



Facebook: Will we use it for teaching and learning?

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Abstract

Pre-service teachers come into teacher training with pre-conceived ideas about teaching and learning (T&L). Unpacking some of these beliefs are rather arduous and challenging to many teacher educators. One of them is on the notion of using Facebook for T&L. In this study, the usage of Facebook as a T&L tool is explored. Facebook was used as a T&L tool in a course with an enrolment of forty two pre-service teachers. Using an open-ended survey, questions on whether they would use Facebook in their upcoming practicum stint were asked. Twenty nine pre-service teachers responded that they will use Facebook during their practicum stint. Among the reasons cited using Facebook are to enrich their students' learning experience, as a teaching tool, to keep abreast with college events and as an avenue to exchange pre-service teachers' experience. The remaining thirteen pre-service teachers indicated that they will not use Facebook. For them, Facebook is not a teaching tool, their students would not be receptive to Facebook and a few cited that their supervisor might penalize them for using it.

Keywords: Facebook; Pre-Service Teachers; Practicum

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1. Introduction

Among the many internet inventions, Facebook has gained a lot of media attention from the research fraternity. Its use for social purposes is high. It ranges from findings criminals by the police, people using it to trace their biological mothers and connecting with voters by politicians (Wetzner and Gordon-Logan, 2011).

Facebook usage in the field of education has its own share of success and failures too. Among the social networking websites, Facebook is a popular choice for students (Smith et al., 2009).

Though Facebook has its own share of supporters and opponents, it continues to be an interesting tool for educators. Facebook allows educators to keep abreast with other educators. Issues in education and opportunities for professional development are some of the reasons educators use Facebook.

The usage of Facebook in the field of teacher education is also gaining momentum. Either in the domain of pre-service or in-service teachers, Facebook provides the platform for teachers to interact and exchange professional development. Teachers use Facebook to access valuable information and resources without incurring any cost.

Pilgrim and Bledsoe (2011) findings highlighted that pre-service teachers who used Facebook are more likely to be more knowledgeable and resourceful than those who did not use Facebook. Besides using Facebook as a communication tool, students also seem to be using it as a collaborative learning tool. Lampe et al. (2011) noted that the sharing of notes and arranging for group study, are some of the learning activities that take place through Facebook.

Numerous researches on the usage of Facebook in the field of educations have been carried out. Junco (2012) investigated the relationship between the frequency of usage and student engagement; while Christy et al. (2011) explored the role of personal values. Most researches pointed out that social presence and group norms had a significant influence on the usage of Facebook. Students use Facebook to support their learning. Salaway et al. (2008) pointed out that Facebook provides the platform for students to discuss their school matters, while Selwyn (2009) noted that it is used to discuss academic matters.

Nevertheless, Facebook has its own pitfalls too. Some educators use Facebook on their own accord (Vincent and Weber, 2011). In fact the use of Facebook seems to increase their workload. For example, at the end of day, participation and contribution done by students through Facebook are not taken into account when grading students. Much of this is attributed to the fact that, usage of Facebook is not stipulated in the course syllabus.

At the same time, educators who use Facebook for teaching and learning, will need to act as the moral police. It is the responsibility of the educators in ensuring that students do not post or use it for unethical activities. Often educators are caught between allowing Facebook posting which are deemed as expressions of creative and constructive views; to curbing postings which infringes on sensitive or unethical issues (Metzger et al., 2010)

Taking note of all the arguments for and against Facebook, this study intends to explore whether pre-service teachers would consider using Facebook. The distinction of this study lies in two fold. First, the pre-service teachers were exposed to the usage of Facebook. This was done by their lecturer. These pre-service teachers were given the opportunity to experience using Facebook in the context of teaching and learning. Second, these

pre-service teachers would be undergoing a practicum stint. Henceforth, whether these pre-service teachers would consider using Facebook for teaching and learning in their upcoming practicum stint is explored.

2. Data and methodology

The purpose of this study was to develop insights into whether pre-service teachers would employ using Facebook during their practicum stint. A basic qualitative design was used to gather data for this study. To capture the insights into whether the pre-service teachers would use Facebook in their upcoming practicum stint, an emergent inductive research design was viewed as the best approach.

Forty two pre-service music teachers enrolled in teacher education programme were involved in this study. At the time of gathering the data, these pre-service teachers were enrolled in a course on Classroom and Behaviour Management. This is a compulsory course for all pre-service teachers. One of the researchers was their course instructor.

The course instructor had incorporated the usage of Facebook to facilitate teaching and learning. The teaching strategies utilized in this course were lecture, tutorial and group discussions. At the beginning of the semester, prior to the commencement of the course, the course instructor uploaded the teaching materials. The pre-service teachers had the opportunity to read the materials before attending the lecture. There were two approaches used in carrying out the group discussion. During the classroom interaction, the lecturer assigned questions to be discussed in face-to-face groups. Using the other approach, questions were posted in Facebook for the pre-service teachers to respond and discuss in virtual group.

The course instructor stimulated the discussion on Facebook by posting newspaper clippings to encourage and keep the interest alive. Most of these newspaper clippings appeared in the local newspaper. To enrich the pre-service teachers' exposure, the researcher had invited a guest lecturer from an overseas university, to be a member in the group he created in the Facebook.

In order to capture the pre-service teachers' views on the usage of Facebook, a focus group interview was conducted at the end of the course. The reasons for using focus group interview instead of individualised interviews were (i) to capture pre-service teachers' inhibitions (ii) to obtain greater variations in responses, and (iii) activation of forgotten details via group discussions (Merton et al., 1956). The pre-service teachers were informed of the purpose and intent of this study, and they acknowledged it.

The names of the pre-service teachers were changed to pseudonyms i.e. PST1, PST2.... PST18 to ensure confidentiality. The pre-service teachers were given the option to withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable with it. The focus group interview was conducted one week before the start of their practicum stint. The timing of the focus group interview was crucial in capturing the pre-service teachers' inner thoughts.

During the interview, a variety of questions were formulated to capture the pre-service teachers' notions. For the sake of clarity and to gain a better understanding, the pre-service teachers were given the opportunity to expound on the questions posed, as long as they stayed within the boundaries of the research was focussed (Yin, 2009); and within the scope of the study.

The interview was recorded with the permission of the pre-service teachers. The recorded interview was transcribed by the researchers. Huberman and Miles (2002) analysis process was used in analysing the interviews and the notes prepared by the assistant. An initial iteration of open coding was carried out to identify segments of the data which could be used to answer the research questions. The data was re-examined, consolidated and organized into categories; and a second iteration was done too. This was done to ensure the categories identified were comprehensive and better consolidated. The categories were organised into themes. The themes were arranged in a hierarchical order based on the number of times and magnitude discussed by the pre-service teachers.

3. Results

A total of 42 pre-service music teachers took part in this study. Of them, only 5 were males. A few questions on the familiarity and usage of Facebook were asked. Table 1 shows the usage pattern of the pre-service teachers. Thirty five pre service teachers access their Facebook daily. A point to note is that the majority of them i.e 22 view their Facebook at night, when they are at home.

Table 1. Usage of Facebook by the Pre Service Teachers

	Morning	Afternoon	Night	Whenever possible	Total
Everyday	2	2	22	3	35
Once a week	0	0	3	1	4
Rarely	1	0	2		3
Total	3	2	27	4	42

To direct discussion towards teaching and learning, the pre-service teachers were asked a question on whether they would consider using Facebook on their upcoming practicum stint. Figure 1, shows their response. Twenty nine or 69% of the pre service teachers stated that they would use Facebook.

The 42 pre-service teachers were separated into two groups. The separation was done based on the response to the question on the usage of Facebook in their upcoming practicum stint. The first group consisted of 29 pre service teachers who would use Facebook, and the remaining 13 indicated they would not use it. The two researchers decided to conduct the focus group interview separately to explore the reasons of their decision i.e whether they would use or would not use Facebook during the practicum.

In the following section, the findings are arranged into two broad sub-sections. They are

- 1) Will use Facebook for the upcoming practicum stint.
- 2) Will not use Facebook for the upcoming practicum stint.

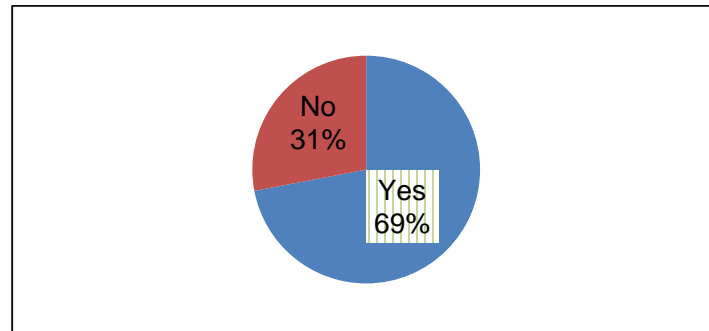


Figure 1. Using Facebook during the practicum

3.1. Will use Facebook for the upcoming practicum stint

3.1.1. As a teaching tool

To use Facebook, computer and internet accessibility are required. Only students with these facilities i.e internet accessibility, can use Facebook. Three PST indicated that they would like to use Facebook in their classroom. However, it all depends on the socio-economy status (SES) of their students. Their initial assessment of the school which they would be posted to, showed that the students do have Facebook. Apparently these pupils whom their seniors taught, are still keeping in touch with them through Facebook.

Two PST said they would use Facebook only at the end of their practicum stint. Their practicum stint is for 12 weeks. PST2 said that she plans to have a mini concert with her students. She hopes to form a choir group. She hopes her students i.e the choir group would be given a chance to perform in the school event; the AGM of Parents Teachers Association. She plans to record her students' performance and post it in her Facebook, for her students to view. She believes this will motivate her students to participate in such activities.

3.1.2. Enrich students' learning experience

PST2 also plans to design a task which requires her students to perform a song. By asking her students to post their video clip, she plans to select a few and showcase them to other students. However she is aware that there are some parents who will not allow their children to post video in Facebook. This PST2 intends to video record their performance and post it in her Facebook. To this suggestion, PST3 interjected and voiced her concern on the implications of doing this.

PST3 felt it is necessary to obtain permission before posting the video. At this juncture PST4 highlighted the topic of "Ethics in Education and research", which they attended during the Action Research Course (Note: Action Research is a compulsory course for all pre service teachers).

3.1.3. To Keep abreast with college events

One of the subjects which the pre-service teachers were required to take is ICT. They are encouraged to use ICT to support their teaching and learning. This is in line with Lampe et al.'s (2011) notion that is Facebook could also be used to share information and activities of their peers.

PST5 felt it is necessary to keep up with the events taking place in the college. She cited the upcoming Innovation Carnival. She has been participating in the event since joining IPG, and she intends to participate this year too. She has befriended a few juniors to keep her informed on the upcoming events in the college.

On the other hand, PST6 plans to use Facebook to share her experience. She hopes her classmates would do the same. Through this, they could learn from each other. At this point, PST7 wished PST6 would post her experience every hour. This statement, made everyone confused. PST6 and PST7's practicum supervisor is the same lecturer. PST7 said, if PST6 posted that she is being observed, then PST7 could take a break. Though everyone laughed, they realised by collaborating they stood to gain. By posting their feedback from their practicum supervisor, they could learn from each other.

3.2. Will not use Facebook for the upcoming practicum stint

3.2.1. Connectivity

The pre-service teachers will be undergoing their practicum stint in urban schools, which are quite near to the Teacher Training Institute (TEI) they are currently studying in. Though internet accessibility in these schools is good, but accessing social media such as Facebook and Youtube are restricted. Two pre-service teachers were expecting to face limitations if Facebook were to be used in T&L. They were concerned with the technical issues involved in accessing Facebook.

One pre-service teacher said that the limitation in accessibility could put some students in a disadvantage position. She cited, her experience, where her parents allowed her to access her Facebook on weekends only. Therefore if she were to use Facebook for T&L, and assuming parents of her students are same like hers i.e limiting the use of Facebook will use the access time for Facebook (allocated by parents) for her subject, then the students' response could only be assessed by her the following week. She felt such prolonged period, could jeopardise T&L. She summed her view on giving task for students by this proverb 'must strike while the iron is hot'.

On limited accessibility, when suggested that they could use their smartphones (all the pre-service teachers owned such phones) to access Facebook, one pre-service teacher highlighted the teachers' code of ethics. She said it is not encouraged for teachers to use handphone in the classroom. Another pre-service teacher said, the public especially the headmaster might mis-construct their act of holding the phone. Though their intentions are noble (to access Facebook for T&L), the implications of such mis-construct might jeopardise their grades (Note: These pre-service teachers would be evaluated during their practicum stint).

3.2.2. Receptiveness

Besides exposing the pre-service teachers to the school environment, during practicum they would be evaluated by an appointed lecturer. The pre-service teachers voiced their concern on the receptiveness other lecturers towards Facebook. One pre-service teacher narrated her experience to illustrate this notion.

One of the lecturers wanted to re-schedule her class, which was scheduled for the next day. Through short message service (SMS), the lecturer informed the class representative. Upon receiving the information, the class representative posted it in her Facebook. All her classmates are also in her Facebook. To ensure the message is conveyed, the class representative posted it in the class *WhatsApp* group and announced it in the class. Having done all these, the lecturer insisted that the class representative puts up a notice in the classroom's notice board. The pre-service teacher felt, putting the notice (using paper) was not necessary and against the practice of advocating paperless environment.

As such, this pre-service teacher highlighted the usage of Facebook will pose a problem for them to convince their lecturers on the 'learning that took place' in their classroom. Assuming the pre-service teacher post a homework, and students attempted it, the lecturer would insist on seeing the hardcopy of the homework pasted on students' workbook. Besides the hassle of convincing the lecturer, the usage of Facebook would increase their workload, for they have to print student's response too.

4. Conclusion and policy recommendations

Facebook has been used by many professions to share their thoughts and findings in their respective field. Though Facebook has its own perils, the pre-service teachers who participated in this study indicated on their willingness to use Facebook in the context of teaching and learning. Such willingness must be encouraged as it augurs well for the teaching community. Lecturers who are responsible in moulding pre-service teachers must encourage and allow them to use Facebook.

The findings of this study are clearly in-line with the findings of Junco (2012). Junco's (2012) findings are that Facebook will be used in two major aspects. They are for academic engagement and out-of class engagement which are indirectly related to education. Besides using as a teaching tool, the pre-service teachers would use Facebook to exchange their experiences i.e practicum. Such exchanges would enhance their learning.

In the context of teaching and learning, Teacher Education Institutes (TEI) could encourage pre-service teachers to participate and exchange their teaching experiences. A good platform which is convenient and less hassle is Facebook. TEI could set up taskforce to oversee the usage of Facebook. For instance, the student body and ITE administration could collaborate to form a group in Facebook. Through such collaboration, teacher educators could pose their experience and views on teaching and learning. Pre-service teachers could learn from the teacher educators' experience. At the same time, posting by pre-service teachers would provide a chance for all to compare their respective experience. Such exchanges will benefit both the teacher educators and pre-service teachers, for the landscape of teaching and learning is dynamic and is constantly evolving.

Having said that, internet connectivity influences the usage of Facebook. Hence, education providers must ensure that the speed of the internet connection is up to the expectations of students or in this case pre-service teachers. Good facilities will encourage all to use Facebook.

However there are two sides to a coin. Therefore it is necessary for all, especially students to be aware of the perils of Facebook. Since this study involves pre-service teachers, they should be taught on how to monitor

their students' posting on Facebook. At the same time, internet administrator in an institution should have a mechanism to curb the misuse of Facebook in their premises.

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