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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE PERCEPTION ON THE USE OF FACEBOOK FOR SOCIAL LEARNING AMONG PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS IN SAUDI ARABIA

ALSHAMMARI BADER FARHAN

University Science of Malaysia School of Educational Studies

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*Corresponding Author

Dr. R. Ambily, Ph.D.

Abstract

The research aims to study the perception of using Facebook for social learning in terms of readiness, expectation and the usability among pre-service teachers in Saudi Arabia. In this study, Facebook as a tool for learning was the basis for the assessment of students' perception and comparison in both genders. The sample consisted of 50 male and 50 female students from Primary Education department in Hail University. The results show the positive perceptions of these students in terms of readiness, expectation as well as usability. The male students' readiness does not correlate with the overall perception, while, the expectation and usability were correlated with the general perception. However, the female students' readiness, expectation and usability were not correlated with overall perception. It can be concluded that, students' perception is not affected by the potential constraints and students in both genders have similar perceptions. Findings also revealed students' concern about the availability and affordability of internet connection and the students-teacher online relationship which may cause real hindrance for social learning.

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Introduction

The current global situation is repositioning the way everything including the learning is being done. Learning resources continues to be increasingly available on the internet, redefining the manner in which learning takes place. Focus is shifting from the classroom learning to life-long learning; and being educated is becoming more of an individual's ability to maneuver technological tools for interaction and communication (Mullen & Wedwick, 2008). Today's classroom is fast moving from inside the brick walls into 'wall-less' settings with neither boundaries of distance, geography or time (McLaughlin, 2005). Professionals, teachers, learners, etc from various parts of the world can collaborate together on projects or other forms of team work. Distance education has become far more commonplace than it ever was.

The human traffic on Facebook especially has generated an interest in its exploration for social learning, (Selwyn, 2009; Hung & Yuen, 2010) and especially as a tool to promote social learning considering the nature of the vast network of users (friends, friends of friends, the public, open and closed groups, etc) and a number of institutions across the world now use Facebook for supplementing classroom instructions. Research reports on its use are available from across the globe, especially in developed economies as well as developing nations (Tian et al., 2011; Yang et al., 2011; Hamann & Wilson, 2003; Fischman, 2008; Mazer et al., 2009; Coutts et al., 2007). Although, Facebook is used for social networking, especially among Saudi students in schools and collages (Aljasir, Woodcock & Harrison, 2013). There is no report yet on its use for purely social learning.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Facebook is the most popular Social Network Site (SNS) among college students (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). Despite the popularity and extensive use of Facebook by students, its use has not made significant inroads into classroom usage (Arteaga Sánchez, Cortijo & Javed, 2014). A major reason given by primary teachers for not using technology in the classroom apart from inaccessibility and cost is unfamiliarity and understand the advantages of its use over the challenges (Edwards, 2011). Many educators believe that social networking tools such as Facebook offer new educational affordances and avenues for students to interact with each other and with their teachers or tutors (Poellhuber & Anderson, 2011). However, little is known about their expertise with social networking or their interest in harnessing these tools for informal learning or collaborating with peers. This study aims to investigate the perception of pre service teachers in Hail University on the use of Facebook to enhance social learning.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions being considered in this study are:

1. What is the perception of male students on using Facebook for social learning in terms of readiness, expectation, and usability?
2. What is the perception of female students on using Facebook for social learning in terms of readiness, expectation, and usability?
3. Is there a relationship between the perception of male students and female students on using Facebook for social learning in terms of readiness, expectation and usability?

2. Background

Social Networking throughout the world has gained much importance and this is mainly due to the presence of the ICT. The SNS introduction has led to the vast usage of the PCs, tablets, laptops, etc. Information Communications Technology (ICT) hasn't experienced growth and development in Saudi Arabia since the global system of mobile (GSM) telecommunications was introduced (Sanou, 2013). There existed an era where only the upper class had access to a fixed telephone line in their homes.

The average undergraduate student is in possession of at least a mobile phone with facility to access the internet (Marshall, 2012; Amali et al., 2012). Social Networking Sites (SNSs) are among those most frequented (Lory, 2011; Coutts et al., 2007). SNSs are internet sites that provide subscribers with opportunity for networking with family, friends, colleagues and even strangers with whom they share common interests. Users can share ideas, exchange views, share audio or video contents, hold 'live' discussions online or 'chat', exchange photographs, etc. Sites including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc are accessed quite regularly by many young people (Amali et al., 2012; Lory, 2011; Coutts et al., 2007).

Facebook use in the classroom has been reported by researchers across the world. Schools in developed nations including America and the United Kingdom are already taking advantage of this tool. A number of developing nations including Japan, Hong Kong and China have also been reported to be leveraging on this tool (Morofushi & Pasfield-Neofitou, 2012; Lu & Churchill, 2012; Ham & Schnabel, 2011). However, Saudi Arabia and other developing nations seem not to have caught the 'bug' yet. The question then arise as to whether or not the same response achieved in the identified developed and developing nations can be duplicated in Saudi Arabia.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

The Simple random sampling method employed for sample selection. Since the Chi-square statistic is employed for correlation purpose in this study, the researcher employs the statistic rules of thumbs for sample size selection for chi-square. Therefore, the sample selected was 50 males & 50 females who are studying in Primary Education department from college of education, Hail University, Saudi Arabia.

3.2 Research Procedure

The procedure was used to collect data for the study is questionnaire. The Figure below shows the procedure that researcher follows to collect the data.

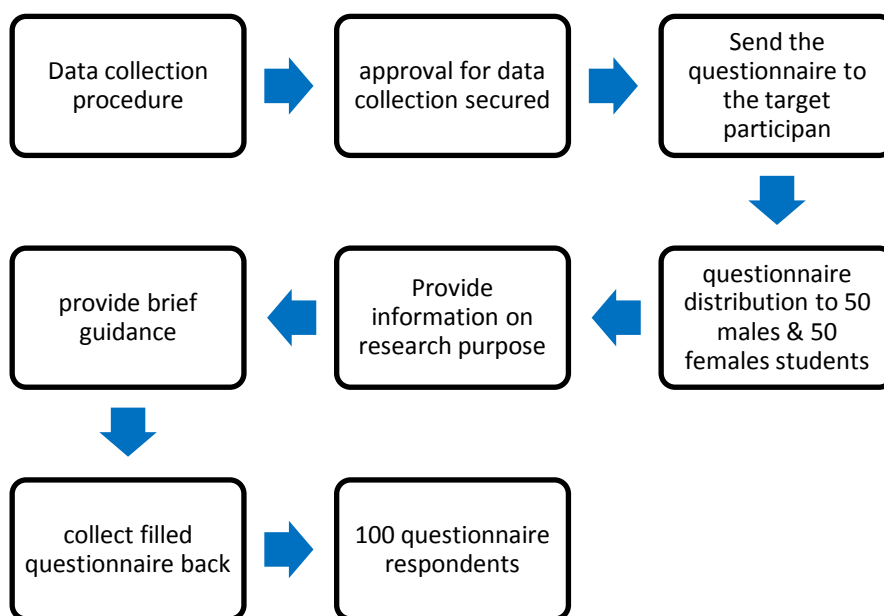


Figure 3.1 Research Procedure

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis will involve the use of both descriptive and inferential statistics. It focused on providing answers to the research questions and establishing the relationship between the dependent and independent variables involved in the research.

Table 3.1: the data analysis methods employed in the study

Research question	instrument	Data analysis method
What is the perception of male students' on using Facebook for social learning in terms of readiness, expectation, and usability?	Questionnaire	Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Standard deviation), inferential statistics (Pearson Chi-square)
What is the perception of female students' on using Facebook for social learning in terms of readiness, expectation, and usability?	Questionnaire	Descriptive Statistics (Mean, Standard deviation), inferential statistics (Pearson Chi-square)
What is the relationship between the perception of male and female students on using Facebook for social learning in terms of readiness, expectation and usability?	Questionnaire	inferential statistics (Pearson Chi-square)

4. Findings

4.1 Perception of male students on the use of Facebook for social learning

Male students were found to have a positive perception of Facebook in terms of the three variables examined in this study. They consider Facebook as a possible learning tool especially in relation to social learning.

No correlation was found between students' readiness and mean perception, this observation is due to the concerns of students on the availability of required infrastructure for making Facebook a possible learning tool as expressed in their responses to the open-ended questions. However there is correlation between students' expectation and mean perception and usability of Facebook and mean perception. In the responses to the open-ended questions, a good number of male students expressed concerns over the effectiveness of the Facebook tool. Some of the issues raised include high cost of internet connectivity and affordability of ICT tools like computer systems, laptops and tablets; unstable power supply and the possibility that social networking will remove the teacher-student ethical gap and cause disrespect as well as the potential of social networking activities to distract students from academic work. There are mostly viewed from cultural perspectives owing to the form of relationship between younger and older persons among the people.

4.2 Perception of female students on the use of Facebook for social learning

Correlation of students' mean perception with perceptions in terms of readiness, expectation and usability however shows no correlation for all the three variables of female students. In essence, the general positive perceptions found from the descriptive data differ from the perception based on the individual variables. Female students expressed practical concerns about the availability and affordability of internet connection and ICT tools. They reported this as major constraints that constitute real hindrance to the educational utility of Facebook and in line with other findings of Bakia (2000), cost as a major factor in internet usage in higher institutions, in relation to campus use of technology. It's also in line with findings of (Ehrmann & Milam, 1999) reported that, using technology in the higher education typically represents additional costs, rather than cost reductions.

Table 4.1: the Chi-square statistics for male and female

	Pearson Chi-square					
	Readiness	Significance	Expectation	Significance	Usability	Significance
Male	0.118	N.S	0.014	S	0.006	S
Female	0.197	N.S	0.300	N.S	0.474	N.S

S= Significant NS=Not Significant

4.3 Relationship between the perception of male students and female students on using Facebook for social learning

There is a significant relationship between the perception of male and female students on using Facebook for promoting social learning in terms of readiness, expectation but there is no relationship in their perceptions in terms of usability.

However, in spite of the higher number of respondents expressing concern over the use of Facebook, the responses to the questionnaire show that apart from the variable of usability, students have a general positive perception of Facebook in terms of readiness and expectation. The potential challenges identified obviously do not seem strong enough for Facebook to be discarded as an important tool for social learning.

Table 4.2 perception of male & female students

	Pearson Chi-square		
	Readiness	Expectation	Usability
Male	.118	.014	.006
Female	.197	.300	.474
Overall Perception	.001	.000	.086

5. Discussion

This study examined students' perceptions of the use of Facebook for social learning. The perception of male and female students were examined and compared. The findings of this study shows that the challenges of infrastructure in Hail city have no effect on the perceptions of students on a learning tool as the results shows that in spite of the lack infrastructure, students perceive the use of Facebook positively in term of their readiness, expectation and usability of the tool.

Furthermore, the findings show that internet access; the cost of ICT tools does not affect the perceptions of students. The constraints experienced due to the nature of the tools students use for accessing Facebook do not affect their perceptions. Male students are mostly restricted to the use of hand phone for accessing Facebook due to the cost of larger and more convenient gadgets; these places limitation on how much of the materials they can access and consequently, how useful the platform can be for social learning. Female students have access mostly to laptop and from their responses to the open-ended questions do not foresee any challenges with using Facebook for social learning. However, in spite of this difference, the perceptions of both groups are the same.

One key differences observable among both groups of students is in their response to the open-ended questions that bothers on the teacher-student relationship with respect to the use of the Facebook platform. A good number of male students expressed concern about the possible negative effect of students chatting with their teachers which they think may result into disrespect due to the breakdown of the traditional limit. Female students think differently about this, seeing no serious challenge with respect to such. This reaction or observation seems to be linked to the culture and tradition, especially the younger-older person' relationship of males and especially in the region where the study was carried out. It can't be ascertained if students from other regions of Saudi Arabia where the cultures are different will express the same concern.

5.1 Conclusion

This study shows that students' overall perception of Facebook for social learning is positive in spite of the possible challenges identified by the students. Issues including internet access, the cost of ICT tools are very important considerations while the place of culture/tradition is also emphasized by students. Students feel online relationship may cause the removal or violation of the students-teacher boundary and thus bring about conflicts that may not be positive for social learning.

5.2 Recommendations

Future research should focus on areas not covered by this study, including the effect of differences in culture and traditions. This research involves only a perception study other aspects for example, implementation, development, etc can be explored in future research. These are other important issues in relation to the use of a learning tool; that could bring to focus a critical issue that require attention and could constitute potential challenges for practical applications. Future studies can also focus on the perception of teachers, school management, parents, etc.

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