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Qualitative Evaluation: Effectiveness of Utilizing Digital and Social Media in Education

Evaluación cualitativa: Efectividad de la utilización de medios digitales y sociales en la educación

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RESUMEN

El estudio tiene como objetivo verificar la utilidad de los medios digitales y las redes sociales en la educación y reconocer las posibilidades de emplear redes. Se adopta la metodología de la encuesta sobre las actitudes de los docentes y estudiantes en los Emiratos Árabes Unidos hacia el uso de las redes sociales en la educación. Se concluye que el enfoque tecnológico, dentro del proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje, ayuda a los maestros y estudiantes a sintonizarse y comunicarse mejor en formas que se han convertido en la vida actual de todos los grupos a través de un proceso de enseñanza más flexible y sensible.

Palabras clave: Docente, educación, evaluación cualitativa, medios digitales y sociales.

ABSTRACT

The study aims to verify the usefulness of digital media and social networks in education and recognize the possibilities of employing networks in the construction of knowledge. It is adopted a survey methodology through questioning the attitudes of teachers and students in the United Arab Emirates towards the use of social media in education. It is concluded that the technological approach, within the teaching-learning process, helps teachers and students to better tune in and communicate in ways, which have become the current life of all groups through a more flexible and sensitive teaching process.

Keywords: Digital and social media, education, qualitative evaluation, teacher.

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INTRODUCTION

The technological and information revolution in the various branches of human knowledge has become a distinctive trait of twenty-first-century features. The revolution has touched all aspects of life, as it contributed to a state of rapprochement and communication, and the elimination of geographical boundaries, class, and ethnic differences. This led to the mixing of cultures, as well as the daily follow-up of events taking place on the world stage.

Social networking is one of the results of these technological developments that entered our daily lives, and it has become an indispensable means because of its capabilities and technical methods, which have transformed the world into a small cosmic village that is amazingly interconnected. Although the main purpose of establishing these sites is for social communication between individuals, this use has spread more and more to enter all areas of daily life and to all cultural, social, political, and economic activities. Thus, social sites have added a new form of free and direct communication. Through social media, the audience has become increasingly involved in most areas of knowledge.

The education sector represents one of these areas, which has experienced a degree of change and influence on social networking sites. Moreover, not far from these effects, is the increasing use of these social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and other networks. They are deemed of the most important ways used and applied in the educational process, as they provide a flexible virtual environment and platform in which parties in the educational process communicate while providing educational models based on strategies that allow them to obtain information, knowledge, and exchange ideas. Additionally, they assist in preparing a generation of teachers and learners who own skills in dealing with modern technologies and their subsequent developments as well as helping to share these skills with the wider community and open the door for equal education.

Some researchers confirm that teachers will benefit from “a stronger focus on students’ daily use of learning utilization Web 2.0 technologies inside and outside the classroom.” (Greenhow & Robelia: 2009, pp. 1130-1161; Ramírez & Hugueth: 2017, pp. 305-335; Rincón et al.: 2019, pp. 1208-1234). However, some assert that only a small percentage of young people use social media in complex ways that teachers may appreciate (Eynon & Malmberg: 2011, pp. 585-595; Ito: 2013, p. 440). This indicates that there is a lack of existing models, which view social media as a place for informal learning.

Therefore, the current researcher seeks to study the attitudes of teachers and students towards employing social media sites in the educational process and its benefits and challenges facing social media in the daily use of learning.

Problem statement

In this paper, the researcher relies on the relevant theories, previous literature, and the results of field research in the United Arab Emirates on the employment of social media as a means of learning with different characteristics. This is achieved through the views and opinions of teachers and students about the role of those methods in the education process. This paper examines the use of social media tools to support this form of education. The study includes participants from teachers of various disciplines as well as students in the second and third cycles of basic education as a sample of the study. The researcher refers to “education” on a large scale as extending to school contexts, to review the debate on social media in education to highlight the importance of employing social media in education, especially at this time when educational systems suffer as a result of the spread of the COVID-19 virus, which forced many countries to switch to distance education.

Considering the importance of social networks and their role in all social aspects, i.e. cultural, political, scientific, educational, religious, etc., and through my work in one of the educational institutions, I found that it is necessary for light of the growing role of distance education to investigate and examine the impact and power of social media on education. Furthermore, shedding light on this topic may help contribute to overcoming obstacles and difficulties, which students might encounter while learning and studying.

Consequently, this paper will make some recommendations for decision-makers to improve standards of education, teaching, and teaching methods in light of technological developments around the world. The current study also tries to cast light on the role of social media in education from the perspectives of teachers and students in the United Arab Emirates.

Questions of the Study

The study attempts to find an answer for the use of social media in education from the perspective of teachers and students in the United Arab Emirates and research questions can be identified as follows:

1. What are the ratios of teachers and students utilizing Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Google Plus, LinkedIn, and blogs?
2. What are the attitudes of teachers and students towards the use of social media in education?
3. What are the benefits of social media utilization in education from the perspectives of teachers and students?
4. What is the role of social media utilization in education from the perspectives of teachers and students?
5. What are the challenges of using social media in education from the perspectives of teachers and students?

The significance of the study

The importance of this study lies in being one of the studies, which discusses the role of social networking sites in education, and the development of interaction between teachers and students, on the one hand, teachers and teachers, and students and students on the other hand. The attitudes of teachers and students towards social media have also been studied together with its usefulness in developing students' scientific and academic aspects, and the challenges facing the use of these sites.

Similarly, the findings of this study will help those working in the education and education sectors to identify the possible benefits set of utilizing social media tools to improve teaching and learning processes.

Aims of the study

This study aims at Identifying:

- A. The social media role in education from the perspectives of teachers and students in the UAE.
- B. Attitudes of teachers and students towards the use of social media in education.
- C. Benefits of utilizing social media in education.
- D. The role of social media in education.
- E. Challenges facing the use of social media in education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Internet is considered as a World Wide Web for communication. It connects hundreds of thousands of computer networks. It is considered as a communication system that allows computer machines to exchange communication. Researchers in the field of communication define it as a cooperative means of communication that includes a huge number of computer networks worldwide, which allows individuals and groups to use as a means of communication on a vast mass scale (Aljaad: 2016, pp. 194-202).

Bexheti (2014), reported that there are several reasons to use social media in the classroom as follows:

1. Its content supports teaching and learning in a lifelong learning scale; it contributes to fairness and inclusion and increases standards on Higher Education institutions to improve the quality and availability of their course content.
2. Social media gives the possibility to the students to create digital content on their own and publish it online, increasing a vast resource of user-created content from which learners and teachers can jointly benefit, also encouraging more active and proactive approaches to learning.
3. Social media is a network that connects students, and with their teachers, allowing them to share their knowledge and at the same time have access to specific and targeted knowledge in a given field of interest.
4. Social media makes possible collaboration between learners and teachers on a given task or project or a joint objective, pooling resources, and gathering the expertise of a group of people working towards a common objective (Bexheti:2014).

Crowley (2015), also discusses some reasons to use social media in the classroom as follows:

- (1) Social media provides venues for students to share their stories both within and beyond the classroom.
- (2) It also grants opportunities for them to hear stories from beyond their school.
- (3) Social media helps students to recognize the power of personal voice.

The effectiveness of social media in education.

According to Greenhow & Robelia (Greenhow & Robelia: 2009, pp. 1130-1161), integrating social media in learning and teaching environments may yield new forms of inquiry, communication, collaboration, identity work, or have positive cognitive, social, and emotional impacts.

Another research by Mazman and Usluel (2010), has suggested learning through sites and social networks (for example, Facebook) in particular since they are available for interaction, cooperation, information, and resource sharing. Amin et al. (Ahmad & Ahmad : 2019, pp. 746-778; Amin et al.: 2020, pp. 1-25), state that social networking sites encourage participation and critical thinking, Ajjan and Hartshorne (Ajjan & Hartshorne: 2008, pp. 71-80), increased peer support and communication on course content and evaluation (DiVall & Kirwin: 2012, pp. 1-5); intercultural language learning (Mills: 2011, pp. 345-368); and its positive effects on identity expression and digital literacy, especially for marginalized groups (Manca and Ranieri: 2013, pp. 387-504).

Some educational uses of social media tools.

In this part of the study, the researcher reviews some of the social media tools and their role in education:

Blogging

Blogging is used in different educational purposes; for example, it is used for:

- Publishing research papers and school homework. Hosting system where students use the blogging system in publishing their research papers and homework electronically instead of the traditional way.
- Creating an environment of cooperation and constructive dialogue between the students by following up on the blogs of their colleagues and commenting on them (Al-Khalifa: 2008, Kenna & Hensley: 2019, pp. 86-94).

Facebook

Educators and students can use Facebook in Education to create a Facebook page or group for educational purpose by:

- Inviting teachers and students to participate by exchanging information and sharing and exchanging Internet links related to the educational topic.
- Upload educational pictures and videos related to the educational topic, then teachers and students can share, discuss and comment on them (Madge et al.: 2009, pp. 141-155; DeSchryver et al.: 2009, pp. 329-336).

Twitter

Livingstone (Livingstone: 2008, pp. 393-411), reported that Twitter is used in education to:

- Follow-up conferences and seminars.
- Update courses; a teacher of any course can make a Twitter account for that course
- Facilitate project management; students or instructors working together on a project can communicate with each other Twitter utilization. They remind each other of project matters and the status of the project
- Activate debate and discussion; the interactivity of Twitter could help a group of people through creating channels for debate and discussion about certain topics (univ, 2016).

Instagram

Instagram was launched as a photo-sharing platform and over time other new features such as video, texting, and story sharing have been added which contributed to its growth greatly (Ellison: 2017). In terms of language learning, Handayani (Handayani: 2015, pp. 320-327), argues that Instagram can be used as a source for applying several activities in language classrooms like digital storytelling, grammar activities through photos, role plays, reading, speaking activities through videos, etc. Thus, Instagram addresses to four language skills to practice the language in and outside the classroom. Additionally, some studies were conducted on Instagram for developing writing skills (Ahmad & Ahmad: 2018, pp. 44-49; Soviyah & Etikaningsih: 2018, pp. 32-38). These studies showed that Instagram was an effective tool for improving students' writing skills. Furthermore, it was found that Instagram increases students' motivation to learn and their participation in classroom activities (Purnama: 2018, pp. 94-103). Among the studies conducted on Instagram regarding its use for language learning, Mansor and Rahim (2017), found that it is an effective platform that it encourages students to interact with their peers in the group works related to videos they share about tasks led by the teacher.

WhatsApp

Results of the Cetinkaya's study (Cetinkaya: 2017), showed that students developed positive opinions towards the use of WhatsApp in their courses. They demanded the same practice in their other courses as well. They reported that learning could also take place unconsciously and the messages with images were more effective for their learning. However, a few students have expressed adverse opinions about the timing of some posts and the redundant posts within the group. Finally, it is suggested that the use of WhatsApp in the education process be encouraged as a supportive technology for students and the possibility of coming across in potentially harmful friendships.

The role of social tools in teacher-student communication method.

A Study by Manca and Ranieri (Manca, S., & Ranieri: 2013, pp. 487-504), shows that utilization of social media or digital media is more stimulating and motivating. For teaching and learning, the applications of social media have proved to be quite useful, as some tools are applicable within the daily practice, those in which students take their tasks home. Some of the options that may be adopted by teachers and students are presented by Manca (Manca: 2020, pp. 100-107) as specific communities for class, group work, sharing of ideas, and continuing teacher education. Community resources allow the inclusion of videos, links, documents, and text or voice messages. With the use of collaboration space, such as social networks, the

teacher, in turn, has the opportunity to improve aspects such as the ability to write texts, improve development in writing, research on a subject, the presentation of an opinion, and the debate among students.

The role of social communication tools in implementing research and homework assignments instructors

Social networks can be used for research and homework assignments by utilizing new techniques that encourage students to raise issues and be creative or even enable students to exchange books and borrow them from each other. Social networks can increase the number of learners by facilitating their communication with their instructors. Moreover; social networks spread the culture of technology and enlighten students by updating them about the latest developments in their majors. Social communication tools allow shy students to express their opinions in writing, which will help them to arouse their creativity (Aljaad: 2016, pp. 194-202).

Previous practical studies.

The researcher reviewed literature related to social media effects and uses in different areas. Aljaad's study (Aljaad: 2016, pp. 194-202; Ahmad & Sahar: 2019, pp. 1540-1543), aims at identifying the role of social communication tools in education from the Saudi female students' perspectives studying at the college of education at King Saud University-Riyadh. This study used a survey, which was distributed to 500 female students. The results showed that 90% of respondents used social media where 95% said social media improved interaction with each other and raised the sense of social responsibility, 56% used all tools of social media. 45% used social media for more than 6 hours daily. 61% believed that social networks promoted democratic values and spread political culture. 62% of respondents used social media to do homework or academic projects and researches. 99% of respondents believed that social media allowed them to follow new information about their academic specialty and obtained specialized scientific consulting. 79% of respondents believed that one goal of creating accounts in social networks was learning specific science knowledge or a foreign language. 9% of respondents benefited from social media in social educational consulting. 44% of respondents preferred to debate in scientific and educational topics. 84% of respondents agreed that social networks provided the opportunity to form relationships with those interested in a particular scientific subject and exchanged experiences and information with them.

Greenhow & Robelia (Greenhow & Robelia: 2009, pp. 1130-1161), argue that social media has the potential to bridge formal and informal learning through participatory digital cultures. Exemplars of sophisticated use by young people support this claim, although the majority of young people adopt the role of consumers rather than full participants. Scholars have suggested the potential of social media for integrating formal and informal learning, yet this work is commonly under-theorized. We propose a model theorizing social media as a space for learning with varying attributes of formality and informality. Through two contrasting case studies, we apply our model together with social constructivism and connectivism as theoretical lenses through which to tease out the complexities of learning in various settings. We conclude that our model could reveal new understandings of social media in education, and outline future research directions.

McKinney & Rill (McKinney & Rill: 2009), studied the effects of YouTube discussions on a group of university students, their number was (311) students. They aimed at finding the implications of the available discussions on CNN and YouTube. McKinney & Rill (McKinney & Rill: 2009) put a special focus on the effects of these discussions on youth and their attitudes toward democracy as well as their political values. The results of this study reflected the success of this method of debate as it makes the youth more active and raises their political awareness and efficiency as well as their trust in candidates. This method also decreased the amount of political satire and joking about the candidates. It also helped with reinforcing effective information desired by the candidates in the minds of the youth.

Livingstone (Livingstone: 2008, pp. 393-411), studied teenagers' use of social networking sites for intimacy, privacy, and self-expression. This study explored teenagers' practices of social networking to uncover the proper connections between online opportunities and risk. She proved that expressing ideas and identity on social networks exist within real relationships. Her study draws a picture of the contradictions between the real world and the virtual world of teenagers. She gave a binary classification of social networking sites. Thus, she proposed one of the several meanings of shaping online privacy.

Halil (Halil: 2012), investigated student and teachers' social network usage tendencies and tried to identify what sort of social and educational activities they practiced on these networks. The study was carried out on five student teachers studying at various departments of Ankara University, Faculty of Educational Sciences. It was qualitative research and the data were collected via two-hour focus group interviews. The data were analyzed through content analysis. The results indicated that the most useful social network according to the teacher candidates is Facebook. Student teachers use social networks for fun, sharing, social responsibility, and educational purposes as well as communications. Exchanging personal information was the commonest use of Facebook for communication. At the same level of commonness of use, there was sharing of different data like videos, photos, songs, and poems. Participants believe that social networks are safe and confidential provided that they are confident of their security settings. The study also showed that social networks improve social interaction among their users depending on the type and goals of usage.

METHODS

This study used the survey methodology for a sample of (110) teachers and (206) students from U.A.E. This method, as one of the most important so-called methods of research, has high accuracy at the phenomenon, as far as the study is concerned, at this moment. Further, it describes precisely what the researcher does, and yet further how the analysis will be as such. A descriptive research design is concerned with describing the characteristics of a problem. The questionnaire is the method used to get information in descriptive research (Mohajan: 2018, pp. 23-48).

Population and research sample.

The population of the study consists of all the teachers and students in the second and third sessions of basic education in the United Arab Emirates during the academic year 2019-2020. While the sample was a random stratified taken to help achieve the goal of the study. The sample includes (110) teachers and (206) students who use the sites and tools of social media.

Research Instruments.

The questionnaire was used to collect data from the research sample. This study relied on a questionnaire to collect information. Items were selected based on studies and researches in the field of social media. The research tools consisted of two questionnaires, the first for the teacher and the second for the student. Each of them consisted of two sections. The first section contained demographic data and the second section contained 20 items distributed on the four axes as each axis includes 5 elements, the four axes, namely:

- A. Attitudes towards the use of social media in education.
- B. Benefits of social media utilization in education.
- C. The role of social media in education.
- D. Challenges of using social media in education.

Validity of research instruments.

The two questionnaires were provided to social media professionals, who made some observations on some of the items. The researcher modified them after the arbitration.

Reliability of research instruments.

The two instruments were implemented on random samples (teachers, students), which were selected other than the sample that the study was conducted on (pilot study). Then, a statistical analysis was performed (Cronbach Alpha) to verify the reliability of the study instruments. Cronbach Alpha was 0.89 for the teacher questionnaire, and 0.79 for student questionnaires, which was an accepted value to prove that the study instruments were reliable.

RESULTS

Findings of Question #1: What are the ratios of teachers and students utilizing Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Google Plus, LinkedIn, and blogs?

Following are the findings of question number 1:

- A. For teachers:
- B. For students:

Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	YouTube	WhatsApp	Google+	LinkedIn	blogs
29%	11%	18%	19%	25%	11%	2%	1%

Table 1. The percentages of teachers utilizing social media.

Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	YouTube	WhatsApp	Google+	LinkedIn	blogs
58%	34%	32%	21%	22%	10%	3%	1%

Table 2. The percentages of students utilizing social media

The researcher concludes from Tables (1, 2) that the percentages of using YouTube, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and blogs converge between teachers and students, while we find that the percentages of students using Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram for students exceed those of teachers.

Findings of Questions #2-5:

What are the attitudes of teachers and students towards the use of social media in education?

What are the benefits of social media utilization in education from the perspectives of teachers and students?

What is the role of social media utilization in education from the perspectives of teachers and students?

What are the challenges of using social media in education from the perspectives of teachers and students?

Respects of social media utilization in education.	Teachers	students
Attitudes of teachers and students towards the use of social media in education.	77%	79%
The benefits of social media utilization in education.	76%	72%
Role of social media utilization in education.	75%	76%
The challenges of using social media in education	63%	64%

Table 3. The attitudes of teachers and students about the use of social media in education, and its benefits, role, and challenges.

DISCUSSION

It is shown in Table 3:

1. The responses of both teachers and students came close in all respects of social media utilization in education.
2. 77% of teachers and 79% of students showed a positive trend towards the use of social media in education.
3. 76% of the teachers and 72% of the students approved the benefits of social media utilization in education.
4. 75% of the teachers and 76% of the students approved the role of social media utilization in education.

63% of the teachers and 64% of the students went through some challenges of using social media in education.

CONCLUSION

1. Preparing a strategy to activate students' use of social sites for academic purposes, by registering and participating in closed educational groups within these sites is to create a collaborative learning environment between students and teachers.
2. Urging teachers to use social sites for scientific communication with students.
3. Spreading scientific and cognitive awareness among teachers and students about the concept of social site utilization for scientific and academic use.
4. Carrying out experiments for and in education through social media and generalizing them at the level of the United Arab Emirates due to its importance in the field of education.
5. Establishing closed groups for students to be managed and supervised by a scientific and technical committee designed by accredited educational institutions to provide the students with respective materials, assignments, and discussions.
6. Preparing and provide educational courses that increase the knowledge of the positive benefits of social networking sites utilization in the educational process.
7. Studying the problems and challenges facing the educational process parties when utilizing social media sites.

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