
PRE-COUNSELING THROUGH WHATSAPP: ENRICHMENT FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION COUNSELING SESSION

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Abstract: WhatsApp is a smartphone application used by the young generation for creating the social feel. Many researches are happened in effect of whatsapp in education. These researches concentrated in the perspective of disadvantages of social media especially WhatsApp. The focus of this paper is to propose a system to utilize WhatsApp as a facility for improving effectiveness of Face to Face counseling sessions in Distance Education. WhatsApp enabled pre-counseling sessions are the core of this proposal. Ultimate aim of this article is to design virtual class room with the support of WhatsApp.

Keywords: WhatsApp, Counseling, Distance Education, Social Media, Technology in Education

Introduction: Distance learning or Distance Education provides "access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both"^[1]. Distance education has many advantages. That is why it become quite popular. Through (ODL) Open Distance Learning system it is possible to serve large sections of society wanting further studying but who are not able to continue to study in regular conventional institutions for various kinds of reasons. Distance education provides access to higher education to adults who are willing to learn on their own, at their own pace^[2]. Distance education is more flexible and cost effective system. It has emerged as a alarming system of higher education in most developing countries. Distance education has two major components, distance teaching and distance learning. Distance teaching is the efforts of the educational institution to design develop and deliver instructional experiences to the distant learners. Education, and distance education, is comprised of teaching and learning. In India, Distance education in the higher education sector contributes to about 24% of the total enrollment. The Indian Government has ambitious plans of increasing this to 40% by 2012. Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is the only one central open University in India. Most of the Indian States also has a State Open University setup by the local State Government. Many private, un-aided distance education providers are also functioning in India.^[3] In Indian Distance Education System, Counseling sessions have a vital role. These are organized at the study centres with the intent of providing the human face to the learner. These are coordinated by academic counselors. Academic counselors are experienced and qualified teachers drawn from the conventional system of education and those who have been teaching the subject in reputed institutions. The number of counseling sessions is predetermined by the corresponding institution.^[2] Distance education system requires learners to have effective self motivation and good study skills,

discipline, and attributes needed to attain learner autonomy (Collis, 1996). If the students do not receive effective counseling to motivate them in learning, they may not learn well, if they progress at all. There are incidents reported in several research studies of students dropping out of the learning system, thereby being labelled failures. ODL students have many roles to play. It is a general belief that ODL is for family and the employed folk (Keegan, 1996). These roles bring with them a lot of challenges that will negatively affect students' studies. Faced with inadequate or no counseling students may fail to cope with studies resulting in low motivation to learn. They may therefore opt to dropout or suspend studies. However, dropping out or suspension of studies has a negative social connotations as the students are regarded in low esteem by peers. They may be regarded as failures by the society in which they live. On the other hand, faced with a scenario in which students are failing to complete studies, the ODL institution loses credibility as it is blamed for its failure to deliver^[4].

In the distance education system, as the word means learners are physically separated from the teacher and the distance teaching institution. To link these three counseling system are attached. A link is also created through multiple media, such as print, video, audio, and through computer-mediated technology. Counseling is an important activity in distance education and is entirely different from the usual classroom teaching. Counselors answer to the learners' questions in counseling sessions, besides clarifying their doubts and helping them to overcome difficulties they may face while going through the self learning materials. These counseling sessions also offer the students an opportunity to interact with their peers. The counselors perform various roles, such as facilitating learners about the subject matter content, assessing assignments, providing motivation and encouragement and supervising research/term papers/project work. Since counseling is such an

important component of distance education, it is necessary to understand the concept.^[5]

An expert counselor, ambitious learner and sufficient number of counseling session can make the learning process more effective. In most of the cases, Counselors are experts and Learners are ambitious but number of counseling sessions is inadequate. Increasing number of face to face counseling sessions are not possible due to many practical reasons of counselor as well as learners. In distance education, counseling means doubt clearance and discussions. So a pre-counseling session will be an effective tool for overcome this difficulty. Instead of face to face counseling, pre-counseling sessions are demanding for the implementation of technology. WhatsApp, a popular social media tool can provide virtual direct counseling environment.

A. Literature Review : The role of social networks in students' learning experiences.

This is an article by Ilaria Liccardi and Reena Pau. This is a work to investigate the role of social networks in computer science education. This research focuses on analyzing the role that social networks play in students' learning experiences. The construction of students' social networks, the evolution of these networks, and their effects on the students' learning experience in a university environment are examined^[6].

B. The Role of WhatsApp in Teaching Vocabulary to Iranian EFL Learners at Junior High School

This is a paper by Sanaz Jafari and Azizeh Chalak of Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran. In this paper they presented a study about the role of WhatsApp in the vocabulary learning improvement of Iranian junior high school EFL students. A pre-test and post-test were used. The result of the work revealed that using WhatsApp had significant role in vocabulary learning of the students.^[7]

C. Distance Learning and Facebook's Usage in the Study Process: Students' Attitude.

This is a paper by Vilmantė Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė. This paper analysed the role of facebook in study process. This paper states that Facebook should be implemented into study process in future decades. This is even more attractive and comfortable when Facebook became connected with Skype. However explored Lithuanian students are quite critic and conservative about Facebook's using in the study process as use it more for leisure and disport at the moment, but from the other hand they prefer to use the same media for all purposes[8].

D. Learners' Views Regarding the Use of Social Networking Sites in Distance Learning

This is a work by Özmen and Atıcı of Firat University, Turkey. In this study, they examined the use of learning management systems supported by social

networking sites in distance education and to determine the views of learners regarding these platforms. Semi-structured interview with open-ended questions were used to collect the data. Content analysis was used in the analysis of the data. The results of the study shows that within the scope of the course that the students have positive attitudes towards the use of social networking sites and distance education applications and these applications have positively affected the quality of communication between instructors and students^[9].

E. To use or not to use? Social media in higher education in developing Countries.

Abu Elnasr E. Sobaih , Mohamed A. Moustafa , Parvis Ghandforoush and Mahmood Khan introduced the role of social media in higher education. This paper encompasses the universal use of social media by students for academic-related purposes. It bridges a gap in knowledge in relation to the value and use of social media as effective teaching and learning tool in higher education in developing countries. Several barriers among the social media usage for higher education were identified with some specific to developing countries' context. They proposes that the faculty that if these barriers were overcome, social media could be developed as an innovative and effective tool for teaching and learning. Implications for researchers and policy makers are discussed^[10].

F. The Effectiveness of WhatsApp Mobile Learning Activities Guided by Activity Theory on Students' Knowledge Management

This is a research paper by Chokri Barhoumi of Taibah University, Saudi Arabia, which explores the effectiveness of using mobile technologies to support a blended learning course titled Scientific Research Methods in Information Science. Specifically, it discusses the effects of WhatsApp mobile learning activities guided by activity theory on students' knowledge Management (KM). The researcher adopted an experimental approach-based comparison between an experimental group and a control group. The researcher used the t-test to compare the means of the control and experimental groups in the test and the students' attitudes at 0.05 alpha levels. This research paper is useful for exploring the effectiveness of mobile technologies in supporting blended learning courses.^[11]

G. Distance education accounting students' perceptions of social media integration

This is a paper by Annelien van Rooyen* University of South Africa. In this paper, author presented the role of mobile phones and social media in the case of accounting students of University of South Africa (Unisa), a distance education institution. Accounting lecturers incorporated a number of social media applications into a second-year module and on the basis of the evidence provided it is evident that using

social media can enhance the teaching and learning of Accounting. In his words lecturers need to remind themselves that students are, as a participant correctly stated, part of a generation that mostly communicates via mobile technologies^[12].

H. The Impact of WhatsApp Mobile Social Learning on the achievement and attitudes of female students compared with face to face learning in the classroom. In this paper, Aicha Blehch Amry of Taibah University studied the use of mobile learning activities in learning and teaching online courses. The study seeks to explore the impact of using WhatsApp mobile learning activities on the achievement and attitudes of online students using mobile devices at the university. The e-learning process of the experimental group is based on WhatsApp mobile learning activities. The e-learning process of the control group is without WhatsApp mobile learning activities and receives only face-to-face learning in the classroom. A learning unit of the same course educational media is experimented with the experimental and control group. The t-test was used to compare the differences between the experimental and control groups. Through the test he proved that there are real differences in the achievements and attitudes of the experimental group compared with the control group^[13].

I. Benefits and Challenges in the use of social media in open and distance learning.

This is a research article by Richard Bukaliya and Gift Rupande of Zimbabwe Open University. In this article they explored the use of social media among which are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Whatsapp and communication platforms such as Gtalk. These social media tools were mostly used to discuss assignments, research projects and communicating important dates. Being an important tool that can bring about results for the ODL tutor and learner, the study recommended synergies between the institution that the social media use can be enhanced through training of tutors and learners and equip them with technological expertise, availing compatible gadgets to log on to the social platform through university initiatives and also coming up with a clear ICT policy and programme in the university^[14].

J. The Impact of Social Networking on New Age Teaching and Learning: An Overview

This is a paper by Rasmita Kalasi. In this paper illustrates how social media has influenced teaching and learning at present and how it's a biggest and

most comfortable communication zone. In present scenario, social networking seems to have had a deep impact on our social structure and intrasocial interaction. It has proved to be a concept that has caught the human society by storm. One of the monumental achievement is, this Social Media has created a realm of digital environment in today's New Age Teaching And Learning. However, social networking can be defined as an online computer network through which people interact and bond with each other. In simple words, it is virtually, society, where one can know other people and communicate with them. Undoubtedly and Unquestionably, its an emphatic assertion, that we find a social networking global phenomenon that has caused a huge paradigm shift in the world of New Age Teaching And Learning and in the field of communication.

Proposed Approach : The algorithm for the proposed work is as follows:

1. Create a WhatsApp group with counselor as administrator and learners as members.
2. Initiate Discussions on modules
3. Conduct quiz sessions
4. Attach video classes of counselors to clarify doubts.
5. Arrange discussion with expert by adding them as guests for advanced study.
6. Face to Face counseling.

First five steps of the algorithm are named as pre-counseling sessions. The tool used for this session is whatsapp. This approach will make a feel of virtual class room among the distance education learners. Administrator can act as tutor instead of Counselor.

Conclusion : Proposed approach is a technology enabled session. Familiarity of WhatsApp application among the young generation is the key to take it as the social media platform. Pre-Counseling sessions can ensure full time care and systematic development of students like that in class room. In future, administrator can decide discussion time schedule as early for active participation. Administrator can include entertainment sessions of participants to make the cool feel. This will provide more exposures to the students. These features will provide easy and enjoyable class like learning environment and it will overcome the two real problems of distance learning. First one is the inadequate time for completing topics due to less number of sessions. Second one is the learners doesn't have a single class feeling due to the less number of meetings.

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