The use of Whatsapp in today's mobile language teaching and learning

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Overview of the presentation

˝ Introduction, objectives and methodology

˝ Advantages of WhatsApp in a blended learning environment

˝ Teaching of Portuguese as a Foreign Language in Eswatini

˝ Covid19 and language teaching and learning

˝ Conclusion

Introduction and paper objectives

˝ This mixed method paper seeks to give an insight into recent developments in the teaching and learning of Portuguese as a Foreign Language in the context of the kingdom of Eswatini (Southern Africa).

˝ It shows the results of a desktop review of existing literature on mobile learning applications in the field of language teaching and learning in general and of Portuguese as a Foreign Language in particular, on the one hand.

˝ On the other hand, it explicits field research done with tutors and learners in the Certificate of Portuguese blended learning programme offered by the Institute of Distance Education of the University of Eswatini.

˝ Before concluding, the authors also briefly look at how the COVID19 pandemic has impacted on the use of WhatsApp.

General benefits of WhatsApp as a teaching and learning tool

WhatsApp can be used:

˝ As a discussion tool.

˝ To hold synchronous and asynchronous interactions.

˝ To produce and disseminate educational videos and podcasts.

˝ To promote cooperation between peers by sharing content and supporting material, for example: research articles, e-books, laws, YouTube channels, links, etc.

˝ For data collection since the teacher / researcher / student researcher can use this medium to send voice or written questions and receive answers, thus promoting quick feedback.

˝ To promote collaboration, as knowledge is being created by a group through discussion in shared construction.

˝ To assess student participation: The teacher / moderator can use WhatsApp groups as a means to assess student participation.

˝ To motivate and stimulate students.

˝ To build confidence: students can feel more comfortable than during face-to-face classes to ask questions or share interests.

˝ To allow higher forms of inclusion: learners are all different, some are more extroverted and others are more introverted, some have visual and other hearing problems.

It is through practice of the language that a learner develops language skills. When using the grammatical content and vocabulary learned in the production of sentences and in an attempt to dialogue, the learning process becomes really significant. WhatsApp is a very useful tool for practicing writing, listening and speaking skills.

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Brief overview of the teaching and learning of Portuguese in Swaziland/Eswatini

The Portuguese language arrived in the Kingdom when the first Lusophone speakers immigrated. In 1969 there was already an operational Portuguese school, located in the capital city.

Over the years a few primary and secondary/high schools started teaching Portuguese

The Department of Modern Languages (UNESWA) added a Portuguese section at the beginning of the new millennium. This translated in the design and implementation of a Certificate in Portuguese programme for which classes started in 2009

From the onset, the Certificate in Portuguese was a blended learning programme, as students would have limited face-to-face lectures and tutorials. In between classes interaction was needed.

Moodle was first seen as a viable option but it was soon felt that WhatsApp offered more affordances.

COVID19

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Covid19 and language teaching and learning

˝ The pandemic has greatly disrupted teaching and learning in Eswatini.

˝ Universities were closed in March 2020, at least physically, meaning that no students or staff were allowed on campus and all face-to-face learning was thus stopped completely.

˝ As March 2020 was in the middle of the second semester and students were already used to working on WhatsApp, it was hoped that the switch to fully online learning would run smoothly, especially as students' attitude towards the use of WhatsApp for learning and teaching is generally positive.

˝ However, this was not really the case. Learners soon noted a number of obstacles to the finalising of assignments and continuation of learning.

˝ Some students had this to say: "we are weary and scared of online learning as sessions seem to be based on time out sequences" (the student was referring to synchronous sessions).

˝ Students, because of the lockdown, were unable to get to internet cafés or get additional data or airtime because of financial constraints.

˝ Even though the coordinator, lecturers and tutors kept on encouraging students to continue interacting and learning (for example, by sending resources, asking questions and providing additional reading) the fear and stress related to the coronavirus spread made it difficult for students to participate meaningfully.

> WhatsApp has been tested for years now in several educational contexts and it proved to be very beneficial not only to develop a community of inquiry but also as a helpful tool for language learning.

> For the past five years the coordinator, lecturers and tutors in the Certificate in Portuguese have been adapting WhatsApp to students and teachers' needs and trying to take the most advantage of this tool.

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We hope you have enjoyed this short presentation. We look forward to your comments and questions

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