Appraising Use of Mobile Messaging Application as an Additional Tool for Undergraduate Teaching

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights how undergraduate medical students can use mobile messaging applications for academic purposes with their peers and faculty. Few suggestions along with potential advantages of mobile messaging tools are put forth. The major challenges that could be encountered are also encompassed in the paper.

Keywords: Mobile, Messaging, Students, Applications

I. INTRODUCTION

The profound influence of mobile in our lives today is no news. It has permeated almost all spheres of our lives allowing us to be better, faster and save time and money. It is no different for the education sector as well. Over the last decade, teaching learning modalities have seen drastic change. Use of internet among students has increased manifold and medical students form an integral portion of its users. Moreover the uses of mobile applications are also growing leaps and bounds among the students and they are using it quite pervasively. They are familiar with social networks and pretty comfortable with them.

II. CONCEPT OF MOBILE LEARNING

It is one of the hot educational trends for the coming years. Apps, and smartphones are storming into classrooms around the world. Mid level and higher education in developed and developing countries are now trying to adopt the use of smartphones in the learning process from different perspectives and teaching methods.[1]

Mobile phones are becoming popular as many people can afford them. Currently the use of mobile communication devices has gone beyond the traditional communication role that it is now used in supporting teaching and learning. In education, mobile phones have led to the evolution of new paradigm known as mobile learning [2].

Mobile apps represent a potential breakthrough in the way students can learn and the amount they can learn while doing it. These apps can improve information accessibility; facilitate communication enhancing synchronous learning and increase cooperation among students.

Mobile phones can be used for sharing information resources through mobile applications such as *WhatsApp, hike, viber, wechat* etc. which can be used very well for sharing academic information resources. WhatsApp and other messaging services could become the next platforms to reach 1 billion users within a year or two [3].

According to Common Wealth of learning [4], teachers can share with students' movies, audio files and other learning materials through their mobile phones.

A. Suggestions feasible for undergraduate teaching:

Considering these facts we intend to recommend use of mobile applications such as WhatsApp, hike, viber etc.

amongst medical students as a valuable adjunct and an important tool to be utilized for teaching, learning and communicating in medical education.

- We suggest that mini groups of students and mentors on such applications can be made.
- Students should be free to become group members of the same.
- It will create a good platform where they can express their views without any fear.
- Small quizzes, informative pictures, short surveys pertaining to subjects can be posted.
- Even a teacher can periodically upload educational material in the form of videos, illustrations and diagrams.

Visual impressions definitely have several advantages like generating interest in class and improving attitude of students towards content. It fosters in depth learning and leaves indelible visual impact in their mind.

Medical Professionals have started appreciating the use of intelligent, open source lectures available online to supplement their classroom lessons (on myriad topics) and even learn a few things they themselves didn't know before.

It could serve as the best method to obtain feedback from students. They can express difficulties which they are facing in their academic as well as non-academic life. Posts from students should be heartily accepted and need to be encouraged from time to time.

The "new generation" will find something close to their heart.

Though economic difference amongst students is prevailing but smart mobiles are within the reach of everyone. We agree that not all students are using such applications and it may be its biggest limitation but it's always good to start something innovative. Implementation of change in teaching learning methodology has been welcomed from time to time.

Every new idea fetches criticism and our suggestion might encounter or may have to face some contradictory or nasty comments. Nevertheless its better late than never to start something new and if we from faculty community won't change, our students might consider us as "Obsolete". There is enormous potential of cloud-based technology, which would allow students to log in to specific mobile apps in order to access their curricular assignments, thereby creating the scaffold for paperless submission. According to Huang et al [5] mobile

learning applications can facilitate students not only learning contents conveniently but also interacting with others collaboratively anytime and anywhere. Hence, the development of m- learning as a new strategy for education has implications for the way students and tutors in educational institutions interact.

According to Cui and Wang [6], SMS System can be utilized to help students learn many a things and teachers can `use SMS to communicate with one student or even one group of students. For instance teachers in higher education in UK have implicated SMS as prompt for course requirements, polling classes, pop quizzes to students and sending information about time table and reminding students about dates for examination [7].

B. Benefits of mobile messaging tools:

1. Instantaneous

It has been found that students check for text messages on their mobile phones frequently and always respond to the arrival tone [8]. Therefore, a significant feature of text messaging is the immediate capture of the recipient's attention. Such attention-getting may lead to an improvement in students' focus and motivation as per Martinez-Torres et al [9] and result in an enhanced learning experience. Allen, Witt, and Wheeless [10] found that an immediate response from the instructor increased students' motivation and the cognitive mastery of material.

2. Pervasive

Text messaging is also an advantage because mobile devices are nearly always turned on and owned by the majority of students [11]

3. More fitting than email

It is notable that text messaging is perceived by students to be more ''instant'' than email and is the dominant mode of e-communication among students Harley et al [12]. Given its role as a primary communication channel, text messaging has been identified as preferable to email in building both social and academic relationships.

4. Time management

Because of its immediacy and ubiquity, text messaging is particularly well suited to providing time-management assistance to students. Text messaging has been suggested as a means of reminding students of assignment or application due dates, and timetable or procedural changes.

C. Key Challenging Issues

Despite the massive advantages that mobile phones do have in the teaching and learning process, there are some challenges of m-learning among tutors and students.
Some of the mobile phones do not have programs that have direct compatibility with the academic programs such as pdf, words, excel and PowerPoint. Screen size is another limiting factor for mobile learning.

1. Short messages

Given that a single-text messages is limited to 140 characters, faculty and students may be challenged by the short message length and brevity of language required.

2. Divided attention

When students respond to the arrival tone of new text messages, their attention is drawn away from the current task in which they are engaged. This can be a significant distraction when text messaging is used in class (Markett et al [13] Similar problems exist for instant messaging conversations. Junco and Cotton [14] observed that instant messaging is detrimental to learning because it requires students to split their attention in an academic setting.

3. User fees

Until free services to the education market are provided, cost could be a factor in adopting text messaging for academic purposes [13]. The same challenge does not exist for instant messaging, as nearly all services are available for free. However, the unique challenge to instant messaging is that the user has to be signed in to a computer in order to participate.

4. Personal space

While text and instant messaging can serve to increase familiarity between students and faculty, students were seen to resent such communication when it was used for academic purposes. Students consider their mobile phones a personal technology, and in some cases, disliked receiving text messages from faculty or tutors because it encroached into their personal space as quoted by Brett [15]. Instant messaging is also considered a private, peer-to-peer communication tool, and students do not always want to appear visible to their instructor or to other students.

The teaching staff in many colleges makes calls and sends text messages for alerting students and communicating with colleagues on academic issues.

This article highlights how medical students can use mobile messaging applications for academic purposes with their peers and faculty. Specifically, comfort level, frequency of use, usefulness, reasons for messaging and differences between peer-to-peer and peer-to-instructor interactions are key factors why the students feel that they are very comfortable with using messaging. Students consider mobile messaging as very useful for academic purposes. Key reasons cited for using messaging included saving time, resolving administrative issues, convenience and ease of use. Text messaging appears to be the preferred mode of communication for students with respect to communicating with both peers and instructors.

Since many institutes are offering free Wi-Fi to students, therefore it should be channelized somehow for constructive methods. Students will feel free to come out with their expression on this media as compared to directly expressing their view in front of their mentors or teachers. It can be a reasonably good educational tool despite the presence of certain distractions. Students would agree upon the fact that social networking time can be put to good educational use.

III. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the use of mobile applications can be envisaged fundamentally as an adjunct to the conventional teaching learning aids to improve students' learning ability. It can be a useful and viable tool for

augmenting student's communication among peers and faculty in medical education.

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