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Determining the Suitability of WhatsApp for the Jusoor Azima Project

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Notes

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Background

Jusoor is a nonprofit based in Lebanon that supports the education of out-of-school Syrian refugees.

As a response to Covid-19's social distancing measures, Jusoor launched the Azima Project and shifted to Whatsapp-assisted learning to ensure continued access to learning for out-of-school children in refugee camps.

EdTech Hub ran a Sandbox with Jusoor to understand effective approaches to WhatsApp messaging.

One of the key assumptions the Sandbox wanted to test was to see if WhatsApp was the most appropriate tool for Jusoor's Azima project. To test this assumption, we developed a set of criteria to evaluate Whatsapp's suitability to Jusoor's context.

Summary of findings

We compared the way WhatsApp is used by the Azima Project to deliver distance learning to refugee children during the enforced school closures in Lebanon owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, with the 'ideal offering' based on existing literature.

WhatsApp is the best tool for the job. WhatsApp met a number of the key criteria and improvements could be implemented without changing the tool.

WhatsApp's appropriateness was largely due to widespread use. While it met other aspects of the criteria, its biggest comparative advantage was the fact that teachers, students, and parents were all familiar with it and able to use it.

It's not just about a tool. It was impossible to evaluate WhatsApp without exploring Jusoor's offering as a whole, e.g., offering printed material to accommodate offline learners and supplement online learning.

It's not just one tool. While WhatsApp was the main tool used to facilitate distance learning, Jusoor was using a number of tools to support its broader learning system, including G-Drive, PowerPoint, and Tabshoura. These tools helped fill some of the gaps WhatsApp was unable to fill, such as organising learning materials.

How we determine the suitability of WhatsApp for Jusoor's Distance Learning?

1

Determining function —
What do we want the tool to do?

2

Contextual factors — What else do we need to bear in mind?

3

Prioritisation —
What are the 'must haves'?

4

Rating — Do the tools match our needs?

1 Determining function

The first step was to determine what it was that we wanted our ideal tool to do. This included things like:

- Facilitating teacher–student communication
- Sharing learning materials — *text, video, or audio*
- Scaffold learning
- Track student progress

2 Determining contextual factors

What context-specific factors might impact the choice of tool? These might include:

- Technology access levels. *What kind of access do students and families have? What kind of devices? How many hours during the day do they have access?*
- User considerations. *E.g., Needs to be appropriate for younger children (ages 4–6).*
- Cultural considerations. *E.g., Female teachers might not want to be filmed.*
- Learning considerations. *Were there any pedagogical considerations we needed to bear in mind? E.g., hands-on activities for younger children.*
- Cost considerations. *What does the tool cost to use?*

2 Determining contextual factors

Some of the specific criteria we developed included:

- Familiarity with the tool — *Due to time constraints, it was important that whatever tool used was familiar to students, teachers, and parents.*
- Age appropriateness — *The tool needed to be simple to use with parental support as students were typically 4–7 years old.*
- Voice notes — *Many of the parents were illiterate, and as such needed a tool where voice notes were easily shared.*
- Less than an hour a day — *As most students had minimal access to devices, we needed to make sure that Jusoor's offering required less than an hour on-device time (ideally 30 minutes).*

3

Prioritisation

We gave a weighting of 1–3 for each criterion, as follows:

- Must have — 3
- Nice to have — 2
- Unnecessary — 1

4 Rating

Finally, we evaluated WhatsApp / Jusoor's current offering as follows:

- Yes, we're doing this! *WhatsApp and Jusoor's current offering are covering these needs.*
- We're trying. *The current offering meets this criterion imperfectly.*
- We'd like to, but we can't because ... *Our current offering is not meeting this criterion.*

Criteria and the final rating

People	Provision	Place
Product	Pedagogy	Policy

Weighting	An impactful programme using WhatsApp for Syrian refugees in camps in Lebanon will ...	Yes, we're doing this!	We're trying	We'd like to but we can't
3	use technology to support teachers not replace them.	X		
3	find ways to encourage families to give the learners access to the family device.		X	
2.5	communicate regularly and efficiently with parents.		X	
3	provide regular, reasonable, relevant, and reflective teacher professional development.	X		
2	be platform-agnostic.	X		
3	allow for flexibly-minimal time on device.		X?	
3	be low cost, but not at the expense of learning.		X	

Criteria and the final rating

People	Provision	Place
Product	Pedagogy	Policy

Weighting	An impactful programme using WhatsApp for Syrian refugees in camps in Lebanon will ...	Yes, we're doing this!	We're trying	We'd like to but we can't
3	be mobile-first.	X		
3	require minimal data usage (?).		X	
3	have offline options.			X
3	cater to younger students (4+).	X		
3	protect student, teacher and parent data.		X	
2.5	deliver text-based learning material.	X		
3	deliver video / audio-based learning material.	X		
3	monitor / show / encourage student writing.		X	X

Criteria and the final rating

People	Provision	Place
Product	Pedagogy	Policy

Weighting	An impactful programme using WhatsApp for Syrian refugees in camps in Lebanon will ...	Yes, we're doing this!	We're trying	We'd like to but we can't
3	use a tool that parents, teachers, and learners are <i>already familiar with</i> .	X		
3	encourage <i>student-teacher</i> interaction.	X		
3	encourage <i>peer-to-peer</i> collaboration.			X
2	provide <i>synchronous</i> virtual lessons.			X
3	provide <i>quizzes</i> and assessments.	X		
3	<i>scaffold</i> and schedule learning.	X		
3	conduct formative and summative <i>assessments</i> .	X		
3	<i>monitor</i> student progress.	X		