assistance to be provided to the students, especially as MS Teams is a platform required to be used by the UWTSD itself.

The research also aimed to understand if students had other digital skills that could help them be creative and create collaborating- studying space outside of what was advised in the classroom, as per suggestion of the done reading. The findings showed that most of the students ranked highest MS Word with 33.3% of them, while on the second place was WhatsApp with 16.7% of the participating students ranking it highest. This confirmed the thesis and suggested that both MS Word with its potential to share documents live with other account holders, and WhatsApp as instant messaging tool were introduced by the students as preference based on their digital skills and technology consumption.

The overall idea gained from this research, accepted the starting thesis, and confirmed that students do confide in technology and do recognise its benefits when it comes up to student collaboration and performance.

5. Conclusion

The idea of this research was created based on literature and academic reading, which suggested that technology found massive presence in education nowadays. The main research question was based on the theories that universities recognised benefits from applying technology in the classroom, assisting it turn into a more interactive space, too. Further, there were suggestions made insinuating that the same benefits were recognised by students, too, who dedicated themselves gaining digital tools. Based on these ideas, the research aimed to explore if the students studying at UWTSD felt confident applying technology as a mean to collaborate with their peers and take use of the benefits.

Based on the findings gained through a survey shared with the students at level 4 studying Digital skills and Research Methods, it can be concluded that UWTSD's students do recognise the essence of technology for their collaboration with peers and academic performance, by majority of them confirming that they do have digital skills and are confident applying technology.

6. Reference List

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7. **Appendix A** – A blank copy questionnaire.

Digital Skills 2022

Question Bank for the Research question

1. I consent to take part voluntarily
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No

2. Are students confident in using technology to collaborate?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No

3. Are you confident in using MS Teams to work with your peers?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Maybe

4. I feel confident using technology to collaborate with my peers
 - ☐ Strongly Agree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Strongly Disagree

5. Rank these applications in order of how confident you feel using them
 - MS Teams
 - One Drive
 - MS Word
 - WhatsApp
 - Moodle

Submit!