ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

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Using Whatsapp as a training tool

The most popular instant messaging application can also be unexpectedly useful for educational purposes.

The famous messaging application, whose greatest strength is and always will be that it is **free**, can be used as a tool to **support training and lifelong learning**. We are, of course, talking about Whatsapp, an app that was the subject of an in-depth study aimed at assessing the importance of social media in imparting knowledge to medical degree students at the ESI-PGIMSR, ESIC Medical College & Hospital in Joka, India.

The work of the researchers

The researchers aimed to evaluate the improvement of knowledge acquisition through e-learning and didactic teaching using the app without neglecting the individual and collective experience of the students who experienced this new approach. Two groups of students were taught the same topics in two different activities, e.g. through WhatsApp and through didactic lectures. Knowledge was assessed through the administration of pre- and post-test questionnaires of 20 points for each topic. The perception of e-learning via WhatsApp was done via a feedback form.

What results were obtained

The research demonstrated the actual value of a new type of learning as the group of students who also made use of Whatsapp scored between 5 and 20 points while those who had access to classic didactics scored between 3 and 17.5 points. An important difference that shows how useful the switch to this new teaching and learning support tool can be.
Some disadvantages
The scholars from the Indian university highlighted only a few minor disadvantages that, they point out, are far fewer than the advantages of the teaching approach, which are:

1. Eye fatigue
2. The 'bombardment' of messages on the smartphone

These negative effects can, however, be alleviated by using **larger devices** that therefore tire the eyes less and by concentrating the messages only at certain times of the day, as if one were in class.

So how does learning via Whatsapp work?

An example of '**community**' comes directly from the messaging app, which tells the story of Priya, the headmistress of a small school who would like to find a practical way to connect with teachers, parents and students and build a stronger sense of community. As stated on the app's official website, the educator "is tired of sending so many emails to so many groups, and the fact that most of the time people don't even read them creates a sense of frustration for her. Some parents she sees often, but she is worried about those she never sees: are they aware of the opportunities their children are offered? Do they read the notices about school assemblies? Do they have difficulty getting in touch with her or her team?". Hence the headmistress's idea to first discuss this with colleagues who teach in the upper classes. They explain that "many parents contact them directly for updates on school activities, and they often find themselves repeating the same conversation with different parents. There are also many students who need constant reminders about upcoming class assignments, some of whom cannot keep up, while others just don't come to school. The teachers are enthusiastic about the idea of creating groups; they are convinced that there is a better way to communicate with parents and students, or even to create smaller study groups to foster the children's learning and consolidate friendships". Thus was born the idea of a virtual community that could improve:

1. The quality of teaching

2. The quality of school-family communication
3. The pupils' academic performance

Another aspect not to be overlooked is the optimisation of communication between colleagues, parents and students.

Here is how to create a learning community

1. Establish the objective of your group
2. Decide on the type of members to include
3. Think about which people can help you administer the group
4. Avoid including people who would not benefit at all

Good communication and coordination of administrators must never be lacking within the team. When choosing an administrator, it is best to choose people who have an important role in the community, e.g. teachers or staff members. With regard to staff and parent groups, try to appoint administrators who are:

1. faithful to the code of conduct;
2. kind, sociable and strong;
3. able to devote time to group management;
4. willing to communicate and meet regularly with other administrators.

How to make sure there is always a good engagement rate

Questionnaires and surveys are always a good strategy for keeping the community active and learning the content of what we are disseminating. Useful links, reading ideas, alerts, appointments are always welcome. For teaching purposes, the exchange of links to studies, research, can become a way of deepening a particular topic analysed in class or analysed during a meeting.

The didactic usefulness of Whatsapp

Think of how much paper has been wasted over the decades taking notes when instead a lesson can be recorded, when the passage of an explanation can be put online in the Whastapp group available to all students. The use of the app also has a great impact on the environment. Not only that. The huge amounts of photocopies made at school can be overcome by digital documents that can be exchanged in the class group and thus always available. This modus operandi has very positive effects on learning itself as young people can more easily find what they need, they can explore a topic at home without fear of having missed something.

E-learning via Whatsapp in the Metaverse

Living in the Metaverse means venturing into an experience in which digital is the master. It is in this perspective that training must also project itself in order to increasingly guarantee an experience of personal enrichment that is realistic, concrete even if in a remote mode. The Metaverse presents itself as an ideal world for cultivating a new educational experience. It is conceivable that teachers and students will meet in a virtual space and no longer in classrooms as is currently the case. Preparing for these changes by making use of social media is a first step towards the launch in the near future.

Why choose Whatsapp

Returning to the study conducted by the ESI-PGIMSR, ESIC Medical College & Hospital, the researchers argue that WhatsApp has more advantages than other technological tools used in the educational system. We are talking about low cost, simplicity, accessibility, efficiency and habit. Until recently, there was no technological tool that was used so naturally by adults and students of all age groups. The students involved in the research described Whatsapp as a 'transnational communication platform' in which they can express themselves freely in an unrestricted environment, thus eliminating the constraints of low participation characteristic of lessons. According to the data, 82% of the students were eager to post videos, audios, texts about their difficulties and also learn from the posts of others.

Conclusions

Although there is no significant difference between acquiring knowledge via Whatsapp or through didactic lectures, the advantages (technical, educational or didactic) outweigh the disadvantages. The material remains practically forever, putting on paper that much talked about lifelong learning.