

The Use of Whatsapp Application in Teaching Environmental Education Students in the University of Calabar

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Abstract

This article explored the use of whatsapp application in teaching environmental education students in the University of Calabar. Whatsapp is a social media handle used by many people in the world today; it can be accessed by using computers, tablets as well as smart phones. Additionally, this application has infiltrated every sphere of life in dissemination of information at all levels of the society; it is particularly useful in the field of education. WhatsApp users may use its services to text, call, and send video, audio, links, location, documents, and images. It allows people to manage their own privacy settings. Whatsapp has been known as being one of the most patronized social media platforms for people to voice their thoughts in and out of the community and to articulate them in writing before communicating. Considering its numerous features which are applicable in the school setting, this paper makes a case for the use of application for teaching Environmental Education. It is recommended that seminar and workshops on whatsapp use should be organized for Environmental Education staff and students to increase the use of whatsapp in the department.

Keywords: whatsapp, environmental, education, social, media

Introduction

Whatsapp has contributed to the concept of globalization as it is one of the easiest means of communication for students and non-students alike. The application is very useful among students as they can get connected to their classmates and friends around the world thus showcasing the concept of global village in the academic world. WhatsApp is one of the technological applications which are commonly used on smart phones and computers in the recent years. This application has helped to increase students' academic performance. This is because it is easier for both the students and lecturers to study through the platform anywhere they are. Whatsapp has become a part and parcel of students' daily life activities and has affected many aspects of their academics positively. According to Çam and Yafes (2019), since the smart phones became very popular, individuals find it difficult to do without it. Mumtaz et al. (2021) opined that the use of WhatsApp is growing continuously day by day at an inconceivable rapidity with many purposes including keeping in touch with friends and family members, sharing ideas, thoughts, and emotions to meet their information, entertainment and

learning requirements. Many students have begun to use this application for their educational tasks, thus necessitating an exploration of the use of this application in teaching environmental education students.

Social media on daily lives

Whatsapp is a social media platform where most people depend on for their daily activities. According to Bonsu et al. (2020), social media has become an educational tool for teaching and learning and sharing educational contents. As Lee et al. (2023) rightly put it, the evolution of digital technologies with renowned technological innovations such as computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones and the Internet have impacted on daily lives. The utilization of social media was initially built to help people socialize; it has become an educational tool for teaching and learning and sharing educational contents. Gul et al. (2021) buttress the assertion by Bonsu et al. (2020) that social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Ayoba, TikTok and WhatsApp are becoming more prevalent and gradually changing the way students interact and socialize with others.

Pervasive nature of whatsapp

One of the most widely used apps among young people for texting and multimedia downloads is WhatsApp, which provides free communication with friends, family, and strangers. In the opinion of Lee and Teh (2016), WhatsApp provides for interactive collaboration, knowledge sharing and effective communication among student teams, which contribute to building a sense of community in higher education. Students engage in teams and/or learning communities in higher education such as student support groups, assignment groups and teams in clubs or societies. Social Media has become effective as a means of communicating ideas and feelings among their users. For instance, Whatsapp enables people to create online communication where they can share information with other members. With the increase in the ownership of smartphones by university students and the ease of use and affordability of WhatsApp in the higher education learning environment, many studies recognize that WhatsApp is of “potential for ubiquitous learning, and the students have a good attitude to this app as a teaching and learning platform” (Suarez-Lantaron et al., 2022).

Social media and environmental conservation

Ogunijinmi et al. (2013) maintained that massive support and vigorous participation in sustainable use of resources would only be achieved by educating and informing the general public. Consequently, social media has an enormous role to fulfill in the worldwide effort to conserve biodiversity. According to Murthy (2013), social media is a widely accessible electronic tool that enables anyone to publish and access information, collaborate on a common effort or build relationship.

Social media are different from traditional or industrial media in many ways including quality, accessibility, frequency, usability, speed and performance. Social media technologies take on many different forms including blogs, business networks, enterprise social networks, forums, micro-blogs, enterprise social network, photo sharing, products, services review, video sharing and virtual world (Aichner et al., 2015).

Kumbhar (2019) revealed that social media have a significant influence on biodiversity and forest preservation. The researcher proposed that there is need for government and all stakeholders to ensure the proper use of social media for environmental sustainability. In the same vein, Akpojotor (2019) examined the use of social media on tropical deforestation in Cross River State, Nigeria and discovered that social media play a significant role in tropical deforestation issues in the area. To buttress this assertion, Ekpo (2016) indicated that social media also have impact in forest conservation. In this regards, whatsapp can be used to change people's attitude towards deforestation.

Whatsapp in the teaching and learning of environmental education

According to Gon and Rawekar (2017), WhatsApp is a teaching and learning platform, which when used can improve students' physical thinking skills. They also revealed that the technical, educational and instructional advantages of teaching and learning with WhatsApp far outweighs the disadvantages. Speroff (2016) opines that WhatsApp is a cross-platform mobile messaging app which uses the internet to send messages. It allows users to communicate easily with others by saving other users' phone numbers that have been verified as their WhatsApp account in their internal telephone memory. Alshammari et al. (2017) state that WhatsApp allows teachers to take on a greater facilitation role in their teaching. The teachers can facilitate all features to support their Environmental Education Teaching. Some of the features of WhatsApp which enhances the application of this application in the teaching of environmental education are as follows:

- 1) Message: The Message in WhatsApp is very dependable and simple. In this case, students of environmental education can send messages to their classmates at little or no cost.
- 2) Voice call and video: Calls through WhatsApp is very convenient. The students are free to talk with their classmates wherever they are and at any time and at their convenience. This is another feature that justifies the use of this application in the teaching and learning of environmental education.
- 3) Photos and Videos: Using photos and videos feature, the teachers and students can share their moments by sharing photos and videos on WhatsApp as soon as they can. Such moments may include excursion or exploration of the natural environment. This can be a very quick method for dissemination of environmental information to the stakeholders.
- 4) Document: The stakeholders in the teaching and learning of environmental education can share documents easily. Such documents include Pdf files, Ms Word documents among others, which may include learning materials on environmental education or any such related documents.
- 5) Chat Group: Students of environmental education can connect with their lecturers through group chat for lectures as well as their fellow students for discussion. Educational activities can be conducted through such group as students and lecturers can use group chat for studying wherever they are.
- 6) WhatsApp on phones and desktop: Another good feature of whatsapp application is that it is compatible with both smart phones and laptops/desktops. Students and teachers can decide on which device that is convenient for them for easy communication.
- 7) End-to-End Encryption: End-to-end encryption is a security feature of whatsapp application. This guarantees the confidentiality of messages exchanged via the platform thus making the platform reliable in exchanging messages that are particularly for some targeted audience or stakeholders.

8) Voice Message: WhatsApp users can use this option to discuss important issues or give/ask questions during classes online. This feature is also useful in the teaching and learning of environmental education as the teachers and learners can communicate by dropping voice notes for one another.

Conclusion

WhatsApp application is a useful tool for teaching Environmental Education. It enables students the opportunities for practical teaching in Environmental Education such as field trip and excursion, class work and assignments; it gives more personal and comprehensive relationship between students and teachers. It facilitates staying connected to the learners and making the students available for help and support in their quest to learn about the environment. Then, students will feel confident, independent, and have a positive attitude to learn Environmental Education. In addition, students do not only access the WhatsApp in the classroom but also outside the classroom. It helps students to learn Environmental Education anytime. They can gain access to the materials that is given by their teachers more than one time whenever they want. It enables students to interact with their classmates and their teachers through WhatsApp when difficulties arise or not being clear enough about the learning material given. Therefore, WhatsApp is a very important tool for teaching and learning that can bring about change in behaviour and attitude among Environmental Education students. WhatsApp is a potential tool to assist Environmental Education Instructors in teaching Environmental Education, although this application has not been used to its full potential by Environmental Educationists. Information about environmental issues could be disseminated through this platform.

Recommendations

- 1) Students should be encouraged to use social media platforms especially Whatsapp which is becoming more prevalent and gradually changing the way people interact and socialize, that will help them in learning outside the school environment.
- 2) Seminar and workshops on whatsapp use should be organized for Environmental Education staff and students to increase the use of whatsapp in the department.

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