Improving Communication with Today's Digital Student

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ABSTRACT : *Communication is a key component for success in today's classrooms. It is of critical importance that college students remain actively engaged in and outside of the classroom. Many courses at the collegiate level either have an online component or are taught online in their entirety; therefore, it is important that students "log in" or "be present" daily. That being said, it is apparent that some students fail to do so and may become remiss with managing time or recalling various assignments for the several courses taken each semester along with work and/or family obligations, which are quite common for today's college student. In an effort to remain in contact with students and support academic success, it is necessary to improve communication and utilize strategies that meet the needs of today's digital student.*
KEYWORDS: *communication, digital, Remind, technology*

I   INTRODUCTION

This study sought to measure the effectiveness of an app that was used as a means of communication between a university professor and enrolled students. It has been discovered that not all students have their university email addresses and/or learning platforms set to their phones, which means that there is often a delay in receiving messages. Such delay can hinder response time as well as performance due to the delay in sending and receiving messages. Conversely, most students readily admit to sending and receiving text messages frequently; therefore, this research hoped to improve not only response time, but mostly, improve communication, which may lead to improvement in overall student performance.

II   REVIEW OF LITERATURE

We witness rapidly changing technology in our everyday life and the world around us, and for many of us, we take part in many of those advancements in an effort to make life easier or better, don't we? Today's students have been referred to in numerous ways, such as: as Millenials, Generation Y, Google Generation, and Digital Natives. Regardless of the nickname given, these students have grown up with technology. They have grown up with computers, search engines and electronic games, used the Internet for school, work, and leisure, and multitasked while using social technologies to collaborate and share information and thoughts (Fieldhouse & Nicholas, 2008). Conversely, Prensky (2001) refers to those who have not grown up with technology, as digital immigrants. So, the question lies: in which category do you belong and more importantly, are today's schools meeting the needs and demands of digital natives?

As technology continues to expand and advances become more readily available, (Carraway & Burris, 2013) suggest that the more accustomed to technology these younger generations of students will be arriving in our classrooms. In fact, they assert that today's students are attached to their technological devices. How educators choose to respond can impact their learning and overall experiences in the classroom. Furthermore, twenty-first century learners are influenced by social media, phone applications, and a digital world that was uncommon twenty years ago (Roblyer, 2006). The aforementioned advancements have created the need for educators to analyze current teaching practices to ensure students are prepared to meet the changing needs of today's world. Additionally, technology advancements have provided educators with access to an abundance of resources allowing for student engagement, content diversity, and differentiation of instruction (Ball & Levy, 2008; Chandra & Fisher, 2009). Technology can support learning by diagnosing individual learning and providing instruction based upon the needs of individual students (Tomel, 2003). Educators need to position themselves to better suit the changing needs of today and future learners.

While there are numerous ways to incorporate technology into the classroom to enhance learning, especially considering the plethora of Web 2.0 tools, which can be utilized for classroom presentations and demonstration of student learning, there are other considerations for using technology. While the abovementioned technology serves to enhance learning and engage learners, there is another form of technology that can be used to improve communication between faculty and students. *Remind* is an app, which serves as a communication

tool that uses texting as its source of communication (http://www.remind.com). Educators send an invitation email to students and once students have accepted the invitation, they are signed up to receive text messages from their teachers/professors. This form of communication does not require an exchange of cell phone numbers, as it all handled privately through the app via email solicitation. Once a communication has been sent, students will receive a text message to their phone and it shows the sender as the professor/teacher. However, there is no phone number involved; therefore, anonymity is ensured. Furthermore, it is a one-way communication, in that students are not able to reply. This allows the communication to include course announcements, reminders, and such without the need to log into the learning platform or email account used at the university.

III   OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This mixed-methods study investigated pre-service teachers beliefs about the effectiveness of using the Remind app in teacher preparation courses. Using a 12 item Likert-scale survey and two constructed response questions, the researcher sought to answer the following:

Research Question 1: Does the Remind app improve communication between professor and students?
Research Question 2: Does the Remind app improve academic performance?

IV   METHODOLOGY

The sample population consisted of 73 pre-service teachers enrolled in courses taught by one university professor (researcher). Students from four courses taught by the researcher were invited to participate in the use of the Remind app for one semester. Students who opted to participate in the study, signed an informed consent and were sent the invitation to join and receive text messages for course announcements and reminders from the course instructor via the app. Students who opted to participate in the study were given a survey at the end of the semester. The survey consisted of twelve written statements using a Likert scale, where participants had the following choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree/Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree. In addition, there were two constructed-response questions, which sought qualitative participant feedback regarding the study. All surveys were solicited and completed anonymously, in hopes that students would provide honest feedback regarding the research. Data was collected from pre-service teachers enrolled in the following courses:

- Teacher Education: Children's Literature
- Teacher Education: Adolescent Literature
- Teacher Education: Classroom Approaches to the Teaching of Reading in the Elementary School
- Teacher Education: Reading Instruction and Assessment for Upper Elementary Grades

Some students were enrolled in two courses; however, they only completed one survey to avoid biased sample results or redundant responses, which would skew the data. The data was collected over the period of one semester (15 weeks).

V   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed to determine pre-service teachers' beliefs using the Likert-scale statements and open-ended questions found on the survey distributed to participants. Results of each Likert-scale item are reported in Table 1. For the majority of the students, 78% and 79.4% respectively, this was their first experience using Remind app and using it in an academic setting.

Table 1 *Participants' Survey Responses*

Question	SD	D	N	A	SA
This was my first experience using Remind app.	5	5		6	57
This was my first experience using Remind app (in an academic setting).	3	3	1	8	58
I found that the Remind app was helpful for receiving assignment reminders.			2	22	49
I found that the Remind app was helpful for receiving overall course reminders.			3	24	46
I believe that the Remind app improved communication for me.			8	24	41
The Remind app helped improve time management.	1	7	16	28	21
The Remind app helped improve my overall performance in this course.		8	23	22	20

I would like to see other courses use the Remind app.	3	25	45
I would consider using the app in my future classroom as a teacher.	2	22	49
I believe it is important for teachers to seek ways to improve communication with students.		15	58
I believe that using technology can be an effective tool for improving communication.		13	60
I would recommend Remind to others.	1	21	51

Note: n=73 participants; SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neither Agree/Disagree; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree

As quantitative data suggests, pre-service teachers valued the use of the Remind app in the classroom and the majority would not only recommend it to others, 69.8%, but most would consider using it in their future classroom: 67.1% Strongly agree and 30.1% Agree.

Qualitative analysis consisted of an examination of the responses to the open-ended questions, which sought to answer the following:

Research Question 1: Does the Remind app improve communication between professor and students?

Research Question 2: Does the Remind app improve academic performance?

The first question, "Do you believe that using Remind improved communication between the professor and the student? Why or Why not?" revealed an overwhelmingly positive response. In fact, 66 or 90.4% of the students responded that the use of the app did indeed improve communication. Some shared that it was helpful to receive the reminders on their phone, which was always with them, making it much more helpful and convenient than logging into the learning portal or email to retrieve messages. Another commented that the communication "showed that she cared about our success in the classroom."

An analysis of responses to the second question, "Do you believe that using Remind positively impacted your learning experience revealed mixed responses. While some shared that the reminder sent as a text to their phone helped ensure that they were on task and completing assignments in a timely manner and served to help remind them of due dates within the course, others stated that they did not need the reminders as they remained current with course expectations. The responses to this question are found below in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Participants' response to Q2

Do you believe that using Remind positively impacted your learning experience?

- Yes — 75%
- Somehwat — 3%
- No Response — 10%
- No — 12%
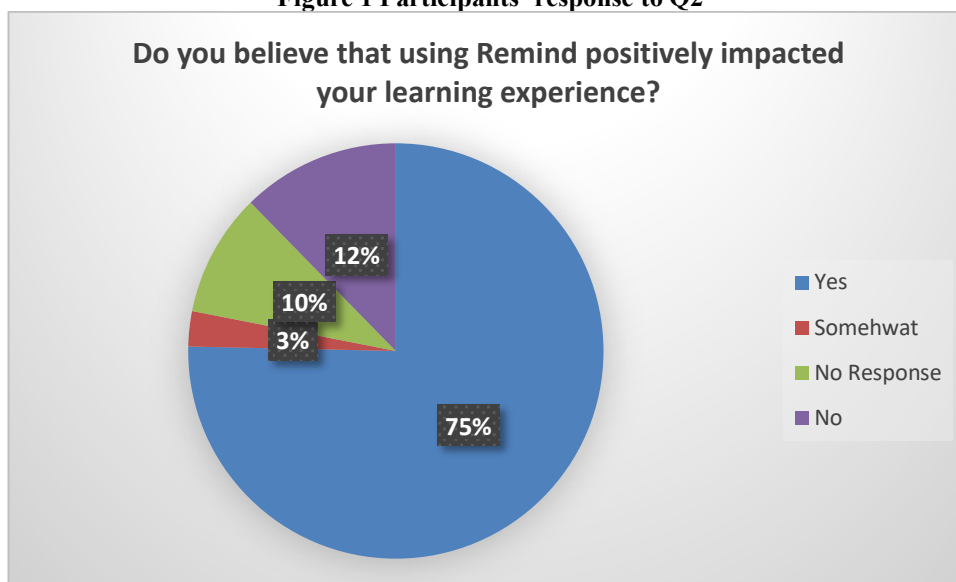
As quantitative and qualitative data suggests, pre-service teachers found the Remind app to be effective and overall, a good communication tool between faculty and students.

VI   CONCLUSION

Communication and technology are arguably two of the most critical components of today's society. It is evident that the methods of communication and the use of technology are ever-changing. It is imperative that we remain abreast of technological advances in an effort to improve experiences for all stakeholders. We must

continue to embrace such changes and seek effective ways in which to communicate with students as we seek to not only improve communication, but also positively impact academic achievement.

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