Undergraduate nurses reflections on Whatsapp use in improving primary health care education

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Background: The global use of mobile devices with their connectivity capacity, and integrated with the affordances of social media networks, provides a resource-rich platform for innovative student-directed learning experiences.

Objective: The objective of this study was to review the experiences of undergraduate nurses on the improvement of primary health care education at a School of Nursing at a University in the Western Cape, South Africa, through the incorporation of a social media application, WhatsApp.

Method: A qualitative, exploratory, descriptive, and contextual design was used to explore and describe data collected from a purposive sample of 21 undergraduate nursing students. The study population was engaged in a WhatsApp discussion group to enhance their integration of theory and clinical practice of the health assessment competency of the Primary Health Care Module. Participants submitted electronic reflections on their experiences in the WhatsApp discussion group via email on completion of the study. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data collected was done according to Tesch's (1990) steps of descriptive data analysis in order to identify the major themes in the study. The electronic reflections were analysed to explore their rich, reflective data.

Results: Seven themes were identified that included: positive experiences using the WhatsApp group; the usefulness of WhatsApp for integrating theory and clinical practice; the availability of resources for test preparation; opportunity for clarification; anonymity; exclusion of students as a result of the lack of an appropriate device, and the application caused the battery of the device to run flat quickly.

Conclusion: The results of the experiences of students in the WhatsApp discussion group could be used to inform the use of social media applications in teaching and learning, with the purpose of enhancing the integration of the theory and clinical practice.

INTRODUCTION

Emerging technologies, including the use of social media applications such as WhatsApp, are becoming more frequently used in higher education pedagogies; this is also true for the health sciences (Bozalek et al. 2015:2). In this technologically advanced era, it is difficult and sometimes challenging not to be 'tech-savvy' as an educator at a Higher Education Institution (HEI).

The global advancement in science and technology makes it difficult to remain indifferent to the presence of technology when individuals are singing the praises of the many technological gadgets that they are using on a daily basis. Madeira et al. (2009:2441), for example, report that emerging technologies afford students the opportunity to visualise and interact with learning content by using multimedia, rich graphics, animation, simulation, and virtual environments. Whilst some studies have been conducted about the use of social media for higher education pedagogies, little has been written with regard to the perspectives of learners about these tools. There is therefore a need to investigate the experiences of students in a WhatsApp discussion group to better ascertain how it might be used to enhance student learning.

This article set out to investigate undergraduate nursing students' experiences of using WhatsApp to integrate theory and practice of the health assessment in a Primary Health Care Module. A discussion of the investigation follows.

STUDIES INVESTIGATING EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND MOBILE LEARNING

Studies about the use of emerging technologies and mobile learning to improve student learning are becoming more prolific in higher education (Bozalek et al. 2015; Pimmer & Pachler 2014;

Veletsianos 2010). Technology, such as mobile devices, has permeated our daily lives and provides inexhaustible access to communication and information. Educators and students use mobile technology in diverse contexts for a variety of teaching and learning purposes, for example discussion forums and distribution of content (Conejar & Kim 2014:193-197). An inter-institutional research project funded by the National Research Foundation in South Africa was initiated in 2011 at 22 public South African HEIs. The purpose of this was to explore the use of emerging technologies

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