

**THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO SUPPORT TEACHING AND LEARNING IN
TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING COLLEGES**

by

Nokuthula Fairhope Dlamini

Student number: 56203616

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Dr. MM Moila

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DECLARATION

Name: NOKUTHULA FAIRHOPE DLAMINI

Student number: 56203616

Degree: MASTER OF EDUCATION IN CURRICULUM STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the ever-transformative landscape of education through an investigation into "The Use of Social Media to Support Teaching and Learning in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges." Analyzing the integration of social media platforms within the educational sphere, the research navigates the various roles played by social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube in enhancing teaching and learning strategies and fostering communication. Drawing on both scholarly insights and empirical findings, the study uncovers how social media not only facilitates student-teacher interaction but also cultivates collaborative learning environments. In the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which prompted a digital transformation in education, the research reflects on the resilience of educators and students in leveraging social media to navigate challenges posed by these external factors. The study concludes by emphasizing the transformative potential of these technologies that transcend traditional classroom boundaries of teaching and learning in TVET colleges and proposes avenues for further innovations in educational practices.

KEY TERMS:

Social Media Integration in Education; Technology-Enhanced Learning; Teaching and Learning Strategies; Communication Technologies in Education; Student-Teacher Interaction; Collaborative Learning; Educational Technology Implementation; Online Learning Platforms; Technical and Vocational Education (TVET); Educational Innovation

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Technology has fundamentally transformed the delivery of education, a trend that has accelerated extensively with social media platforms and their integration into daily life (Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020:1). This transformation was most evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, which drastically altered the global educational landscape and highlighted the potential of remote teaching and learning (TL) enabled by social media platforms (Carey, 2020:1).

In South Africa, the nationwide lockdown necessitated innovative measures by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to salvage the 2020 academic year. A phased approach combining remote learning and online study was introduced. This magnified existing inequalities in the education system, as many Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges (TVET Colleges) struggled to implement effective remote multimodal teaching and online learning (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2020:1).

The COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated the unpredictable nature of the future and our limited ability to foresee and prepare for such global disruptions. This research is driven by the need to integrate today's technology into classrooms, leveraging its benefits for students. The pandemic has demonstrated how teachers and students could unite on learning platforms despite physical separation, utilizing social media sites and online programming expertise.

This crisis has prompted many higher education institutions, previously reliant on traditional in-class TL, to reconsider their delivery methods. Social media platforms have emerged as crucial communication tools, revolutionizing TL activities.

Tess (2013:60) argues that it is difficult to define social media (SM) satisfactorily. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010:1), on the other hand, suggest that the concept of SM may be summarized as the creation and exchange of internet applications that are supported by user-generated content. The digital age, with its transformative impact on education, requires individuals to learn and acquire knowledge more quickly and independently than ever before, and to become more adaptive learners.

The use of SM is widespread in the educational sector (Kulidtod, 2017:56), and its rising popularity confronts educational institutions' main stakeholders (teachers, learners/students, and parents) with the reality that it is here to stay (Hoyos, 2014:9). SM plays a significant role in motivating learners to take charge of their education, adapt to evolving knowledge landscapes, and acquire skills and knowledge more quickly and independently than ever before.

This study aims to explore the integration of SM platforms in education, addressing the benefits and challenges highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and proposing strategies to enhance the resilience and inclusivity of the educational system in South Africa and beyond.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH STUDY

To say that COVID-19 has disrupted education would be an understatement (Malhi, 2020:762). The outbreak of the disease had a global impact on the educational sector and almost every sector of the economy. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) found that, in mid-April 2020, almost 87% of the world's student population was affected by school closures in more than 195 countries, from pre-primary to higher education. There was a drastic shift to a 'new normal' that would hopefully be better than what had gone before (Malhi, 2020:762).

Digital Transformation (DT) is the implementation of new technologies, talents, and processes to improve the core business processes of a company to effectively achieve customer expectations through leveraging data and technology (Pham, 2021:1). In the educational sector, the adoption of this process by students, faculty and staff took on heightened importance during the COVID-19 outbreak. Schools that had been planning to go digital over the next ten years had to do so in a matter of weeks. Governments were expected to respond to the crisis with solutions, and the faster they could move education online, the better it would be (Carey, 2020:1).

In South Africa, academic institutions like TVET Colleges were compelled to incorporate new ways of operation in response to the pandemic-specific restrictions. The DHET developed measures aimed at limiting and controlling the return of students when the country was under level 3 of the lockdown phase (South African Government, 2020:1). Only 50% of students and staff members were allowed to be on campus at one time, leaving the other 50% to continue with their curriculum from the safety of their homes (South African Government, 2020:1). The digital transformation had to be greatly accelerated. Unfortunately, the unique environments and situations of students were not taken into account, as not all learners had access to online facilities (South African Government, 2020:1).

In such cases, mobile devices and SM provided excellent opportunities for e-learning, academic collaboration, and access to course content, tutors on YouTube, and online blogs (Gikas & Grant, 2013:18). It is common knowledge that students spend most of their leisure time on SM sites (Gikas & Grant, 2013:21). A report on 3000 college students in the United States revealed that 90% of them used Facebook, while 37% used Twitter to share resource materials (Elkaseh, Wong & Fung, 2016:192). This study suggested that the use of SM sites in educational institutions had a positive influence on students' learning performance outcomes (Elkaseh et al., 2016:199).

Teachers are often annoyed to see students with their phones in their hands all the time (Alwagait, Shahzad & Alim, 2015:1087). However, it appears to be time for a shift in perception, as SM may be a useful tool for educational purposes (Alwagait et al., 2015:1190). Educators are constantly trying to bring their teaching methods closer to the “real world” – SM as a learning tool and network may provide the perfect chance to achieve this goal (Pierce, 2019:1).

The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to the education system (ES), which generally refers to all institutions involved in delivering formal education (Mehnaz, 2014:1), served as a reminder and possibly a rude awakening that there is a need for transformation in the country’s learning strategies. For years, the government had been talking about DT to be implemented at some unspecified future time. The crisis forced South Africa, in particular, to shift from simply thinking digital to becoming digital (Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020:1).

Mhlanga & Moloji (2020) state that COVID-19 foregrounded the need for the education sector to adopt innovative ways of providing TL services at all levels. The pandemic introduced many rapid changes in TL, especially in the higher education landscape (Khan, Ashraf, Seinen, Khan & Laar, 2021:1), such as the social distancing phenomenon and the sudden shift from the usual face-to-face TL method to a more remote learning approach (Khan et al., 2021:1).

Technology has played a vital role in providing solutions to the challenges posed by the new reality, indicating that the education sector cannot avoid including digital tools in the delivery of learning content to students (Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020:1). During the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional in-person TL was disrupted, and educational institutions around the world had to turn to digital tools and online platforms to continue delivering educational content to students (World Economic Forum, 2023:1). For instance, many universities and schools introduced Learning Management Systems (LMSs) like Moodle, Blackboard, or Canvas, where teachers could upload course materials and assignments, and conduct virtual classes by means of video conferencing tools like Zoom or Microsoft Teams (World Economic Forum, 2023:1).

Students accessed these platforms from their computers or mobile devices to attend lectures, submit assignments, and engage in discussions, proving that technology was essential in ensuring continuous learning despite physical restrictions. Various education service providers had to rethink their strategies to remain relevant. The outbreak raised red flags in the South African education industry, especially in the TVET College sector, requiring steps to be taken to provide the much-needed digital development (Mhlanga & Moloji, 2020:1).

A recent study by Gan, Menkhoff, and Smith (2015) has shown that SM sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, blogs, and podcasts each have up to a million subscribers or more. It is estimated that more than 90% of students in higher educational institutions log on to social networking sites regularly (Mukherji, 2013:22). More and more students have started using SM for gathering information, learning, sharing ideas, and expressing creativity, and not for communicational purposes only (Gan et al., 2015:652).

A discussion of the benefits of using SM sites in TVET College institutions should not be limited to these tools managing, planning, delivering, and tracking academic activities only (Alamri, Almaiah, & Al-Rahmi, 2020:1). However, it is important to acknowledge that beyond the above mentioned advantages, SM also promotes collaboration and helps improve participation among learners, thus, transforming their learning experience (Almari et al., 2020:1).

To address the remote learning challenges, various institutions have developed real-time messaging and SM sites on channels or platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube (Alamri et al., 2020:1). These online learning opportunities using SM platforms have created sites where education can reach every student's doorstep (Poonam, 2020:1). Students use online tools to cater to their individual learning needs. In this day and age, SM and education work go hand in hand (Chen & Bryer, 2012:87).

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The researcher employed the theoretical framework of Connectivism to investigate the role of SM sites in supporting teaching and learning (TL). TL is defined by Christensen (1991) as an engagement with learners to enable their understanding and application of knowledge, as we know it. Connectivism, developed by Siemens (2004), is a learning theory that emphasizes the significance of technology and socialization in the learning process. It proposes that learning occurs through networks of information, facilitated by digital technologies, which enable learners to connect, share, and co-construct knowledge.

Unlike traditional theories such as constructivism, which focus on individual knowledge construction, Connectivism highlights the importance of social networks and the collective generation of knowledge (Siemens, 2004:22). This theory is particularly relevant in today's digital age, where SM platforms play a crucial role in facilitating collaborative and interactive learning environments. Through Connectivism, the researcher aims to understand how SM platforms can transform TL by fostering connectivity, engagement, and knowledge sharing among students and educators.

The researcher delves more into detail regarding this theory in chapter 2 (see, 2.5)

1.4 KEY CONCEPTS

1.4.1 Social Media (SM)

The concept of SM is summarized as the creation and exchange of internet applications that are supported by user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010:59).

1.4.2 Digital Transformation (DT)

The implementation of new technologies, talents, and processes to improve the core business processes of a company (or other organization) to effectively achieve customer expectations through leveraging data and technology (Pham, 2021:1).

1.4.3 Education System (ES)

Generally, this refers to all institutions involved in delivering formal education (Mehnaz, 2014:4).

1.4.4 Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

This is an infectious disease caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) virus strain.

1.4.5 Teaching and learning (TL)

Defined by Christensen (1991) as an engagement with learners to enable their understanding and application of knowledge, behaviour, and skills to add to their range of learning experiences.

1.4.6 Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

This is a term used to describe learning activities that professionals take part in to develop and enhance their skills (Oxbridge Academy, 2017:1).

1.5 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The uncertain nature of the future, and our inability to foresee what lies before us, seem to have been vividly brought home yet again by the COVID-19 pandemic, not only to our continent but to the world as a whole. This research was motivated by the urgent need to let today's technology enter our classrooms, with its associated benefits for our students – not that it could ever really be stopped, but getting ahead of it can provide some control over the process of transforming the future of education.

There is no denying that South African learners in higher educational institutions are already using SM sites which provide them with unlimited access to online information and communication. The pandemic has revealed how teachers and students can come together in a learning platform, even while physically apart, with the use of SM sites and the expertise of online programmers.

The unpredictable and ongoing COVID-19 crisis has compelled many higher education institutions that had previously been delivering traditional in-class TL, to rethink their delivery approach. SM platforms have become one of the most significant communication tools revolutionizing the facilitation of TL activities.

It is therefore imperative to understand how this global adoption of technology in the form of SM is continuing to open the door to new ways of TL within our TVET College institutions, thus transforming the future of education as we know it. Schools have had to take a careful look at how they can make the best use of various tools like SM sites to help promote home-based learning for all students.

1.5.1 Main Research Question

1.5.1.1 How can SM be used to support TL in TVET Colleges?

The study addressed this main question to explore the research problem.

1.5.2. Sub-questions

The following sub-questions formed part of the main question:

1.5.2.1 How does the use of SM platforms impact collaborative learning (CL) among students and educators in TVET Colleges?

1.5.2.2 What factors contribute to the adoption of SM as a communication tool in TVET Colleges?

1.5.2.3 How does the use of SM enhance student-teacher interaction?

1.5.3.4 What are the challenges and opportunities associated with the use of SM in TVET Colleges?

1.6 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The study aims to effectively analyze the impact and intricate role played by SM platforms in supporting TL in TVET Colleges.

The current objectives of the study were designed to present conditions of relevant outcomes for a well-investigated, evidence-based use of SM as an effective supporting

tool for TL in TVET Colleges (Van Den Beemt, 2020:12). Information technologies have reshaped TL in schools, but often not in ways anticipated by technology proponents (Halverson & Smith, 2010:51).

1.6.1 Objectives

1. To explore the impact of SM on CL in TVET Colleges.
2. To examine the integration of SM as a communication tool in academic settings.
3. To assess the role of SM in enhancing student-teacher interaction.
4. To investigate the benefits and challenges of SM in TVET education.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section focuses on the research method that was utilized in the study. It focuses on describing how the exploratory qualitative research method was employed to contextualize, explore, and outline how SM sites can be integrated as teaching tools by higher educational institutions, specifically concentrating on Technical and Vocational Education and Training providers (TVET Colleges), and the relevant stakeholders (Bartlett-Bragg, 2006:1). The motivation for the study and the problem formulated are discussed in this section, referring to the stated research question and goals mentioned above.

According to Creswell (2014), a research methodology comprises a specific procedure or methods used to identify or analyze data findings of a study. A description of the techniques used in this research methodology is included (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 2011:49). The study adopted an exploratory qualitative approach to explore how SM sites can be used to support TL in TVET Colleges. This method helped the researcher gain insight into why students use SM for learning purposes, assess the explanations provided by both learners and teachers of their perception of using SM for TL purposes, and observe the difference this platform makes in supporting the learners' curriculum-based needs.

1.7.1 Research Design

A research design is a planned procedure to collect data to generate responses to key research questions or hypotheses of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:1). In an attempt to establish a cause-and-effect relationship for the use of SM to support TL within TVET Colleges, the researcher used an exploratory qualitative case study.

Typically, exploratory qualitative design employs several qualitative data techniques such as in-depth interviews, open-ended surveys and questionnaires, document analysis, focus groups, and case studies (Jovancic, 2021:1). The researcher adopted some of these techniques to investigate the experiences of the learners regarding their use of SM for learning purposes. The gathering of information or data through multiple sources and uncovering perspectives from groups and individuals is a key characteristic of this approach (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2010:1).

Data obtained using qualitative data collection methods can be used to answer the study's main question. The intentions of the researcher were not to explore a phenomenon or even to create a philosophy, but rather to integrate different components such as semi-structured interviews, contextual surveys, participant document analysis, and the experiences of selected students and teaching staff members at the specific TVET College selected by the researcher for the study.

1.7.2 Research Methods

Research methods are specific procedures or tools used for collecting and analyzing thoughtful, accurate, and ethical data (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003:33). This chapter discusses the essential elements of the research process, beginning with the identification of the study's population and the techniques used to select participants. It further explores the data collection methods employed to gather valuable insights. Finally, the researcher outlines the procedure for data analysis, an integral step in unravelling the research's findings. Together, these methodological choices formed the backbone of the study, ensuring that the research questions were rigorously addressed and that the study's objectives were effectively met.

1.7.2.1 Population and Sampling

The researcher sampled a population from a TVET College comprising both lecturers and students in the Marketing Management Program, specifically because this curriculum requires a lot of collaborative research-based work. The researcher sampled each class from the N4, N5, and N6 groups using the questionnaires provided in the paragraph below (*refer to 1.7.2.2*). These learners were studying Marketing Management as a course (NATED level N4-N6) in the Report 191 Business Studies program on the campus. Report 191 refers to a vocational training program within the TVET sector in South Africa that is designed to provide students with practical skills and theoretical knowledge in various vocational fields (DHET, 2022:1)

The Marketing Management curriculum at this level (N4-N6) includes a great deal of research-based work, much of which students are required to do independently. As most of their tasks require online research, this group was well suited to aid in the investigation of this study. Most students at this level have smartphones and subscribe to several active SM accounts.

The Marketing Management Program has four (4) subjects. All the academic staff members for the selected N4-N6 groups were asked to participate in the study, because one aspect of the research question was to investigate the educator's perception of using SM in the classroom. The researcher used purposive sampling, which is a method that relies on the researcher's judgment. This sampling method requires the researcher to have prior knowledge about the purpose of the study to properly choose eligible participants for the research (Alchemer, 2021:1). Purposive sampling is used by researchers when they want to access a particular subset of people, who are only selected if they fit a particular profile (Alchemer, 2021:1). For this study, the only requirement was that they should have a smartphone and active SM accounts.

However, unlike other higher educational institutions, whether public or private, some public TVET Colleges in South African communities have always lacked adequate infrastructure and support for the provision of satisfactory internet services, making

the abrupt adoption of telecommunication due to COVID-19 an even more difficult transition for faculty members and students. The researcher was eager to explore how, for TVET Colleges such as these, the use of SM platforms could assist in fostering sustainable online learning.

1.7.2.2 Data Collection Techniques

As a lecturer at a TVET College, the researcher had the advantage of having developed good relationships and a positive rapport with the participants who would be selected for the study. It is important to note that all the students who participated in the research did so voluntarily. The researcher requested permission from the Management of the College to conduct the study.

College Management was assured that the study would not disturb the normal operations of the institution. A consent form for the participants was drafted, communicating clearly that the research would not influence their assessment results in any way and that the information provided by the study would not be used by the lecturers for the purpose of performance evaluation. The participants were assured that any personal information would be safeguarded in strict confidence.

Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were the primary data collection techniques used in this study. A self-administered questionnaire was used to sample participants to be involved in the document analysis, which was a secondary data collection technique used in the study. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire designed to identify those who were actively using SM sites, whether to do a research assignment for a college project, to study for an assessment, or to complete their daily homework (further details about this questionnaire are provided in Chapter 3).

1.7.2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of systematically applying statistical and/or logical techniques to discover useful information to help inform conclusions and support decision-making (Robinson, 2006:62). For this study, the researcher used a thematic analysis approach to uncover the views, opinions, knowledge, and experience of the

educators and students regarding the use of SM sites to support their TL practices. The thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews that were conducted afforded the researcher a great deal of flexibility in interpreting data, allowing the researcher to approach large data sets more easily by sorting them into broad themes (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003:33).

A descriptive analysis was used because this method would allow the researcher to describe the research subject without influencing it. McCombes (2022) states that descriptive research is an appropriate choice when research aims to identify characteristics, frequencies, trends, and categories.

The methods used in the research allowed the researcher to gather large volumes of data that could be analyzed for trends and patterns necessary to produce the findings of the study. The document analysis method adopted in the study allowed the researcher to gather data on behaviours regarding the use of SM sites by both educators and students for TL purposes, without having to rely on the honesty and accuracy of respondents.

1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is often assumed that qualitative research is exempt from ethical considerations (Wassenaar, 2006:63). However, Wassenaar (2006) points out that, merely because the method of data analysis is generally conversational and the integrity of participants is preserved, it does not follow that in qualitative research participants are not entitled to the same protection and respect as those in quantitative research.

First of all, permission was requested from the Principal of the identified TVET College. Thereafter a letter was drafted by the researcher addressing the Campus Manager and Deputy Campus Manager of the identified campus, to inform them of the intended research and seek their permission to conduct the study on the selected campus. After that, ethical clearance was requested from the University of South Africa (UNISA) before embarking on the investigation.

The researcher met the staff members and students identified as suitable participants and discussed the research objectives with them. The chosen participants were then asked to sign a consent form indicating their consent to participate in the study (more details of the ethical aspects of the research are discussed in Chapter 3).

1.9 POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher recognizes that one of the major limitations of the study is that data was collected from a limited number of students from one particular TVET College. Most of the students at the college in question are of the same ethnic group (i.e. African). As a result, there might be a pattern in the participants' responses and views, and these may not necessarily represent the responses and views of students from different areas and ethnic groups.

1.10 CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1 presents an introduction and background to the study. It introduces the research problem and explains the aims and objectives of the study. An overview of the research design and data collection methods are provided, depicting how the research was conducted. The key concepts of the study have been identified.

Chapter 2 reviews recent and relevant literature on the research questions posed in Chapter 1, from which the conceptual and theoretical framework of the research were derived.

Chapter 3 describes the research methods, designs, and data collection methods employed during the study. Research ethics and issues of validity and reliability are also addressed.

Chapter 4 comprises a detailed report of the data analysis and the interpretation of the data, discussing the findings obtained during the research.

In Chapter 5, the main conclusions of the research are presented, with an analytical summary of the findings. The limitations of the research study are highlighted and recommendations for further research are made.

1.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1 served as an orientation to the entire study. It introduced the research problem, objectives, questions, and significance, emphasizing the critical role of SM in education. The theoretical framework of Connectivism was introduced as the lens through which the study explored the integration of SM platforms in TL. Research methods were discussed, with their importance in gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data. In Chapter 2, the researcher discusses the theoretical foundations of Connectivism, and the relevant literature, in greater depth, providing a robust theoretical background for the study

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher offers a comprehensive exploration of the role of social media (SM) platforms in supporting teaching and learning (TL) within higher education, with a particular focus on South African TVET colleges. The chapter is structured to provide a thorough understanding of the theoretical and practical aspects of SM integration in TL.

To do this, the chapter is structured to focus on four important things, which are, firstly, examining the rapid growth of SM usage for educational purposes during the COVID-19 pandemic, and highlighting its vital role in facilitating remote learning. This is followed by literature on the role of SM in TL. The next section assesses the benefits and challenges of implementing SM in higher education, addressing issues like enhanced engagement and privacy concerns. The theoretical framework of Connectivism is then discussed in detail, emphasizing how SM fosters connected learning environments. Finally, the chapter summarizes key insights and sets the stage for the subsequent research methodology and findings.

The researcher has found that most of the studies conducted by other scholars internationally and otherwise, concerning this topic, have focused mostly on the impact of SM in TL for Universities and not necessarily on TVET colleges (Sithole, 2019:35). This gap has been one of the motivating factors that have propelled the researcher to undertake this study, with a particular interest to investigate what has been the response to the inevitable usage of SM platforms within the education system (ES) to support TL in the TVET colleges specifically. Hence, most of the scholarly literature used by the researcher refers to higher education institutions

2.2 GROWTH IN SOCIAL MEDIA USE FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The coronavirus that gave rise to the respiratory disease COVID-19 was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan in the Hubei Province of China and spread very rapidly around the world (Khan, Ashraf, Seinen & Laar, 2021:1). The pandemic presented many unparalleled challenges to traditional face-to-face TL. The United Nations Educational Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported that 890 million students were affected by the closure of academic institutions in more than 114 different countries (UNESCO, 2020:1).

The outbreak of this disease impacted the educational sector as a whole, and governments were expected to contain and reduce the spread of the virus by implementing strategies that would be solutions to the crisis (Mustafa, 2020:7). Quarantine measures were introduced, leading to the immediate interruption of traditional education as we know it (Sobaih, Hasanein & Abu Elnasr, 2020:1). It was necessary to move education online as soon as possible in order to save the 2020 academic year.

Research shows that because of the ban imposed on public gatherings, most academic institutions provided online classes using various SM applications (Adnan, 2020:45). A study conducted by Sobaih et al (2020) explained how various universities in developing countries did not have access to formal online learning management systems (LMSs) to facilitate communication with students and faculty members. Obstacles like internet connectivity, inadequate computer labs, a shortage of computers or laptops for students, and other technical problems were some of the reasons why these universities did not have access to LMSs (Zalat, Hamed & Bolbol, 2021:15).

To maintain TL during the COVID-19 shutdown, institutions encouraged faculty members to adopt other communication platforms to communicate with their students, such as Google Classroom, Zoom, and other SM sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube (Sobaih et al., 2020:1). These SM platforms offered an unconventional

approach to TL, with a growing number of active users during the pandemic period as most schools and universities became more accessible remotely (Khan et al., 2020:2). The study conducted by Adnan (2020) revealed how SM platforms provided extensive learning platforms for promoting TL.

SM sites are the latest communication technologies to have been widely accepted by students (Mushtaq, 2018:177). The use of SM sites during COVID-19 simplified information sharing and communication. Most users found these tools effective because SM does not call for advanced internet knowledge or experience and can be used by anyone who can connect to the internet (Mushtaq, 2018:177). SM plays an effective role in helping students to obtain the knowledge they need to improve their academic performance (Kahn, 2021:1).

Mapulane (2020) expressed how the prevalence of COVID-19 in South Africa has caused the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to facilitate a phase-in return to the academic year by combining online and remote learning. This ensured that TL was underway from the 4th of May 2020 through the process of providing laptops and tablets to students so that they could access their course materials from home (Mapulane 2020:1).

However, TVET colleges reported far greater disruptions to the continuation of learning than their counterparts (Kahn 2021:3) namely Private colleges, Universities, and Universities of Technology. It was evident that TVET colleges got left behind in this process of issuing laptops and supportive internet data bundles on time for continuous learning from home. The phase-in manner of 4 May 2020 with initiatives to reach students remotely to ensure compliance with the measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in TVET colleges did not take place as planned (Mapulane 2020:2). DHET was still seeking different tools to support online-based learning for TVET college.

Mapulane (2020) refers to three scenarios that were expected to take place during the state of disaster. Firstly, TVET college websites were to have zero-rated billing to provide learners with free access to learning resources. Secondly, it was expected that SM platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp were to be used to communicate with students and faculty members. Lastly, discussions with data providers were reaching finalization to provide free data to students to access educational resources and SM links to save the academic year (Mapulane, 2020:2).

It was concluded by the Human Sciences Research Council (2020) survey that less than 40% of South African students attending TVET colleges reported that their institutions were successfully providing online learning during the nation's first lockdown. By contrast, 83.9% of university students said they were offered online tuition when their institutions were forced to stop in-person teaching (Kahn, 2021:3).

The graph below indicates that TVET colleges had far greater challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic than other institutions of higher education, such as students not having Wi-Fi connections and/or laptops to successfully implement the phased-in remote learning approach suggested by the DHET.

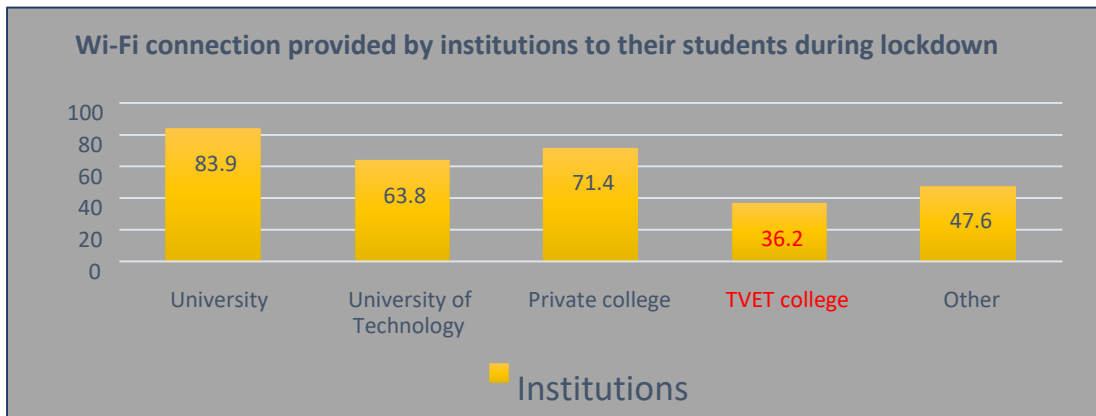


Figure 2.1: Wi-Fi connection provided by institutions during lockdown (Human Sciences Research Council, 2020, p.24)

The graph above shows that 83.9% of students at universities had access to the internet using data bundles provided by their institution, and 63.8% of students at universities of technology could access online materials and SM pages created for their study groups using internet facilities provided by their institutions during lockdown for continued TL (Human Sciences Research Council, 2020:24). Only 36.2% of students from TVET colleges in South Africa had access to the internet during lockdown (Human Sciences Research Council, 2020:24). This indicates that most TVET colleges had challenges in making sure that all their students were provided with a Wi-Fi data connection to access online materials from their laptops or mobile devices to continue with their education.

Even though Nzimande (2020) eloquently expressed the need to complete the 2020 academic year successfully at all higher education institutions, the study by the Human Sciences Research Council (2020) showed that most TVET college students did not have the necessary technology or resources to access online learning from the safety of their homes. This highlights the inequalities that exist in South Africa's higher education sector. With little access to resources, most TVET colleges relied on using SM platforms to bridge the information and communication gap between educators and students.

2.2.1 Learner Participation on SM Platforms for TL Purposes

Wood (2022) discovered that there has been a significant acceleration in the transition to remote TL since the pandemic struck in 2020. A study conducted by the World Economic Forum (2022) showed that most students relied on the role SM platforms played in enabling them to receive academic communication from institutions on various SM websites. An increase in the user participation rate during lockdown for different SM platforms can be seen in the graph below.

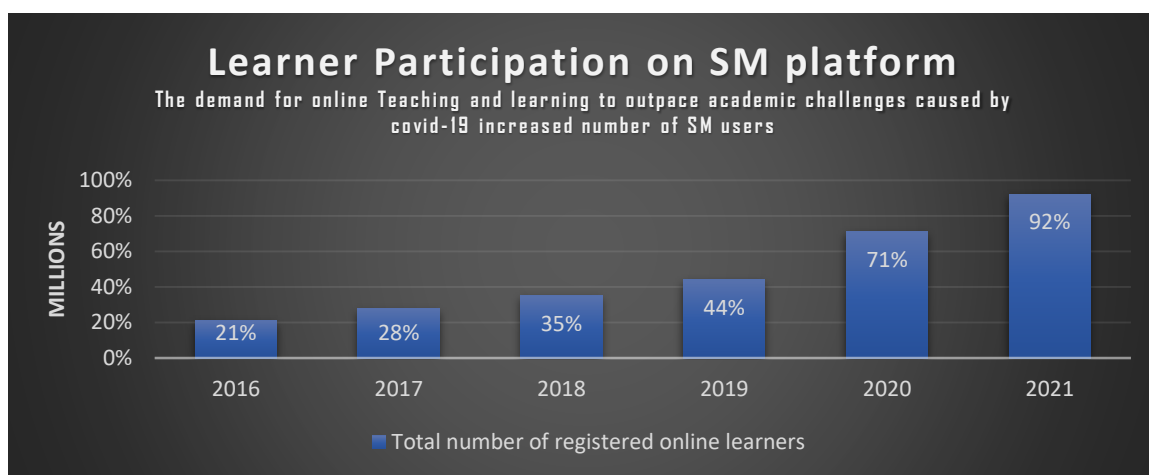


Figure 2.2: Learner Participation on SM platforms (World Economic Forum, 2022, p.32)

The graph above reflects a clear increase in the total number of learners who registered on different SM platforms to address the academic challenges experienced during the global shutdown. The 71% increase in learner participation on SM sites in the year 2020 demonstrates how learners recognized the essential role SM sites played in providing the support needed for continued TL. Students also relied on lessons and assignments being sent via WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger to help them complete their academic program for the year (Coursera Impact Report 2021:1).

The researcher has found that not much has been said or written by other scholars about the continued growth in the use of SM platforms, even post-COVID-19 and the worldwide shutdowns. Scholars who have researched this topic argue for the purposeful integration of SM as an educational tool. In fact, educational institutions should at this stage be actively preparing digital platforms for students to engage with,

because the aftermath of the pandemic has impacted previously normal TL practices, resulting in changes in the education system (ES).

During the pandemic, online learning became the new routine for most students all over the world (Almaiah, Khasawneh & Althunibat, 2020:5261). Institutions worldwide, not just in South Africa, have encouraged educators to create pages for academic study groups on SM networking sites to provide support for the learners' TL practices (Awidi, Paynter & Vujosevic, 2019:106). According to Prinsloo (2020), as reported by Sawahel (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic led to significant disruptions in higher education, prompting students and faculty to utilize SM networks for self-organized learning and administrative tasks.

2.3 THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TL

SM is no longer seen merely as a platform providing an extended opportunity to communicate with others. It has come to be recognized as one of the fastest-growing communication media, enabling the sharing of content in the form of video, image, audio, and text. The role of SM in the field of education is evident in the three roles outlined below, identified by the researcher using different source materials and literature studies available from other scholars on this topic.

2.3.1 The Role of SM in Collaborative Learning

According to Nguyen (2020), the instructional approach known as collaborative learning (CL) refers to students working together in groups of two or more in an attempt to share and create knowledge as a group to achieve set goals. This approach should not be confused with cooperative learning, which is an instructional method where small groups are organized to accomplish set goals, with individual accountability by each student for a particular task (Surbhi 2021:1).

CL encompasses a variety of educational approaches and is commonly employed in colleges and universities, whereas cooperative learning is used predominantly in foundation phase learning (Grades 1 – 7) and also in high school (grades 8 – 12)

settings (Nguyen 2020:2). One of the most common characteristics of CL is the student's freedom to actively explore and engage with the course material rather than simply having the lecturer present an explanation of the learning material (Nguyen 2020:2).

This approach increases student engagement, which improves the student's ability to think critically. It encourages students to participate more in providing answers, explaining their point of view, and justifying their opinions (Nguyen 2020:3). The topic of CL has received much attention, yet very little is said about the impact of adopting SM for CL purposes to enhance student performance.

A study conducted by Ansari & Khan (2020) found that the use of SM platforms assisted 233 students from the University of India with CL, and it also improved the students' self-confidence, as they preferred communicating via technology to face-to-face communication. The adoption of CL through SM had a direct impact on helping the students improve their academic performance (Ansari & Khan, 2020:7). These SM sites enhanced the interaction of the students at the University of India with their peers and lecturers for CL (Ansari & Khan, 2020:8).

Since the application of SM promotes CL among students, research efforts have been made to support TL using a variety of SM tools (Alamri, Almaiah & Al-Rahmi 2020:647). A study conducted by Silius, Miilumaki, and Huhtamaki (2010) developed a social networking site for college students, aiming at enhancing both CL and social interaction. Their research reveals that making SM tools a part of traditional learning is attractive to students and can motivate them to participate more in the learning process.

Traditional learning such as the face-to-face approach provides fewer opportunities for learners to develop and maintain their learning activities as compared to the use of SM sites for TL (Bradley, 2021:68). These learning platforms based on SM paradigms place the control of learning in the hands of the learners themselves, which enhances the CL approach (Cilliers, 2021:5).

The creation of academic groups using SM can be extremely useful in helping students improve their academic performance (Pulido, Mara, Lonescu & Sordé-Martí 2020:135). These SM groups are used by students to collaborate in efforts to complete assignments or tasks and thus encourage CL, which significantly influences students' academic performance (Pulido et al., 2020:135).

2.3.2 SM Sites as a Communication Tool in TL

SM networks have drastically changed communication between people. Although they were not created for academic purposes, they have now gradually emerged as important communicative tools between teachers and students, mainly in higher education (Akcaoglu & Bowman, 2016:582). According to research conducted by Burac, Fernandez, Cruz, and Cruz (2019), most of the respondents, who were teachers, believed that using SM in addition to traditional classes had enhanced students' learning experience and improved communication with students. The teachers pointed out that SM offers flexibility in maintaining communication with their students, which has positively impacted the learners' engagement (Burac et al., 2019: 6).

SM acts as a faster means of disseminating information regarding assignments, tests, exams, and any particular topics the institution or educators may want to convey to the students. Gaining credibility as an information source, it is now recognized as a reliable platform where organizations can engage and interact with their audiences (Cilliers, 2021:5). According to Hershkovitz and Forkosh-Baruch (2013), various questions about teacher-student communication through SM sites have been prompted, offering a new perspective in pointing out possibilities for communication and interaction as well as creating new learning platforms.

A study by World Wide Worx (2021), conducted in 2021 after a full year of Covid-19 lockdowns, provides an in-depth picture of the shifts in online behaviour brought about by the pandemic. The study revealed that Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube had become the most dominant SM sites (World Wide Worx 2021:1), providing teachers

and students with the opportunity to have continuous contact transcending the restrictions imposed on conventional classroom TL.

Further research by Sawahel (2020) showed that students in Egyptian public higher education institutions were unfamiliar with meeting platforms such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams and Zoom, as no training had been provided prior to the pandemic, and thus most faculty members preferred to use SM sites like Facebook or WhatsApp to relay academic matters to their students. These SM sites proved to be the most effective communication tools for TL. Students frequently use these sites and are much more comfortable navigating these familiar platforms.

The results of a study conducted by Hassan (2014) showed that in addition to supporting formal TL, SM was used by architectural students at Port Dickson Polytechnic in Malaysia to build an online community and support one another academically. This has improved academic performance, student commitment, and involvement (Akcaoglu et al., 2016:584). Students use these SM sites for discussions, sharing of videos, and document links, continuing to learn even after classes have long ended (Hassan, 2014:1).

WhatsApp Inc. is an instant messenger SM site created in 2009 by Jan Koum and Brian Acton to make the sharing of communication through multimedia messaging a much easier and faster experience (Alamri et al., 2020:647). This SM application (app) is considered to be an effective collaboration tool for TL. Research related to the use of instant messaging for educational purposes found that the popularity of and support for mobile devices within the student population are great because students can create groups (social network groups) that support social interactions and help them engage in discussion forums, which enhances their academic performance (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017:41).

2.3.3 Enhancing Student-Teacher Interaction

Initially, the new reality of teachers and learners interacting on SM networks generated discussion and debate, and gave rise to questions about the appropriateness of such interaction (Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015:134). Some authorities restricted or even prohibited such communication between faculty and students (Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015:134). Supporters of teacher-student interaction via SM networks, on the other hand, presented arguments in its favour, stating that teachers who wished to take advantage of the educational benefits and opportunities of social networks should be allowed to do so without hindrance (Teclehaimanot & Hickman 2011:19).

In the current environment, by contrast, if an educator does not have a YouTube channel, a blog page, or at the very least an uploaded video containing academic or educational content curating their professional expertise in a series of broadcast lessons, there is a very good chance that they are falling behind the times (TeachThought Staff 2022:1). Nearly every major educational institution in the world currently uses SM sites, hosting their collection of videos featuring news, lectures, tutorials, and even open courseware (Briggs 2013:1).

Students can have immediate communication with their teachers through SM platforms to find out about the content of a subject, and the dates and schedules of exercises or exams (Cilliers 2021:6). Teachers have pointed out that SM enables them to have a quick and responsive interaction with their students, allowing them to be able to reach out and support those students who need assistance the most (Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015:139). They also point out that they are able to use a student's profile information to detect cases where a psychosocial problem can be identified (Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015:140).

The educational possibilities of using SM to support TL are diverse and dynamic, allowing instructors to share information and blend media in unprecedented and exciting new ways (TeachThought Staff 2022:1). Both educators and learners can now sift through thousands of resources, and the potential for inspiration and growth in the field of education has truly reached new heights (TeachThought Staff 2022:1).

2.4 THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING SM SITES FOR TL AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

It is important to acknowledge the challenges and benefits involved in implementing SM sites for TL at higher education institutions. It has been pointed out (Cilliers, 2021:6) that the education system was already facing challenges before the COVID-19 pandemic, and Krishnan (2020) noted that many schools all over the world struggled to provide adequate instruction during the pandemic owing to resource limitations.

However, SM can serve as a powerful tool to address these challenges. Pulido et al. (2020) highlighted that SM platforms can be effectively used to create academic groups that enhance students' academic performance. These groups enable students to collaborate on assignments and tasks, fostering TL and positively impacting academic outcomes. This suggests that while there are challenges, SM can be leveraged to facilitate and enhance TL in higher education.

2.4.1 The Benefits of Implementation

A study conducted by Silius et al. (2010) developed a social networking site for college students, aimed at enhancing TL and social interaction. According to their research, lessons that integrated SM were more attractive to students than those that did not, and these lessons motivated students to participate more in their studies (Silius et al., 2010). Research studies by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) indicate that SM sites serve as dynamic tools to expedite the development of learning environments by encouraging participation, cooperation, and communication among students, which reinforces their learning behaviour and study performance (UNCTAD, 2020).

Vikash & Sameer (2013) explained that SM sites have the unique characteristic of self-paced learning, where the course content can be viewed by a learner at their most convenient place and time. This provides students with an opportunity to learn and interact with each other without any geographical constraints (Michelle, 2021:1).

Furthermore, SM sites add an element of flexibility to learning, allowing learners to select learning material according to their interests and knowledge (Michelle, 2021:1).

The advantage of using SM in education is that both learners and educators can be exposed to experts in different fields and subjects (Nasta 2019:1). When students start following these experts, they learn more, gain useful content, and are able to engage experts worldwide to get answers on topics they may need help with; as a result, they are able to achieve good results (Nasta 2019:1).

South African TVET colleges can connect with students through SM networks such as Facebook, Google Plus, and YouTube (Devi, Gouthami & Lakshmi, 2019:96). These channels can be used to disseminate campus news, make announcements, and provide students with useful information (Devi et al., 2019:96). This builds engagement between the college and students, which helps to address many student issues through group interactions (Devi et al., 2019:98). The wide popularity of SM in education makes it essential for teachers and students to understand and adopt SM sites to establish future educational strategies (Sarwar, Zulfiqar. Aziz & Ejaz Chandia, 2019:246).

There is evidence that learning online through different SM platforms may be more effective in several ways (Hassan, 2014:1). Research by Li (2022), showed that students retained 25%-60% more material when learning online, compared to only 8%-10% in a classroom. This is mostly due to students being able to learn faster online because they learn at their own pace, which helps boost their self-confidence (Li, 2022:1).

2.4.2 The Challenges of Implementation

When governments globally moved classes from face-to-face to online in response to the pandemic (Li, 2020:1), the TVET colleges in many underdeveloped communities of South Africa lacked the necessary technological platforms and the formal online

learning management systems for communication with students and faculty members (Jantjies, 2020:1).

Prinsloo (2020) highlighted the potential of SM to support TL. However, he also pointed out its limitations and related institutional restrictions, such as the prohibition of cellphone use in classrooms. For courses with large enrolments like those at the University of South Africa (UNISA), the participant limit of SM platforms like WhatsApp, with a maximum of 200 participants per group, poses challenges (Sawahel 2020:1).

According to Almaiah et al. (2020), online learning still faces a lot of challenges related to infrastructure, systems technology for online learning, change management, course design, students' self-efficacy in computer use, and financial support. Given the social inequalities in many countries, not all students have access to this kind of education (UNESCO, 2020). There are certainly challenges to overcome in most TVET colleges in South Africa, such as internet access for students, resources such as laptops for students, and access to digital platforms (Ngalomba, 2020).

Some students without reliable internet access and/or technology struggle to participate in digital learning (Krishnan, 2020:12). This is seen among TVET college students who come from disadvantaged communities (Krishnan 2020:12). For example, according to data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2022), whilst 85% of students in universities and private colleges have a computer to use for their academic work, only 34% of students in TVET colleges, or fewer, have access to a computer.

This situation has significant development implications that cannot be ignored. The Department of Higher Education (DHET) needs to ensure that the pandemic does not widen the digital divide between universities and those FET TVET colleges that are less well equipped digitally, and that this divide does not widen even further in a post-coronavirus world (Hoftijzer, Levin, Santos & Weber, 2020:1). The study highlights the need for higher education institutions to establish information technology (IT) units for

guidance, technical support, and training to ensure the appropriate use of SM platforms for curriculum support in TL (Hoftijzer et al., 2020:1).

2.5 THE APPLICATION OF CONNECTIVISM

As highlighted in Chapter 1 (see section 1.7), the theory of Connectivism is employed as the conceptual framework to understand TL through digital technologies, particularly focusing on SM. This conceptual framework serves to guide the investigation into how SM platforms can enhance learning by fostering connections and collaboration among students and educators.

The purpose of the conceptual framework is to provide a structure for examining the research objectives, which include exploring the impact of SM on collaborative learning (CL), examining the integration of SM as a communication tool, assessing the role of SM in enhancing student-teacher interaction and investigating the benefits and challenges of SM in TVET education. By framing the study within the context of Connectivism, the researcher can systematically explore how digital interactions and networks influence learning processes.

Throughout the study, the principles of Connectivism are woven into the analysis and discussion of findings. For instance, the examination of how SM supports CL will consider how students form and maintain learning networks. The assessment of SM's role in student-teacher interaction will analyze how these digital connections facilitate real-time communication and feedback. Additionally, the investigation of benefits and challenges will reflect on the technological and social aspects emphasized by Connectivism, such as the accessibility of information and the dynamics of online collaboration.

Other researchers who have done studies related to this work have either used constructivism, Connectivism, or technology adoption theories to structure their work. Constructivism is the idea that people actively construct or make their knowledge and that reality is determined by their experiences as learners (Western Governors

University, 2020:1). Connectivism, on the other hand, is one of the most prominent of the networking theories developed for e-learning environments. It suggests that technology is an extremely important part of the learning process (Downes, 2012:66). Technology adoption theories examine the individual and the choices the individual makes to accept or reject a given technology either for integration or innovation (Straub, 2017:162).

The researcher has evaluated and compared the above-mentioned theories and has identified the Connectivism theory as the most relevant approach to address the main question of this research. Connectivism provides a useful lens through which TL using digital technologies such as SM can be better understood and managed (Gruzd, Paulin & Haythornthwaite, 2016:47). Siemens (2004) describes Connectivism as a learning network phenomenon that is influenced by technology and socialization.

Connectivism is used in the study to show how conventional ways of approaching TL might not be as effective in today's digital and interconnected world as in the past. The theory reveals the shift towards more collaborative and networked learning approaches (Siemens, 2004:23). Connectivism is highly relevant because it aligns with the idea that SM is an integral component of TL recognizing that learners today access, create, and share knowledge in digital environments (Gruzd et al., 2016:52). Connectivism provides a framework to explore how learners and educators adapt to and leverage these changes for a more effective and networked TL experience.

Students learn best when engaged in learning experiences rather than passively receiving information. Learning is a social activity and is directly associated with the interaction people have with each other. Connectivism theory suggests that students learn best if they are taught to navigate and create social networks via technology and use these network communities to interact and learn from each other (Greenwood, 2020:1). An example of this would be students subscribing to a Marketing Management forum on a YouTube page that posts discussions of how to develop marketing strategies, commenting on the page, and asking questions to learn from other subscribers.

Connectivism highlights the importance of socialization and collaboration in learning. This study helped the researcher in examining how social interactions on SM platforms contribute to TL activities. It was also used to explore how students and educators collaborate, share knowledge, and support each other through digital social networks.

SM sites have been a major tool in keeping these connections alive for most students, particularly during the pandemic. YouTube blogs, for example, help provide opportunities for educators and learners to explore and express their thoughts, opinions, and feelings in an online environment (Deng & Yuen, 2011:441), thus increasing student interactivity and collaborative learning. Schools are better positioned than ever before, and many of them are already using cloud-based systems to promote online learning.

Researchers such as Gruzd et al. (2016) used Connectivism to investigate the integration of SM in higher education institutions. Their study suggested that SM has the potential to enhance learning when implemented effectively within classrooms. It was evident in their research that SM does play an important role in creating online learning communities which can promote interaction, participation, and co-construction of knowledge and information among learners (Gruzd et al., 2016:60).

Teachers can apply Connectivism in the classroom through the use of SM by opening Twitter accounts or WhatsApp groups to announce assignments, homework tasks, and assessment information. These sites can set a good precedent for discussion amongst students and teachers as well as being accessible at any time by any member of the class.

There is no doubt that schools will be required to find ways to be more accommodating towards the learning needs and objectives of each student (Dunhill, 2018:1). SM has a lot more uses than just staying connected and socializing with friends. Most students recognize the various uses of SM, such as gathering and exchanging information, sharing ideas, exposing learners to intentional or spontaneous learning opportunities, expressing their creativity, and bringing them together around shared interests.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that people can respond to change (Malhi 2020:764) and that governments can also change fast. The pandemic has demonstrated that there is a serious need to embrace online learning; using the Connectivism theory, the researcher was able to show how SM can be used to support TL.

By integrating the theoretical framework of Connectivism into the study, the researcher aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how SM platforms can transform TL in TVET colleges, enhancing educational experiences in the digital age.

2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The use of SM sites to support TL in TVET colleges will set in motion a much-needed transformation to a new era in education system (ES). These SM sites provide a platform that is already familiar and can be used to foster alternative methods for online-based learning in developing countries like South Africa.

SM platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp were used effectively during the COVID-19 national shutdown to sustain formal TL in higher educational institutions that lacked the necessary resources and technologies to make it possible to complete the 2020 academic year. This chapter has shown how institutions, faculty members, and students all relied on these sites as the only instrument that maintained academic communication. For students, using SM to build online communities with different online groups and pages was a proactive way to help support one another through the crisis brought on by the pandemic.

The growing popularity of SM in education makes it critical for educators and learners to understand and adopt SM sites for future educational strategies and arrange course materials powered by technology platforms (Sarwar et al., 2019:263). This could very well be the transformation that the education department desperately needs.

The policy-makers in public higher education in many developing countries have provided a speedy and effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic by adopting a new culture of online learning, using free online platforms and social media (Sawahel, 2020:2-3). The researcher calls on higher education policy-makers, especially in developing countries, to promote SM usage for formal academic communication. There is a need for greater collaboration with the telecommunication sector to ensure the provision of appropriate internet services for faculty members and students in support of online TL.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology that was employed by the researcher in an attempt to answer the main questions of the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the research method and design employed when investigating the research questions designed for the successful completion of this study. An overview is provided of the data collection methods and techniques, the research population, and the methods of sampling applied. Budert-Waltz (2021) defined research methodology as a specific technique that can be employed to understand a specific problem or phenomenon. As indicated in Chapter 1, the study adopted a qualitative approach to explore how SM sites can be used to support TL in Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a strategy used to answer research questions (McCombes, 2022:1). McCombes further explains that a well-planned design helps ensure that the methods match the research aims and that the right kind of analysis of data is used. The study follows an exploratory qualitative research design to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between SM and its impact on supporting TL in TVET Colleges.

Exploratory research is defined by George (2022) as a methodological approach that is often used to investigate research questions that have not previously been studied in depth. Bhatt (2016) explains that, in exploratory research, there is generally no prior research; only a few studies exist for reference and the existing ones do not necessarily answer the problem precisely enough. Thus, exploratory research stands out as most fitting for this research, because a lot of the studies conducted by other scholars on this topic have focused mostly on the impact of SM on TL in universities and not necessarily in TVET Colleges.

The exploratory type of research is usually conducted to gain a better understanding of an existing phenomenon and acquire new insight into it, so as to formulate a problem more precisely (George, 2022:1). This study assessed the use of SM platforms by lecturers and students at a TVET College which will be referred to under the pseudonym "Bongukuthula TVET College" throughout the research – and the

impact these platforms have had in supporting the college's TL objectives. Exploratory research is inexpensive and highly interactive, and has no predefined structure, making it open-ended in nature (George, 2022:1). By using this method, the researcher was able to interact with participants using interview questions and document analysis, which helped the researcher to gain a better understanding of the participants' behaviour on SM.

Exploratory research deals mainly with qualitative data (Bhatt, 2016:1). Qualitative methodology is adopted because primary methods of exploratory research are used for data collection, such as questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis (George, 2022:1). In primary research methods, data is collected directly from the subject of investigation (George, 2022:1). In this case, the participants were students of Report 191 Business Studies at Bongokuthula TVET (College and their lecturers, in the Nated Level (N4 to N6) Marketing Management program.

3.2.1 Population and Sampling

The researcher used purposive sampling, which is a method based on the researcher's own judgment. This sampling method requires a researcher to have prior knowledge about the purpose of the study, in order to properly choose eligible participants for the research (Alchemer, 2021:1). Alchemer (2021) explains that this method is also used by researchers when they want to access a particular subset of people.

Purposive sampling was the most suitable sampling technique for this study because it aligned perfectly with the research objectives. This method enabled the selection of participants who were directly relevant to the study's focus on SM use in higher education. It targeted a specific subset of the population, namely active subscribers to SM platforms in higher education. This helped to eliminate the need to collect data from a larger and less relevant group. Secondly, purposeful sampling allows for contextually rich data, ensuring that the information gathered by the researcher provides a collection of in-depth insights that directly address the research questions.

Lastly, purposeful sampling ideally proves advantageous in optimizing the allocation of limited time and resources to the specific group of interest.

To achieve this, participants were selected using a questionnaire (see Appendix D) designed to identify suitable candidates who were active subscribers to SM platforms at the time of the study. Firstly, the questionnaire focused on whether or not the educator or student currently had a smartphone with internet access. Secondly, the focus was on whether or not the educator/student was currently subscribed to and was an active participant on any SM sites such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, etc. The questionnaire also aimed to find out how often participants used their SM platforms for academically-related content. This was a self-administered questionnaire composed of a closed-question format where respondents had to circle the most appropriate answer for them. The questionnaire was used as a sampling technique.

The researcher sampled a population from Bongokuthula TVET College. The researcher was interested in using both lecturers and students in the Marketing Management Program specifically because this particular curriculum coverage requires a lot of collaborative research-based work. One class was sampled from each of the Nated Levels (N4-N6) for Report 191 Business Studies at the Bongokuthula Campus located at Ekurhuleni. Each class had a range of 30 to 35 students, with the largest group being the Marketing Management N6 class which had 39 students.

Students in each of the Nated Levels (N4-N6) classes completed the questionnaire after consenting to be part of the research study. Using the questionnaires, all participants were selected because they fitted the particular profile of being active users of SM platforms. Educators and students who were regular users of SM sites were selected. This criterion ensured that participants had practical experience with SM, making them well-suited to discuss its impact, if any, on TL.

The researcher selected 10 students from each class with a total of 30 students overall represented in this research study. This selection of the 30 participants was based solely on the responses that were provided by the students to the questionnaire (*refer to Appendix F*).

Regarding the sampling of educators, the researcher focused on lecturers who were teaching Marketing Management (N4-N6) students. The Marketing Management Program has four subjects at each of the Nated Levels (N4-N6). All the lecturers of these different subjects per class were asked to participate in the study regardless of their digital competency. The number of educators who were anticipated to be part of the research was hence a total of 12 lecturers.

3.3 METHODS AND TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION

A research methodology is important because it assists in data collection and allows the researcher to conduct an authentic research study to ensure valid and reliable results (Goundar, 2012:1). According to Polit and Beck (2004), methodology refers to ways of obtaining, systematizing, and analyzing data. Howell (2013) agrees with Polit and Beck (2004) and explains further that methodology not only outlines how research is to be undertaken but is also a general research strategy that identifies the means or modes of data collection, and how a specific result is to be calculated.

3.3.1 Data Collection

The primary exploratory research method involves collecting data directly from participants. These participants were individuals selected from a group of educators and students of Bongokuthula TVET College. The researcher used primary data collection methods to obtain data from the participants. These include semi-structured interviews and a document analysis of the participants' SM pages for academically-related content.

To begin the data collection process, the researcher wrote an application letter to the Principal of the TVET College requesting permission to collect data at the Bongokuthula Campus (see Appendix A). Upon approval, data was collected from the 2nd of May 2023 to the 4th of May 2023. The researcher used purposive sampling to select participants who fitted the profile of the study. The participants included educators and students in the Marketing Management Program level N4-N6.

The data collection process at Bongokuthula Campus took three days, instead of the previously estimated five days that had been scheduled. This was because, of the two lecturers previously anticipated to participate in the study, only seven lecturers were interviewed. The researcher found that five of the lecturers who were interviewed for the Marketing Management N4 group also offered lessons to the Marketing Management N5 and/or N6 group.

The main advantage of using this method, especially for this study, was that SM is a socially inclined platform. Through interactive strategies, the researcher was able to gain valuable insights into participants' perspectives on using SM for TL purposes. The researcher employed interviews and document analysis of participants' SM pages concerning any academically-related content as primary data collection techniques. Each qualitative strategy was carefully selected and is discussed below.

The research techniques that were employed for the collection of data are further discussed in detail below:

3.3.1.1 Interviews

Structured interview questions were designed to uncover related behaviours and/or preferences among a pool of respondents regarding the research question. Before proceeding, the researcher prepared an information letter (see Appendix B) and provided a copy to each participant. The researcher read out the information letter to all participants, explaining the purpose and aims of the study and what the participants were to expect during the data collection process. This provided an opportunity for the researcher to engage in any clarity-seeking questions from the participants. Following

this, a letter of consent (see Appendix C) to be read and signed by participants was then issued to both the educators and the students.

The researcher provided a set of interview questions based on the research question. In this process, the researcher went specifically to the participants' setting at Bongokuthula College to gather data from the respondents through an interview method. One-on-one interviews were conducted between the researcher and the selected Marketing Management N4-N6 students. The respondents were actively and willingly cooperative during the interview sessions.

This method is optimal for gathering data on an individual's personal experiences, history, and perspective (Ary, Jacobs & Razavie, 2009:474). The researcher used a qualitative approach through the use of in-depth interviews structured with open-ended questions to gain more depth into respondents' views and the motives that drove their use of SM in their education practices. Conducting an in-person interview for the study made it possible for the interviewer to visually identify the interviewees' nonverbal response(s) and subsequently clarify the intended questions.

3.3.1.2 Document Analysis

The document analysis process took place immediately after the interview process. The setting was the campus hall for the students and the comfort of the educator's classroom for the lecturers. The document analysis process took 10 minutes or less with each participant; however, with the last group of Marketing Management N6 students, the document analysis took a bit longer, as the internet connection was slow because the area experienced load shedding during the time scheduled with the participants. Five minutes were used to respond to the document analysis questions designed in *Appendix F*. Another five minutes were dedicated to investigating the participants' mobile phones for any engagements shared or posted on their SM pages that related to curriculum or academic work activities.

The aim of the document analysis was to gather data on the behaviour of lecturers and students regarding the use of SM sites for TL purposes. The document analysis aimed to provide insights into how participants engaged with SM platforms for TL-related activities, including their interactions, content sharing, and resource utilization, and to explore the extent of engagement on SM platforms for TL activities.

The document analysis also aimed to determine the frequency and depth of participants' involvement in TL-related interactions on SM. This included assessing the frequency of posts, comments, and document sharing on platforms like WhatsApp, as well as the types of content searched for, watched, and shared on platforms like Facebook and YouTube. The researcher also identified the specific platforms and features utilized for TL purposes.

The document analysis aimed to identify the SM platforms that participants used most often for TL-related activities. This included determining the roles of platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube in facilitating teaching and learning interactions. Another aim was to gather evidence of TL-related engagement on participants' mobile phones.

By observing the content on participants' mobile phones, the aim was also to collect direct evidence of their engagement in TL activities. This evidence included posts, comments, documents shared, searched content, and videos watched and shared, providing a tangible record of participants' involvement in order to understand the context and settings in which TL activities on SM occurred.

The document analysis also aimed to capture the settings in which participants engaged in TL-related activities on SM. This included observing any TL activities on the participants' SM sites during class time and within the comfort of their homes, providing insights into the different contexts in which SM was used as a tool for TL.

By achieving these aims, the document analysis assisted in providing valuable data that would help answer the research question and contribute to understanding the use of SM platforms as a tool for TL purposes by both educators and students.

The participants in the document analysis process were the following:

1. *Nated Levels:* The study focused on Nated Levels N4, N5, and N6 of the Marketing Management program. These levels were chosen as they aligned with the research objectives.
2. *Class Sampling:* One class from each of the Nated Levels (N4-N6) in the Marketing Management department of the Bongokuthula Campus was selected. This means a total of three classes were sampled, one from each level.
3. *Class Size:* Each class had up to 35 students. From each of the Marketing Management (N4-N6) classes, 10 students were selected as participants. The selection of these 10 students was based on the nature of the responses they provided in the questionnaire.
4. *Total Number of Student Participants:* With 10 participants from each of the three sampled classes, the total number of student participants in the research study was 30 students.
5. *Educators:* All the educators teaching the different subjects per class were asked to participate in the study. Since each level has four subjects, the total number of lecturers anticipated to be part of the research was 12. However, the researcher discovered during the data collection process that five of the lecturers were teaching more than one Nated Level group. As a result, only seven lecturers out of the 12 anticipated lecturers participated in the study.

The document analysis process took place firstly by examining the participants' mobile phones. The researcher looked for evidence of posts, comments, and documents shared on participants' WhatsApp pages. This allowed the researcher to understand the extent to which educators and learners engaged with WhatsApp as a tool for TL. The presence of posts and comments related to academic work indicated that

participants were actively using this platform for discussing and sharing educational content.

Furthermore, the researcher also explored the participants' Facebook search feeds. By analyzing the content searched for on Facebook, the researcher gained insights into the types of academic information and resources that educators and learners were seeking on this platform. This information was crucial to understanding the role of Facebook in facilitating TL interactions and accessing relevant educational content.

Additionally, the researcher observed the videos watched and shared on YouTube by both educators and learners. This provided evidence of engagement with TL-related content on YouTube. The types of videos watched and shared shed light on the participants' preferences and interests, indicating the role of YouTube in supporting TL activities.

By combining these document analyses across different SM platforms, the researcher was able to build a comprehensive understanding of the participants' behaviours and engagement with SM sites for TL purposes. The document analysis offered concrete evidence of the participants' active involvement in using SM for educational activities, including discussions, content sharing, and seeking out academic resources.

Steps were taken to ensure that the information gathered from document analysis would not be used or published in a manner that would enable the individuals to be identified. This was achieved by making use of document analysis schedule questions (see Appendix F), which were designed to collect information and yet still maintain the privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality of the participants. These schedule questions were also created to investigate evidence of formal academic TL activities engaged in by participants within a time frame of the previous four weeks. When deciding on what information should be regarded as private and confidential, the perspective of the participants on the matter was respected by the researcher.

Overall, the researcher's use of participants' mobile phones to observe their engagements on various SM platforms provided valuable data on how both educators and learners were using these platforms for TL-related activities. The document analysis offered direct evidence of the participants' behaviours, allowing for a deeper understanding of the role of SM sites in facilitating TL interaction.

3.3.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis is important because researchers need to be clear about what they are doing and why they are doing it, and they need to provide a clear description of the analysis methods used (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 77). The clearer researchers are about how they analyze data, the easier it will be for readers to evaluate the trustworthiness of the research process (Lorelli, 2017: 2). In this section, the researcher describes the thematic analysis approach used and also provides a detailed account of the criteria that were followed to identify the codes for the thematic analysis approach.

3.3.2.1 Reasons for using thematic analysis

The researcher employed a thematic analysis approach to analyze the data collected from the interviews regarding the use of SM for TL purposes in a TVET college context. Thematic analysis is a systematic method used to identify and analyze themes within qualitative data, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the participants' experiences and perspectives (Braun & Clark, 2006).

3.3.2.2 Types of thematic approach used

To generate themes and codes, the researcher utilized both deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive approach served as a starting point, where themes were identified based on the existing literature related to the research questions, particularly focusing on studies conducted in the context of universities. These themes were derived from the review of the literature and formed the initial coding frame for the analysis. They provided a theoretical foundation for understanding the potential impact of SM on TL practices.

However, the researcher recognized the importance of considering the unique context of TVET colleges and the specific viewpoints of the participants. Hence, the inductive approach was also applied to the analysis. Through inductive analysis, the data were coded without attempting to fit them into pre-existing themes or the researcher's preconceived notions. This allowed the emergence of themes directly from the data itself, irrespective of the themes identified in other studies.

The combination of deductive and inductive approaches allowed the researcher to maximize the depth of the analysis and to capture themes that might have been overlooked when relying solely on existing literature. Unexpected themes that were specific to the TVET college context emerged through the inductive analysis, providing valuable insights into the phenomenon under study.

By employing both deductive and inductive approaches, the researcher ensured a comprehensive examination of the data and a clearer understanding of how SM is used to impact TL practices in TVET colleges. This approach allowed the exploration of pre-existing themes from the literature while remaining open to new and context-specific themes that emerged directly from the participants' responses.

The thematic analysis approach with a combination of deductive and inductive approaches provided a holistic method to identify and analyze themes and codes within the data collected from the interviews. This approach was instrumental in addressing the research questions and filling the gap in the literature regarding how the use of SM impacts TL practices specifically in the context of TVET colleges.

3.3.2.3. Criteria Used to Identify the Themes

The thematic analysis followed the six-step process developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first phase of the data analysis (i.e. familiarization with the data) allowed the richness of the initial findings to emerge. However, the importance of rereading the transcripts before creating codes was considered. Therefore, the researcher reread the transcripts carefully and used the following guidelines to code all the data.

- *Frequency*: The researcher looked for recurring patterns or topics that were mentioned frequently across the collected data.
- *Consistency*: The researcher identified themes that were consistently present throughout different data sources (interview transcripts, document analysis, SM profiles, questionnaire responses).
- *Intensity*: The focus was on themes that demonstrated strong emotional or intellectual significance in participants' discussions about using SM platforms for TL.
- *Contrast*: The researcher explored conflicting perspectives and experiences related to SM platform usage, which might indicate contrasting themes.
- *Relevance to the research question*: The researcher ensured that the identified themes directly addressed the research question and contributed to the study's objectives and theoretical framework.

These criteria guided the researcher in analyzing the data and identifying meaningful themes that captured the essence of participants' views, experiences, and practices regarding the use of SM platforms for TL in TVET colleges. The basic features of the data and the patterns or themes identified will be described and interpreted in detail in Chapter 4.

3.4 MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

Stiles (2007:601) defined the concept of 'trustworthiness' in qualitative research as encompassing the concept of 'reliability', as the trustworthiness of a document analysis or data, and the concept of 'validity', as the trustworthiness of interpretations or conclusions. Trustworthiness in research can be ensured by adhering to principles such as credibility. Beck (1993:263) refers to credibility as the confidence and believability of the findings and interpretations of a qualitative study. It involves establishing the truth and authenticity of the data and the analysis process. Techniques such as prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checking, and thick description are often employed to enhance credibility in qualitative research (Beck, 1993:264).

In this study, the researcher used various methods to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected. Firstly, the researcher designed the document analysis questions (see Appendix F) in such a way that they directly related to the research question and objectives, ensuring that the data collected was relevant to the study. Secondly, the semi-structured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions, allowing the participants to express their experiences and opinions freely, ensuring that the data collected was a true reflection of their experiences. The researcher also used the member-checking technique to confirm the accuracy of the data collected and to ensure that the participants agreed with the researcher's interpretation of their experiences.

The participants were selected from different levels of Marketing Management courses, including N4-N6, to ensure that the data collected was representative of the different stages of the program. The researcher also ensured that the participants were from different age groups, genders, and backgrounds to provide a more diverse perspective on the use of SM platforms in TL activities.

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Whenever human beings are the focus of an investigation, their protection by means of appropriate ethical principles is very important (Siti, 2018:30). Researchers need first to take into consideration the ethical implications of what they (the researchers) propose to do (Siti, 2018:30). Three categories which encompass most ethical issues in research have been identified by Leedy and Ormrod (2001:107), namely: informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and the right to privacy. The researcher in this study has taken several steps to ensure that the research study meets the above-mentioned criteria.

3.5.1 Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

Qualitative research makes it necessary for the researcher to obtain consent, cooperation and permission from the subjects who are to assist in the investigation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017:52). According to Siti (2018), there are two important factors in the process of obtaining consent:

1. Involved persons must be competent to consent and should understand what is being asked of them.
2. Subjects should have freedom of choice, which is the power to decide whether or not they want to participate in the study or decline the offer.

Firstly, potential participants (N4-N6 students of Business Studies: Marketing Management, and their Lecturers) were approached as a group in their various classes and were provided with an information letter (see Appendix B) detailing the purpose of the study and the data collection process to be conducted. The researcher obtained informed consent from the participants by drafting a consent form (see Appendix C) that communicated the purpose, process, and design of the study. The participants were competent to consent as they were all above the age of 18.

Secondly, participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that withdrawing from the study while in progress would not have any negative consequences or affect their academic performance in any way. Lecturers were approached individually and addressed separately from the students. The lecturers and the students were given an appropriate time to ask questions and address any concerns to the researcher.

3.5.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

The practices of anonymity and confidentiality are used to protect the privacy of human subjects who are participating in a study while collecting, analyzing, and reporting data associated with them (Hoft, 2021:180). Anonymity is a condition in which the identity of individual subjects is not known to researchers (The Evergreen State College, 2022:1). Confidentiality on the other hand refers to a situation in which the researcher knows the identity of a research subject but takes steps to protect that identity from being discovered by others (The Evergreen State College, 2022:1).

The researcher took several steps to ensure that the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were maintained after the collection of data. These are listed below:

- The researcher ensured that the name of the TVET College used was not the actual name of the College at which the study was conducted.
- The participants' names and identities were not revealed in the data collection, analysis, and reporting of the study findings. Participants were identified using letters of the alphabet (A-Z).
- The privacy and confidentiality of the interview environment were managed carefully during document analysis and interview sessions.
- The participants were given full assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.
- The participants are only identified by factors such as gender, race, age, and their Business Studies Nated Level (N4-N6) group.
- No personally identifiable information was divulged including participants' SM user names or Instagram handles.

A code letter (letter of the alphabet) was assigned to identify a particular student or lecturer when necessary in the study.

- These measures were designed to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. The researcher ensured that the nature and quality of the participants' performance were kept strictly confidential, ensuring that the participants' privacy was protected and that their data was secured throughout the research process.

3.5.3 The Right to Privacy

Privacy for research participants is a concept in research ethics which states that a person in human subject research has a right to privacy physically, behaviourally, and intellectually when participating (UCI Office of Research, 2020:1). It is understood among researchers that participants should not be identifiable in print, and the researcher must keep the nature and quality of participants' performance strictly confidential (UCI Office of Research, 2020:1). The researcher in this study ensured that all personal information of the participants was kept in strict confidence. The participants were assured that their anonymity and confidentiality would be respected and that their personal information would not be shared outside the research study.

West and Bautista (2022) argue that, as researchers, our goal is to provide accurate and empirically supported facts that will contribute to existing bodies of knowledge. Researchers have to do what they can to ensure that the data required is obtained and analyzed appropriately to ensure validity and reliability (West & Bautista, 2022:1). However, it is equally important to establish practices that ensure that respondents or participants are protected, and that data is secured throughout the research process (UCI Office of Research 2020:2). The researcher ensured that the participants' identities and responses were kept confidential, which further enhanced the validity of the study by minimizing the likelihood of social desirability bias.

3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology and design employed in this study. The researcher presented a detailed description of the research problem, purpose, and objectives, as well as the research questions that guided the investigation. Qualitative research was explained, described and discussed. The chapter also discussed the sampling strategy, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques that were employed in the study. The exploratory nature of the study and the need to ensure the worthiness and credibility of the data collected were emphasized. The researcher highlighted the measures that were taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the study findings, which included member checking. Chapter four will focus on data presentation, analysis and interpretation of the investigation results. The researcher will provide an in-depth understanding of the research findings and their implications for the use of SM for TL purposes in TVET Colleges.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on data presentation and the interpretation and discussion of the research findings. The study aimed to investigate the potential benefits and impacts of SM platforms on TL practices, in the context of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges.

In Section 2, the researcher provides the biodata of the participants. Section 3 discusses the findings and the organization of data presentation based on the two main data collection strategies (semi-structured interviews and document analysis). The final section is a summary of the chapter.

4.2 BIODATA OF THE COLLEGE AND THE PARTICIPANTS UNDER STUDY

In this section, the researcher provides some contextual details about the TVET college and the participants involved in the research.

4.2.1 The College Context

The college is one of 50 public TVET colleges in South Africa, and it plays a significant role in providing vocational education and training to students in Business Studies, Engineering, and various other fields. The college is located in a metropolitan municipality area in South Africa. A metropolitan municipality is a municipality which executes all the functions of local government for a city (Van Rooyen, 2016:141). Metropolitan municipalities were brought into being during the reforms of the 1990s, so that cities could be governed as single entities (Binza, 2005:69). This reform process was a response to the way apartheid policy had broken up municipal governance.

The TVET College in question serves a diverse population of students, offering a wide range of courses and programs that are aligned with the needs of the labour market and industry within the community. Bongukuthula Campus is one of the campuses of the College. It is situated in a town within the metropolitan municipality area, with a student feed from different townships located close to the campus. Donaldson (2014)

defines a township as an underdeveloped, urban, residential area that was designated during apartheid for the exclusive occupation of Africans, Coloureds, and Indians who lived near or worked in areas that were designated 'white only' under the apartheid legislation.

Schools in this kind of community environment were the most disadvantaged during the apartheid regime. However, the current democratic government has been trying to address the socio-economic balances of the past. One of those initiatives by the South African government was to establish the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to manage bursary programs on behalf of funding entities, to provide financial aid to South African students using funds provided mainly by the government (NFSAS, 2000).

The Bongokuthula Campus is dedicated to providing quality education and training in technical and vocational fields, equipping students with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in their chosen careers. However, nearly 87% of the students who register at this College rely heavily on financial aid from the NSFAS bursary program, as most of the students come from very poor communities. The campus is equipped with modern facilities and resources to support the TL process. It also offers a supportive and conducive environment for students to grow academically and personally.

The Bongokuthula Campus is a Report 191 Business Studies college committed to promoting access to quality education, skills development, and lifelong learning opportunities for students in the region. Report 191 refers to a vocational training program within the TVET sector in South Africa that is designed to provide students with practical skills and theoretical knowledge in various vocational fields (DHET, 2022:1). The campus offers only three diploma programs, namely Management Assistant, Marketing Management and Financial Accounting at NATED (N4-N6) level. National Accredited Technical Education Diplomas (NATED) are programs offered in TVET colleges that give students the theoretical and practical abilities needed to ultimately start their careers (DHET, 2022:1).

Bongukuthula is the smallest of the five sister campuses within this municipal area with a staff component of 16 lecturers and an intake capacity of about 500 to 700 students. At the time of the study, the Marketing Management Program had roughly 204 enrolled students and seven lecturers. The Marketing Management N4 group had three classes of 35 students in each class, the N5 group with two classes of 35 students each, and the N6 group was the largest, with 40 students in one class.

The college strives to be a leading institution in providing relevant and innovative TVET programs that contribute to the socioeconomic development of the local community and the broader region.

4.2.2 The Participants' Context

30 Marketing Management students participated in this study, representing different levels within the program. Among the participants, 10 students were from the N4 group, 10 from the N5 group, and 10 from the N6 group.

There were 18 females and 12 males in the group of participants. The gender composition data within this biodata of participants offered a comprehensive view of the gender distribution among Marketing Management students who participated in the study across different academic levels: N4, N5, and N6. This highlighted the possibility of gender being a contributing factor to the role of usage of SM for learning. The gender composition of the participant group is represented graphically below.

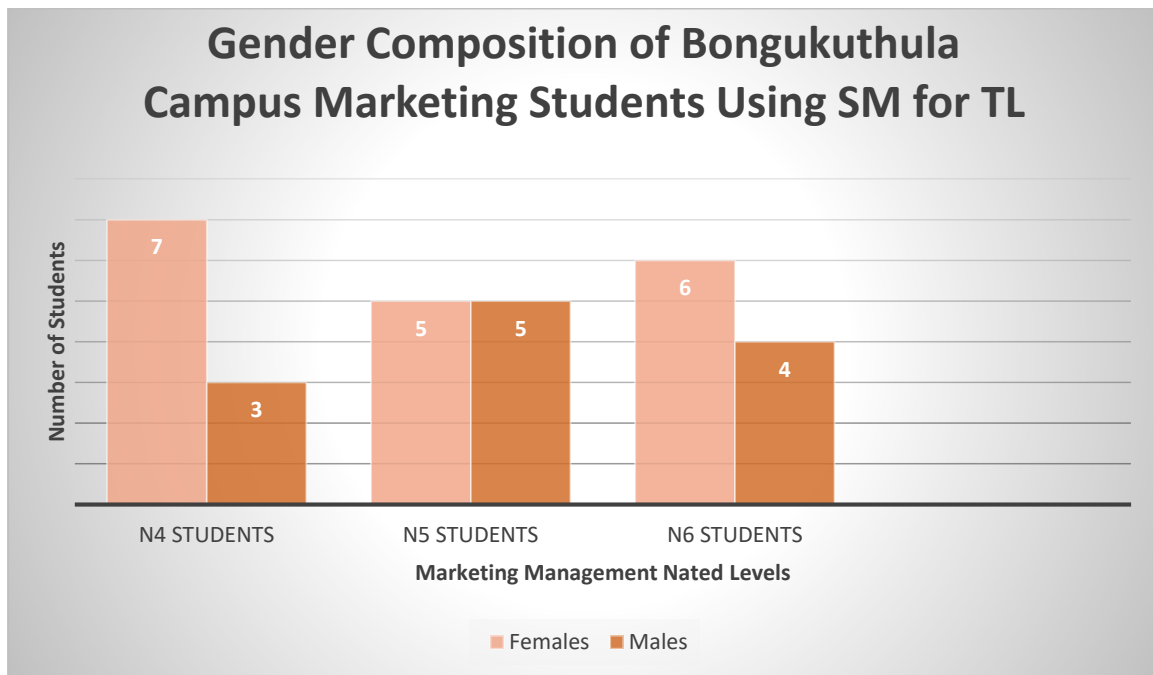


Figure 4.1: Gender Composition of Bongokuthula Campus

The graph shows that among the participants, the N4 group comprised seven females and three males, illustrating the gender distribution within this academic level. The N5 group had a balanced distribution of five females and five males. There were seven females and three male participants in the N6 group, illustrating the gender dynamics within this academic cohort. This data on gender composition at the Bongokuthula Campus is critical as it forms the foundation for understanding how gender may intersect with the use of SM for TL purposes.

The students came from diverse backgrounds, some from townships close to the campus, some from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and some from nearby communities. The study also revealed significant differences in mobile phone ownership among the students. While some students had smartphones, providing them with access to various digital resources and SM platforms, the researcher observed that others had standard phones with limited access to digital tools.

Another factor identified by the researcher as a crucial demographic indicator was the age distribution component. This offered insights into the age profiles of students within each Nated level group. The distribution of students across various age brackets was examined, together with the variations in age composition among these educational levels.

The age distribution found in the study is represented graphically below.

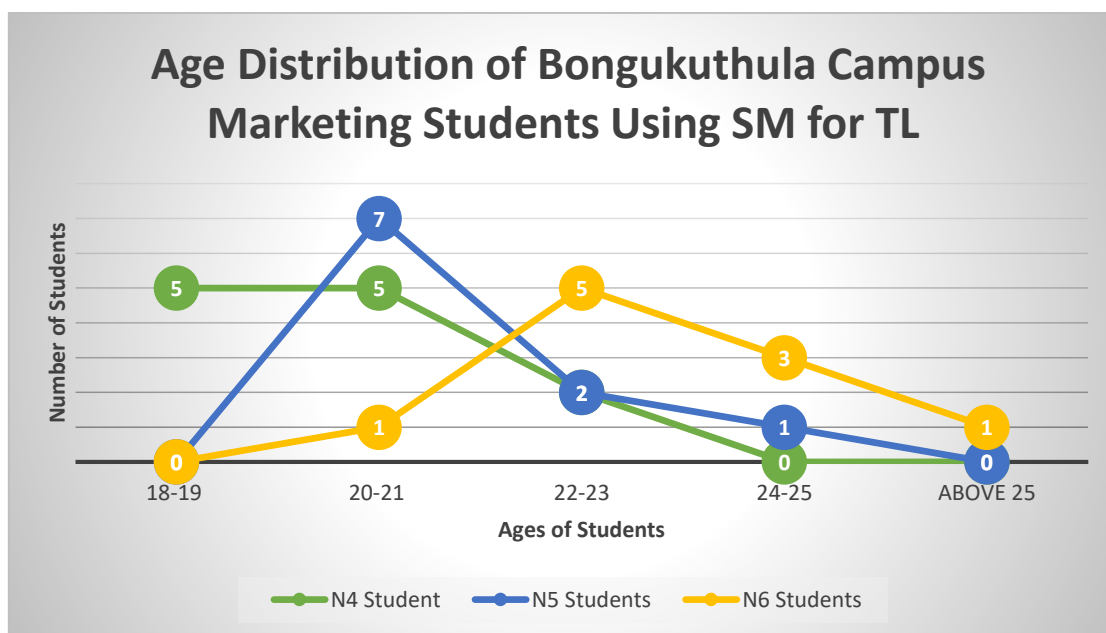


Figure 4.2: Age distribution of Bongokuthula Campus

The analysis of the age distribution among the participants in this study indicated that there was a diverse range of ages represented in the N4 group. Three students fell into the 18-19 age bracket, suggesting that they were some of the youngest participants in this group. Five students were in the 20-21 age range, signifying a larger segment of participants in their early twenties. Surprisingly, only two students were aged 22-23, indicating that this particular age group was less represented among the N4 students.

There were no students aged 18-19 in the N5 group, hence no participants in their late teens. Instead, the majority, comprising seven students, were aged 20-21. Two students were in the 22-23 age bracket, and one participant was notably older, falling into the 24-25 age bracket.

Lastly, in the N6 group, there were no students aged 18-19. One student was in the 20-21 age bracket, signifying a younger participant, while five students were aged 22-23, forming a substantial portion of this group. Three participants fell into the 24-25 age range, indicating a slightly older segment. Notably, one learner was above the age of 25, suggesting a significant age difference compared to the rest of the N6 students.

Understanding the age dynamics among these students highlighted for the researcher how members of different age groups engage with SM platforms and their potential implications for TL practices. This information may provide a foundation for further analysis of how age may influence students' use of SM for academic purposes and, consequently, the transformation of the TL experience.

4.3 DATA PRESENTATION

In this section the researcher presents findings from the two approaches used to collect and analyze data. The findings of this study are derived from the two main data collection strategies: semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Based on the data analysis strategy that was employed, the findings are presented starting with the findings from the semi-structured interviews and followed by those of the document analysis. Quotations are included verbatim from the interviews, and the findings are interpreted and supported with reference to the literature as discussed in chapter two.

4.3.1 The Role of SM in Collaborative Learning (CL)

The literature, as mentioned in Chapter 2, outlines the significant role of SM in facilitating CL (Pulido et al., 2020:135). It highlights the use of SM platforms for interactive learning and the promotion of student engagement. In the interviews conducted with the participants, the role SM plays in TL activities was evident in how the participants expressed their experiences and their perception of using SM sites to support TL activities. For example, one student expressed the following:

Student A: "Me and my classmates have groups on WhatsApp where we discuss assignments, share resources, and help each other out."

Student A's statement provides insights into the role of SM in CL. The fact that students have groups on WhatsApp for discussing assignments indicates that SM is being actively used as a platform for collaborative discussions related to academic tasks. This aligns with the literature on the role of SM in CL (Pulido et al., 2020:135), showcasing SM as a space that facilitates group discussions and problem-solving among students and their peers.

It is also evident in the findings that SM serves as a medium through which students collaborate by sharing materials that can enhance their understanding. It is important to also note that the statement "*help each other out*" suggests a culture of mutual assistance within the group. In this case, SM is portrayed as a tool for fostering a collaborative environment where students support each other. The findings from Student A reveal that the creation of WhatsApp groups among classmates does encourage an informal learning environment. Therefore, SM sites contribute in aiding students to engage in CL activities beyond the formal classroom setting.

Student B: "My lecturer provides feedback on any classwork or homework assignments through the WhatsApp group; this is very helpful, especially if you missed class that day. I do not fall behind."

This statement correlates with findings from Ansari and Khan (2020), who indicated that using SM platforms has a direct impact on academic performance. It underlines the effectiveness of these platforms in aiding CL by bridging the gap between students and educators, aligning with the concept of enhancing social interaction in CL as highlighted in the literature.

Student C: "Using social media has helped me keep up with the new study material. I am able to ask my friends to share any textbooks, previous question papers or any links that deal with a particular topic or assignment."

Student C's feedback highlights how SM has enabled them to stay up to date with study materials, access resources and, with the help of their peers, source additional materials related to their academic work (*refer to Figure 4.4*). This further proves that SM platforms do enhance students' engagement and interaction in an academic setting. The ability to ask friends via SM for textbooks, previous question papers, or relevant links exemplifies how students leverage these platforms to share and collaborate on academic resources. This collaborative aspect of SM use supports the notion that SM enhances engagement and is an excellent tool for sharing and exchanging resources (Nguyen 2020:3). Additionally, it is also evident in the findings that these SM sites play a major role in facilitating peer-to-peer learning (Ansari & Khan, 2020:8).

The use of SM platforms in this manner not only supplements the students' course materials but also helps to address gaps in their understanding, supporting their learning process beyond what traditional resources might offer. This feedback illustrated how SM platforms act as a medium for CL (Nguyen 2020:2). By seeking and sharing academic resources and information, students participate in a collaborative process through these platforms.

The findings from the semi-structured interviews also showed that educators of Bongokuthula Campus acknowledge the potential of SM as a tool that enhances student engagement and helps with creating an interactive learning environment. It

was mentioned by the educators that they use SM platforms to share course materials, provide feedback on assignments, and communicate with students outside of regular class hours. The following extract illustrates this:

Teacher A: "I usually send notes on the WhatsApp group – this is particularly helpful if the work covered in class was not understood by the students. The WhatsApp group we have with the students also enables me to share with them previous question papers so they can refer in preparation for tests and exams."

Teacher A's statement reflects a proactive use of SM (WhatsApp, in this case) to enhance CL. The findings show that Teacher A uses WhatsApp to send notes to the group, indicating a direct application of SM for educational purposes (refer to Figure 4.3). The use of WhatsApp allows for immediate communication and sharing of information beyond the classroom setting. The acknowledgment that the WhatsApp group helps when the work covered in class is not properly understood by the students further suggests that SM is seen as a supplementary tool for addressing gaps in understanding.

The sharing of previous question papers on the WhatsApp group demonstrates the collaborative sharing of resources (refer to Figure 4.2). It indicates a strategic use of SM for CL, as students can refer to these materials during their test and exam preparation. It is therefore evident that the existence of a WhatsApp group between educators and students implies a collaborative space for learning and preparation. This supports the notion from the literature that SM can serve as a platform for CL, where resources and insights can be shared.

Teacher B: "It really helps make my life easier when I send feedback on the WhatsApp group of assessments conducted with the students. I am able to send the memos or marking guidelines so that the students can see where

they went wrong. They are able to then use these memos for revision at a later stage when studying.”

The findings reveal that the use of WhatsApp to send memos and marking guidelines after assessments is a collaborative practice (*refer to Figure 4.1*). The extract from the interview indicates that the teacher uses SM to share valuable resources related to assessments. This finding suggests that SM facilitates the sharing of essential materials that aid in the learning process.

Teacher B noted that students can use these memos for revision. This statement made by the educator speaks to the role of SM not just in assessment but in the ongoing learning process. SM is portrayed as a tool that supports collaborative revision, implying that it contributes to a shared learning environment. The fact that students can see where they went wrong and use the feedback for later revision implies active student engagement. SM, in this context, becomes a platform that engages students in the learning process beyond the classroom.

Figures 4.1 – 4.4 represent evidence of the above statements mentioned by the participants; these screenshots were derived during the document analysis process. The researcher was able to see documents posted by educators on the different WhatsApp groups created by students. The following pictures represent evidence taken from the mobile phones of Teacher A, Teacher B and Teacher C:



Figure 4.3: Memos & Marking Guidelines Posted by Teacher A on the WhatsApp Group of Marketing-N6 Students

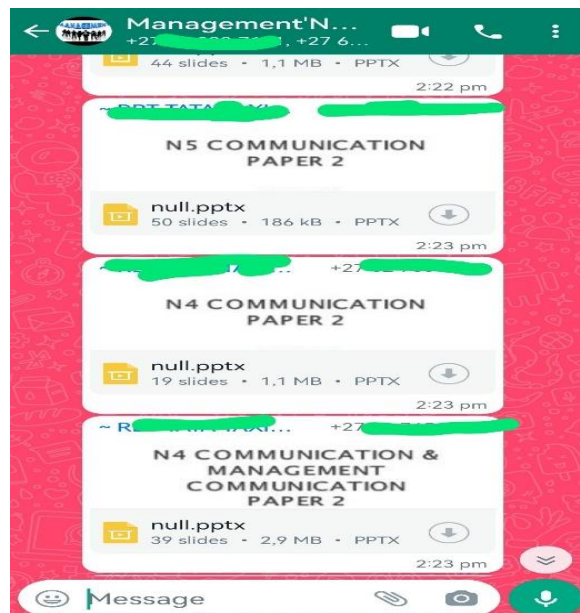


Figure 4.4: Previous Question Papers Shared by Teacher B on the WhatsApp Group of Marketing-N4 Students

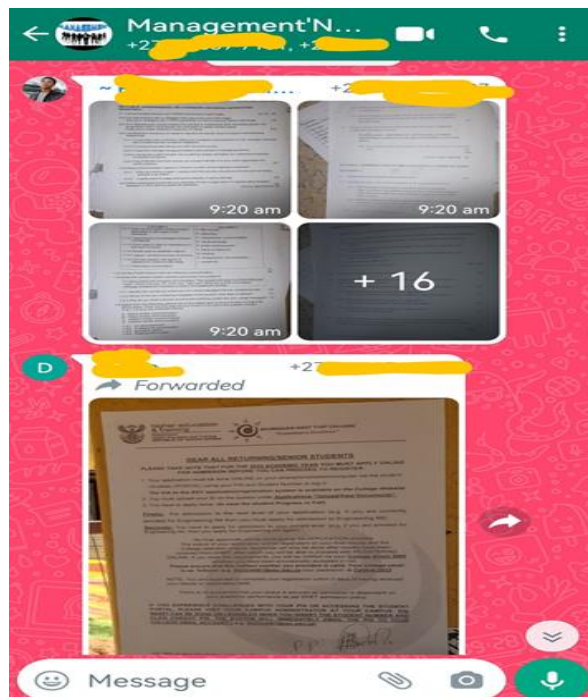


Figure 4.5: Notes Posted by Teacher B on the WhatsApp group of Marketing-N5 Students

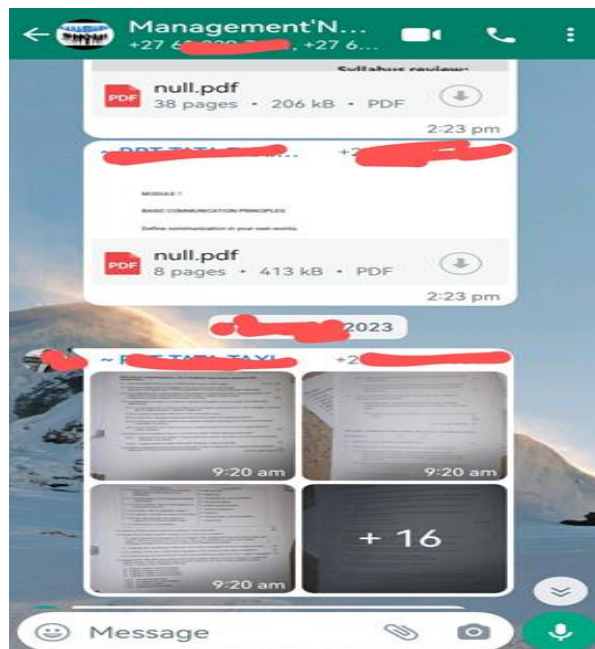


Figure 4.6: Additional Study Material Posted by Teacher C on the WhatsApp Group of Marketing-N4 Students

The findings from both the semi-structured interviews and the document analysis reveal that the integration of SM platforms by the participants for TL purposes is evident in the way these platforms serve as additional channels for CL. These findings indicate that SM, especially WhatsApp, plays a crucial role in CL by facilitating efficient feedback and discussions, sharing important resources, supporting revision, and promoting active student engagement. This supports the broader theme of the role of SM in CL, emphasizing its significance in fostering collaborative educational practices among educators and students.

4.3.2 SM Sites as a Communication Tool in TL

The participants' responses in the interviews indicate that SM serves multiple purposes for them. This includes communication with friends and family, gathering information for studies, and conducting personal interest research. During the interview, participants provided insights into their motivations for using social networking sites and how these motivations extended to the various ways these SM sites enable them to stay in communication with each other.

It was highlighted in the literature (*refer to 2.3.2*) by Akcaoglu & Bowman (2016) how SM networks have become a vital communicative tool in enhancing learning experiences and improving communication between educators and students. The following extracts are derived from the interview data and attest to how SM sites serve as a communication tool for TL purposes.

Student D: "I use SM to stay in touch with my friends and family. I usually log on to Facebook to check my friends and family. I mostly use WhatsApp to communicate with my teachers and classmates."

The feedback given by the students of Bongokuthula Campus provides detailed insights into how SM has been actively utilized for their academic purposes, emphasizing direct communication and engagement with educators and peers. Through these SM groups created by the students, they communicate and receive additional support for specific academic exercises. These findings align with the

emphasis in the literature on SM as a valuable tool for fostering effective communication in TL (Burac, Fernandez, Cruz & Cruz, 2019:6).

Scholars mentioned how during the pandemic, Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube were the dominant SM sites, providing communication and continuous contact between teachers and students, transcending the restrictions of conventional TL (World Wide Worx 2021:1). A similar trend was identified during the collection of document analysis data at the Bongokuthula Campus: most of the participants used WhatsApp, Facebook and/or YouTube. The pandemic imposed restrictions on physical gatherings, including those in educational settings (World Wide Worx 2021:1). Traditional TL methods were constrained due to lockdowns, social distancing measures, and other safety precautions. However, Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube, being widely accessible and user-friendly, transcended these restrictions (World Wide Worx 2021:1). These platforms became alternative channels for educational communication.

Student D's statement indicates that Facebook and WhatsApp serve as versatile communication tools that connect individuals both socially and academically. Using Facebook to stay in touch with friends and family suggests a social aspect, while making use of WhatsApp to communicate with teachers and classmates aligns with the academic context.

Student E: "I use SM to ask my classmates for help with classwork or homework exercises and to engage with my lecturer when I have questions."

Student E's statement highlights the important role of SM platforms in facilitating communication between students and educators. This aligns with the findings in the literature that SM is a valuable tool for fostering effective communication in TL (Cilliers, 2021:5).

Firstly, the student mentioned using SM to communicate and seek help from classmates regarding classwork or homework exercises. This reflects how WhatsApp is used as a communication tool that helps students interact with each other and provides mutual support for their academic studies. Such peer-to-peer interactions can enhance understanding, promote CL, and also bridge knowledge gaps.

Secondly, the student highlighted the use of SM to engage with the lecturer when they have questions. This finding illustrates how SM platforms serve as accessible channels for direct communication between students and teachers outside of traditional classroom settings. Such direct engagement can result in timely clarifications, personalized guidance, and a more interactive learning experience.

Student E's statement provides further evidence to support the theme that SM acts as a valuable tool for fostering effective communication in TL. It demonstrates how these SM platforms facilitate both peer-to-peer and student-teacher interactions, thereby enriching the educational experience and potentially improving TL outcomes.

Student F: "We create study groups on SM to discuss assignments."

The statement made by Student F also provides evidence to support the theme that SM acts as a valuable tool for fostering effective communication in TL. It demonstrates how these SM platforms have enriched the TL experience by facilitating both peer-to-peer and student-teacher interactions and potentially improving the learning outcomes of the students.

The fact that the Marketing Management students of Bongokuthula Campus formed study groups on SM platforms such as WhatsApp to discuss their assignments suggests a proactive approach to TL on their part. These SM study groups allow students to engage in focused discussions and share notes and insights with each other regarding challenges related to their assignments.

These findings confirm that SM is not only a social tool but also a crucial means of establishing effective academic communication. The students' views have shown that the use of SM for TL purposes, engaging with lecturers, and creating study groups highlights the versatility of SM as a communication tool.

4.3.3 Enhancing Student-Teacher Interaction in TVET Colleges through SM

The literature emphasizes the evolving role of SM in fostering interaction between students and teachers. Findings from the literature reveal that in the past, the interaction between teachers and learners on SM networks sparked debate. Questions about the appropriateness of such interactions were raised (Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015:134). As a result, government authorities, in response to these concerns, imposed restrictions on teacher-student communication through SM networks (TeachThought Staff, 2022:1). However, there has been a change in perspective over time. The passage referred to in TeachThought Staff (2022) highlights the evolving dynamics of student-teacher interaction through SM networks and the changing perceptions around its appropriateness and benefits.

SM sites facilitate instant messaging, allowing students to reach out to teachers with questions or concerns in real time. This approach encourages prompt responses for clarification and enhances the accessibility of educators. The following extract from the interviews clearly indicates this:

Student G: "My studies have improved in a great way since my mom bought me an Android phone that enables me to go online. I am able to gather information and discuss things with my lecturers that I didn't understand or was too shy to ask in front of everyone else during class time."

The informal nature of many SM platforms can reduce the perceived barriers between students and teachers, leaving room to encourage a more relaxed and open dialogue. When students perceive that their educators are accessible and responsive via SM platforms, it can nurture a sense of connection and investment in their academic journey.

This finding suggests that SM platforms are utilized for educational interactions with educators. In this extract from the quotation above by Student G: “...*discuss things with my lecturers that I didn't understand...*”, the student highlights their ability to communicate with lecturers, indicating how SM, facilitated by access to a smartphone, contributes to enhanced student-teacher interaction. The mention of discussing things with lecturers outside academic hours implies that SM enables flexible learning and engagement with educators. Students can engage with educational content and seek help at their convenience.

SM's impact on learning is evident when *Student G* notes that they have seen an improvement in their studies ever since purchasing a mobile device that enables them to download SM sites for TL purposes. The student acknowledged that having an Android phone and going online enhanced their access to information.

Overall, the views expressed by Student G show how SM can be utilized as a tool to help with gathering information, facilitate communication with educators, enable flexible learning, and ultimately have a positive impact on the TL experience. This informal student-teacher interaction can help to establish a more supportive academic community, where both educators and students feel empowered to express ideas, seek assistance, and celebrate achievements.

During the interviews, participants indicated that using SM had increased their interaction and overall engagement with their educators. They noted that SM provided an effective forum for them to reach out to their teachers and reflect on their work. For example, one participant mentioned.

Student H: “Having a class WhatsApp group in Marketing-N5 makes it easier for us to reach the lecturers and other students, especially if we have questions, it's not like we have to wait for the following day or anything.”

Student H's statement aligns with the emphasis made by Cilliers (2021) in the literature on the immediate access of support from lecturers through the utilization of SM platforms. The mention of not having to wait for the following day highlights the role of SM in providing timely clarification. This supports the statement in the literature that SM offers a platform for quick and responsive interaction between students and educators (Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015:139). It is noted by the researcher that while Student H does not explicitly mention increased interest, the indication that communication is made easier implies a positive impact on engagement and interest. The literature supports this by recognizing SM as a space for interaction that can foster interest in studies.

Findings from the document analysis showing posts from educators and students in the WhatsApp groups reveal that SM is an excellent tool to use for promoting transparent and constructive interaction between educators and students. The researcher took note of teachers' use of platforms such as WhatsApp on their mobile phones to share feedback on assignments, individually with students and within group settings (*refer to Figure 4.5*). SM allows students to pose questions and seek clarification outside regular class hours. Teachers are able to respond to queries, provide additional explanations, and offer support to students individually (*refer to Figure 4.6*). This helps extend the learning process beyond traditional classroom boundaries. The following images were abstracted from Teacher C's and Teacher D's mobile phones during the document analysis process and support the findings described above:

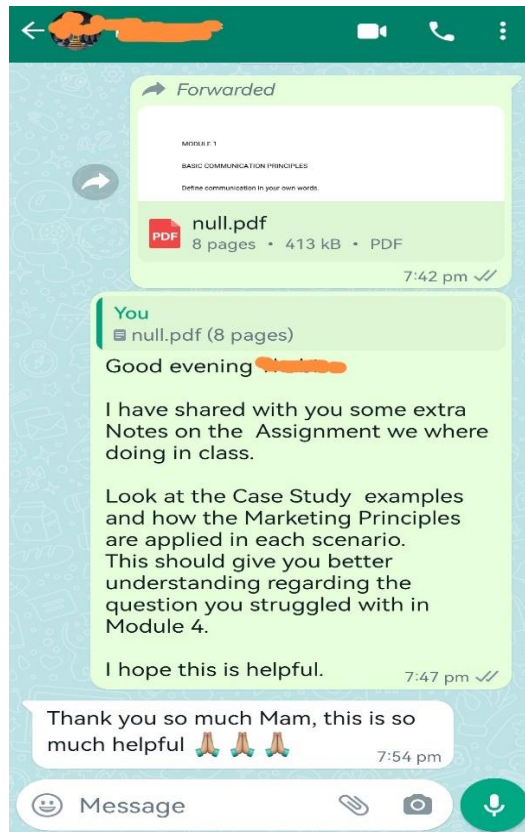


Figure 4.7: Individual feedback on Assignment

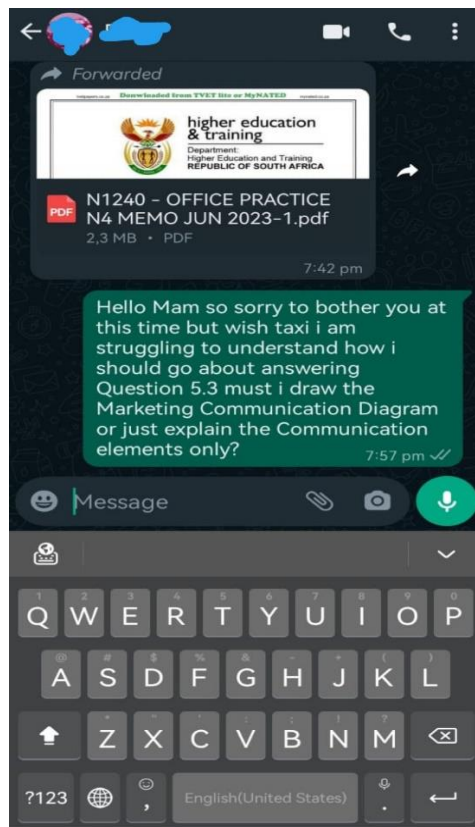


Figure 4.8: Clarity-seeking Question from Student

4.3.4 The Benefits and Challenges of Implementing SM Sites for TL

This section focuses on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of using SM in TVET Colleges. The participants' perspectives on the advantages of SM, such as flexible TL and information access, align with the literature discussing the benefits of technology integration in TVET settings (Michelle, 2021:1). The following interview extract aligns with this theme:

Student I: "The biggest advantage for me of using SM is to be able to understand lessons at my own pace, also having access to information and also connecting out of class for discussion and asking questions through SM group chats or private chats."

Student I recognizes that SM offers a certain flexibility that allows them to understand lessons at their own pace. These findings reveal that students can revisit and comprehend study material according to their individual understanding and speed. The student acknowledges the advantage of having easy access to information. It has been revealed in the literature findings that SM platforms often serve as a tool for accessing study material resources (Michelle, 2021:1); this is a great benefit because when using SM platforms, students are able to access a wealth of information beyond what is covered in the classroom, supporting their independent learning.

Another benefit of SM sites is that they facilitate connections outside traditional class hours. Student I mentions connecting for discussions and highlights the ability to ask questions through SM group chats or private chats. The mention of asking questions through SM group chats aligns with literature from Nasta (2019) who emphasized the interactive nature of SM in supporting student inquiries and discussions. This highlights the importance of SM in providing a communication channel for clarifications and inquiries, consistent with Cilliers (2021) literature finding discussed under section 2.3.3 on 'Enhanced student-teacher interaction'.

However, during the interview, the participants also mentioned problems like data limitations and potential distractions, which mirrors the challenges highlighted in the literature by Ngalomba (2020). These findings emphasize the factors that influence the implementation of formal SM usage in TVET colleges and highlight the importance of considering the specific needs and challenges of these institutions. The following extract illustrates a common challenge that was expressed by a number of students during the interviews:

Student J: "Running out of data becomes a huge problem for me because I miss out on certain information or important things that are shared in the WhatsApp groups."

Student J's statement highlights a significant challenge associated with using SM for TL purposes. Most N4-N6 students have pointed out that running out of data is a serious challenge and that it poses a problem for them. The findings therefore identified a challenge related to the cost and/or availability of data. This aligns with Helsper & Eynon (2010), who expressed concern that not all students may have consistent access to the internet or sufficient data for regular engagement in online learning activities. Student J's statement suggests that a lack of data could lead to students missing what is happening in class. This reflects a potential impact on the continuity of learning, as students may not be able to participate in online discussions, access course materials, or engage in real-time interactions with their educators and peers.

The findings also highlighted participants' concerns about potential misuse, irrelevant discussions, and unethical behaviours on SM platforms, as well as privacy concerns related to online interactions. The following extract from Teacher D attests to these findings:

Teacher D: “My concern is that students may share content on these SM groups that are [sic] unethical. You sometimes find that students [are] busy in the group talk about inappropriate things or things that are not related to academic work.”

Teacher D expresses a common concern raised by most of the educators who were interviewed at Bongokuthula Campus about students sharing unethical content on SM groups or content that is unrelated to academic work. These findings point to challenges in maintaining a focused and academically oriented environment within SM platforms.

The mention of students engaging in discussions about inappropriate or non-academic topics suggests that SM groups may sometimes become platforms for distractions. This aligns with concerns raised in the literature about the potential for off-topic discussions in SM spaces (Junco et al., 2010:119). Furthermore, *Teacher D's* concerns align with discussions in the literature about the need for effective management of SM groups in educational settings. It is clearly a challenge to balance the benefits of CL with the need to ensure that SM spaces are conducive to educational purposes (Luo et al., 2019).

Teacher D's perspective emphasizes the importance of establishing clear guidelines and expectations for SM use in educational contexts. It also points to the need for educators to actively moderate and guide discussions in these WhatsApp groups to maintain a positive and academically focused online TL environment.

These concerns resonate with the literature from Hoftijzer et al (2020) that discusses ethical and privacy considerations in the context of educational technology. It emphasizes the need for responsible use, proper guidelines, and privacy protection for participants when using these SM groups. The above reveals the importance of creating a respectful and secure online learning environment.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 4 examined the impact SM has on TL practices within the unique context of a TVET college. The chapter began by providing vital information about the TVET college and the participants involved in the study, offering a solid foundation for the thematic analysis. The researcher then provided a detailed review of the alignment between the literature themes of Chapter 2 and the findings from the interview and document analysis data.

The first part of section 4.3, *'The role of SM in CL,'* emphasized the positive impact of SM on CL, providing opportunities for enhanced student-teacher interaction and collaboration. This was highlighted by Student A, Student B and Student C, who described how SM platforms such as WhatsApp serve as tools to facilitate resource sharing and academic discussions amongst educators and peers. The second part of that section, *'SM Sites as a Communication Tool in TL,'* recognized SM platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook as effective communication tools for sharing information, conducting discussions, and supporting TL overall. The findings from Teacher A, Teacher B, Student D, Student E, and Student F supported the literature by illustrating how SM is extensively used for academic communication and resource sharing in a TVET College. The third part of that section, *'Enhancing Student-Teacher Interaction in TVET Colleges through SM,'* discussed the evolution of teacher-student interaction through SM, addressing debates and highlighting the diverse educational possibilities. Student G's experience resonated with the literature by showing how SM enhances student-teacher interaction, making learning more accessible and engaging.

The final part of section 4.3 addressed *'The Benefits and Challenges of Implementing SM Sites for TL'* in TVET Colleges. The literature findings acknowledged challenges such as ethical concerns and off-topic discussions in SM spaces. Student J and Teacher D expressed concerns about challenges related to data accessibility and the potential for inappropriate content in SM groups. In conclusion, while SM brings undeniable benefits to education, the findings highlight the importance of managing its

use with care and navigating ethical concerns and distractions to ensure its optimal contribution to the educational landscape.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher draws the study to a close by reviewing the research aims and objectives outlined in Chapter 1. This chapter provides a detailed overview of the study's findings, tracing them back to the main research questions. In addition, the limitations and recommendations of the study are discussed for further research in this field.

The study aimed to investigate the intricate role of SM platforms in supporting TL within TVET Colleges. The specific research objectives included the following:

1. To explore the impact of SM on CL in TVET Colleges.
2. To examine the integration of SM as a communication tool in academic settings.
3. To assess the role of SM in enhancing student-teacher interaction.
4. To investigate the benefits and challenges of SM in TVET education.

5.2 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents a summary of key scholarly and empirical findings. The research findings highlighted the transformative role SM plays in TL, particularly within TVET Colleges. Having successfully addressed the research questions, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge, offering both theoretical insights and practical implications that advocate for the continued integration and further exploration of SM platforms in educational settings.

5.2.1 The Transformative Role of Social Media in TL

From a scholarly perspective, the literature emphasized the transformative potential of SM for TL purposes. The key findings highlighted the adaptability of educational practices in response to technological advancements, emphasizing the growing significance of SM platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube in facilitating communication and collaboration among students and educators. The literature further accentuated the need to foster effective communication, engagement, and

interaction within the ES, positioning SM as a significant tool in achieving these objectives.

The study provided first-hand insights into the experiences and perceptions of students and educators of the Bongokuthula TVET College. The findings revealed the versatile ways in which SM platforms are utilized on campus for academic purposes, ranging from peer-to-peer interactions, CL, to direct communication and engagement with educators. The empirical data confirmed the scholarly emphasis on the role of SM in fostering effective communication and engagement, notably revealing the tangible impacts these platforms had on the students and how their learning experiences were enhanced.

Furthermore, the context of TVET Colleges was particularly emphasized, highlighting the unique challenges and opportunities presented by these institutions. The literature provided insight into how the study's findings could be interpreted, shedding light on how SM can be integrated for TL purposes in TVET colleges. Key theoretical perspectives such as the Connectivism theory were explored by the researcher, offering a theoretical lens through which the empirical findings could be analyzed and understood. The theoretical framework served as a foundation for understanding the potential impacts and implications of SM usage for TL within TVET Colleges.

5.3 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

The study generated themes in response to the research questions from the two main data sources: semi-structured interviews with participants and document analysis utilizing participants' mobile phones (*refer to Table 1: Appendix G*). These themes analyzed the role SM platforms play in supporting TL within TVET Colleges. In this section, the researcher provides a detailed analysis of the research findings obtained in Chapter 4. This section is structured around the research questions (*refer to 1.5.1*) which are derived from the objectives of the study (*refer to 1.6.1*) emphasizing the significance of these findings within the context of integrating SM into TVET Colleges for TL purposes.

In addressing research sub-questions 1, 2, 3 and 4 (*refer to 1.5.1*), five (5) themes were generated (*refer to Table 1: Appendix G*) during the data analysis process. Themes 3 and 5 address the first research question; themes 2 and 4 address the second research question; themes 1, 2 and 5 address the third research question, and theme 6 addresses the final research question. The main findings of this study are summarized in terms of the research questions as outlined in Chapter 1.

5.3.1 How does the Use of SM Platforms impact CL among Students and Educators in TVET Colleges?

The study explored the impact of SM platforms on CL among students and educators in TVET colleges. The findings revealed that SM platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube played an important role in facilitating communication and collaboration. Findings from Student A provided evidence of the impact of SM, particularly WhatsApp, in fostering CL among students. Teacher B's statement (*refer to 4.3.1*) illustrated how educators leverage SM platforms, such as WhatsApp groups, to facilitate CL by providing individual feedback and group discussions.

The evidence from Chapter 4 strongly supports the notion that the use of SM platforms impacts CL in TVET colleges significantly. The key findings revealed that students use SM sites for discussions with educators and peers, posting notes, sharing videos and document links to provide help and support for TL purposes. This use of SM sites extends the students' and educators' CL experiences beyond the formal class hours, fostering the creation of virtual learning communities that contribute to ongoing academic discussions and support.

It was revealed in the study that students and educators actively engage in collaborative efforts through SM platforms. The research concludes that SM platforms play a crucial role in shaping CL experiences among students and educators in TVET colleges. The evidence suggests that these platforms act as a tool for knowledge sharing, group discussions, and collaborative problem-solving. The use of SM platforms influences CL in TVET colleges by fostering dynamic interactions, resource sharing, and the creation of virtual communities.

5.3.2 What Factors Contribute to the Adoption of SM as a Communication Tool in TVET Colleges?

The key findings revealed that SM platforms were instrumental in facilitating direct communication between students and educators. Participants frequently used SM platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp for academic communication. Students reported using these platforms to seek help, ask questions, and engage in discussions for TL purposes (*refer to student E*). This highlights the integration of SM into academic communication channels.

A prominent finding was that SM platforms, particularly WhatsApp, offer an accessible and convenient means of communication for both educators and students. The ease of sharing resources, posting updates, and engaging in discussions without time or location constraints enhanced its appeal as a communication tool.

Features such as group discussions, peer-to-peer interactions, and real-time feedback mechanisms were found to be instrumental in keeping students actively involved in their learning process. The study revealed that SM platforms served as alternative channels for education, especially during the constraints imposed by the pandemic. Platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube emerged as essential tools for maintaining continuity in TL, transcending the limitations of traditional instructional methods.

It was found in the study that educators use these platforms to share additional resources, answer students' queries, and provide feedback, thereby enriching the overall learning experience for students. SM was identified as a facilitator for collaborative learning. Students often created study groups or forums on these platforms to discuss assignments, share insights, and support each other.

The findings revealed that the adoption of SM platforms strengthened the rapport between educators and students. Through regular interactions, educators could address individual queries, monitor student progress, and provide personalized support, contributing to a more supportive learning environment. Overall, the findings

suggest that the use of SM for TL purposes has the potential to improve learning outcomes. It has been demonstrated that SM platforms, through facilitated communication, immediate feedback, and engagement, do contribute to a richer and much more interactive learning experience.

5.3.3 How does the use of SM enhance student-teacher interaction?

The findings from the study demonstrate that SM platforms significantly enhance student-teacher interaction in TVET Colleges. The literature indicates that SM has evolved from being a debated medium for student-teacher communication to a widely accepted tool for encouraging educational interactions (Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015; TeachThought Staff, 2022). Initially, concerns about the appropriateness of such interactions led to restrictions. However, changing perceptions have highlighted the benefits of SM in creating more accessible and immediate communication channels.

From the interviews, it is evident that SM platforms like WhatsApp provide students with instant access to educators, allowing for real-time messaging and prompt responses. This accessibility is crucial for students who might hesitate to ask questions in a traditional classroom setting, as exemplified by Student G, who highlighted improved studies through the ability to gather information and discuss queries with lecturers outside class hours. The informal nature of SM reduces perceived barriers, promoting a much more relaxed and open dialogue, and thus encouraging student engagement.

Student H's experience with a class WhatsApp group further indicates the utility of SM in enhancing educational interactions. The ability to reach out to lecturers and peers for immediate support without waiting for the next class day shows the timeliness and effectiveness of SM in providing academic assistance. This aligns with Cilliers' (2021) findings that SM facilitates immediate support, enhancing student engagement and interest.

Document analysis revealed that educators use SM platforms to share feedback, clarify doubts, and offer additional explanations beyond regular class hours. This extension of the learning process beyond traditional boundaries supports continuous learning and fosters a supportive academic community. The findings from the document analysis show that SM platforms promote transparent and constructive interactions, as educators and students actively engage in discussions, feedback sharing, and collaborative learning activities.

5.3.4 What are the Challenges and Opportunities associated with the Use of SM in TVET Colleges?

The findings identified barriers, concerns, and privacy-related challenges associated with the use of SM in TVET colleges. While the participants in the study did not explicitly outline policies and resources, their experiences and perspectives suggested several considerations. Several concerns and challenges were highlighted in the study, including insufficient data. The N4-N6 students indicated that sometimes they did not have enough data to be able to go online to do their academic work.

Potential misuse of SM for discussions on topics unrelated to TL activities was also a concern raised by the participants, as were certain ethical considerations. Educators expressed concern about students using their cell phones in class for matters unrelated to what was being taught at the time. Privacy and security concerns were also identified as a challenge by the participants. Both students and educators expressed concerns about protecting their personal information and data during the use of SM sites for TL purposes.

The findings indicate that both groups recognize the advantages and disadvantages associated with SM integration in the context of TVET colleges. The study showed that the educators of Bongokuthula Campus see SM as a valuable supplementary tool to traditional TL methods. The advantage identified in Chapter 4 (*refer to 4.3.4*) was that SM enabled the educators to provide additional resources and support to students.

It is important to recognize these challenges and concerns in order for institutions to navigate responsible SM integration. The study showed that, by acknowledging these challenges, educational TVET Colleges like Bongokuthula Campus may be able to develop the necessary safety guidelines to address potential misuse and privacy issues. This will help to ensure that a respectful and secure online learning environment is maintained.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, the researcher presents a set of practical recommendations based on the research findings. The aim is to provide actionable guidelines for the integration of SM into TL practices in TVET Colleges. Aligned with the research objectives and exploring the intricate role of SM in TVET institutions, these recommendations offer a course of action to enhance education in the digital age.

The recommendations are rooted in data and scholarly insights gathered during this research study. They also address real challenges and opportunities faced by TVET Colleges, educators, and students in adopting SM as another platform that can be utilized for TL purposes within higher educational institutions.

Each recommendation starts with a specific action (WHO should do WHAT) and is substantiated with a clear rationale (WHY). The researcher has attempted to structure the recommendations logically, with consideration of actions that may need to be taken at different levels of the ES, be it institutional, district, or national.

5.4.1 Implementing an Integrated Social Media Framework in TVET Colleges

The analysis of the research findings in Chapter 4 revealed the critical importance of structured and purposeful SM use in fostering student engagement and enhancing TL in TVET Colleges. The study illustrated how students and educators perceive SM as a tool for communication, collaboration, and information sharing. The recommendation to implement an integrated SM framework in TVET colleges is grounded in the findings derived from the data analysis.

By creating an integrated SM framework that outlines specific goals, guidelines, and best practices for SM use in education, TVET institutions may be able to provide educators and students with a clear structure for incorporating SM into their TL activities. This framework should be based on the unique needs of TVET Colleges. The data collected by the researcher indicated that both students and educators recognize the potential benefits of SM for TL; however, the participants also expressed concerns about data limitations, privacy, and potential distractions. Therefore, an integrated framework, tailored to the TVET context, could help to address these concerns by setting guidelines for responsible and effective SM use. This would ensure that privacy and ethical considerations are respected, and issues related to data limitations and potential distractions would be mitigated.

It is recommended that the framework be designed collaboratively, by involving educators, students, and institutional stakeholders. This would help ensure that the specific needs and objectives of TVET institutions are reflected. This recommendation motivates the importance of incorporating the perspectives of both students and educators when implementing SM in TL.

By implementing an integrated SM framework, TVET colleges would be able not only to harness the advantages of SM platforms but also to address potential challenges and concerns. This proactive approach would ensure the responsible use of SM and would also support a more engaging and effective TL environment. This recommendation directly addresses the research objective of providing practical guidance for SM integration in TVET colleges based on the empirical findings.

This framework could include guidance on creating a secure and respectful online learning environment, integrating SM into the curriculum, and supporting CL. The researcher has established that national and institutional support would be crucial in ensuring the consistent implementation and monitoring of these guidelines. By implementing such a framework, the TVET sector could enhance the quality of TL as we know it, through the strategic use of SM platforms.

5.4.2 Continuous Professional Development for Educators

Continuous professional development (CPD) is a term used to describe learning activities that professionals take part in to develop and enhance their skills (Oxbridge Academy, 2017:1). The recommendation for CPD for educators is supported by the data gathered by the researcher.

The thematic analysis in Chapter 4 revealed that both students and educators recognize the impact of SM on TL experiences and student engagement. It was demonstrated that students perceive SM as a tool that positively influences their learning, making the lessons more engaging and improving their interest in their studies. The study shows that the educators were also able to acknowledge the potential of SM to enhance learning experiences and promote student engagement.

However, the data highlighted a gap in educators' readiness and skills to effectively use SM platforms for TL. While the participants acknowledged the benefits of SM, some educators felt inadequately prepared to implement its full potential. This has highlighted the potential and opportunity for CPD to be indicated as a key recommendation by the researcher for this study

The data indicated that educators require training and support to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to integrate SM effectively into their teaching practices. This includes understanding how to create engaging content on SM platforms, facilitating meaningful online discussions, and addressing students' concerns. There is a recommendation for ongoing CPD for educators as a critical element that would aid in bridging the gap between recognizing the benefits and the practical implementation.

This recommendation directly addresses the need for practical steps to support educators in utilizing SM for TL within the unique context of TVET Colleges. By providing educators with the necessary skills and knowledge through CPD programs, TVET Colleges can maximize the benefits of SM for both educators and students and thus create a more effective and engaging learning environment.

5.5 AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The focus aims of the study did not allow the researcher to extensively explore all the internal and external factors that could influence SM integration. Therefore, based on the findings and the limitations of this study, several avenues for further research were identified as follows:

Institutional policies: The role of institutional policies in shaping SM integration could be extensively explored. Further investigation could be done on how different policies affect the adoption and implementation of SM for TL.

Professional Development Needs: The specific professional developmental needs of educators for the effective integration of SM use for TL purposes could be studied further in detail. Such a study could focus on identifying the type of training and support that is required to empower educators to effectively use SM for TL.

Government regulations: Here, researchers could explore issues related to student privacy and ethics when using SM for education. An in-depth investigation of student and educator concerns regarding data security and responsible online behaviour could prove impactful.

Technological infrastructure: It is important to assess the technological infrastructure in TVET colleges to support SM integration. This includes investigating issues related to connectivity, device availability, and digital literacy. These factors may significantly impact the use of SM for TL. They address some of the gaps and limitations identified in this research and could provide opportunities for future investigations in this evolving field.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite the fact that the basic objectives of the study were all achieved, the researcher did identify the following limitations during the course of the study:

5.6.1 Focus on One Specific TVET College

The study focused on a specific TVET college in a particular region. The sample size was relatively small as it focused specifically on one campus that only offers a Business Studies program. The selected participants were only from the Marketing Management Department. Therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all TVET colleges or other educational settings and their vast fields.

5.6.2. Number of Educators in Relation to Students

The study had a relatively small number of educator participants compared to students. The researcher had intended to interview 12 educators but discovered that there were only seven educators in the Marketing Management Department on campus. This imbalance could affect the depth of insight regarding the perspectives of educators in TVET colleges. Further research with a more balanced representation of educators could be warranted.

5.6.3 Time Frame

The research was conducted at a specific time, and this might have influenced the study's findings. SM platforms and their usage patterns do tend to change rapidly. Therefore, the findings may not fully capture the current state of SM integration in TVET colleges.

5.6.4 External Factors

There were many other possible factors to explore in the study, such as institutional policies, government regulations, and technological infrastructure. However, because of time and limited resources, the researcher could not conduct an extensive investigation into these external factors that might have had a significant impact on the use of SM for TL in TVET colleges.

5.6.5 Possible Subjectivity

Thematic analysis, whilst the most suitable method for the study, also involves some level of subjective interpretation. Different researchers might identify different themes or interpretations from the same data. To mitigate the effects of this limitation, the researcher used coding procedures and cross-checking.

5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Conducting this research on the role of SM in supporting TL within TVET Colleges has been a satisfactory and successful process and a deeply enlightening experience. One of the most valuable aspects of this journey has been the opportunity to explore the intricate dynamics of how technology, particularly SM, intersects with education in contemporary settings.

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 emerged as an unprecedented disruptor that reshaped various facets of our lives, with education being profoundly impacted. This was one of the motivating factors for this research study. The sudden shift to remote learning models reinforced the importance of digital tools, particularly SM platforms, in sustaining educational continuity. This transformation was not merely a logistical adjustment but also a testament to the adaptability and resilience inherent in the educational community. Observing this rapid adaptation, and recognizing it as a vital moment at which traditional paradigms were being redefined, were the factors that inspired the study. The pandemic, while presenting many challenges, also highlighted innovative approaches and the untapped potential of digital platforms in fostering TL experiences. The researcher sought to capture and understand these emergent

dynamics that acknowledged the pandemic not just as a disruptor but as a catalyst for educational innovation and evolution.

Another important value that the researcher derived from conducting this study is the recognition of the evolving nature of educational landscapes. The findings pointed out the adaptability and resilience of both educators and students in leveraging available resources, such as SM platforms, to navigate the challenges that were posed by external factors such as the pandemic. This adaptability has taught the researcher afresh the importance of flexibility and innovation in education.

The role of SM in bridging gaps, facilitating interactions, and fostering CL environments cannot be overstated. This research highlighted the significance of communication in the educational process and has served as a testament to the transformative potential of technology in enhancing TL experiences and outcomes. The researcher believes that this experience has definitely shed some light on a holistic perspective on the impacts of SM in education. These kinds of approaches are essential for addressing complex challenges in order to help foster continuous developments in the education sector, as we continue to navigate the evolving landscapes of the digital age.

5.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Taking on this research on the role of SM in supporting teaching TL within TVET Colleges has been a deeply enriching and enlightening experience. One of the most valuable aspects of this journey was understanding how the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for educational innovation, revealing the transformative potential of digital platforms in enhancing educational experiences. The study illuminated the adaptability and resilience of educators and students in leveraging SM to bridge gaps, facilitate interactions, and foster CL environments. Personally, this research has highlighted to me the importance of flexibility and innovation in education, reaffirming my belief in the power of technology to revolutionize the educational landscape. The ability of SM to promote continuous communication and create a supportive academic

community has truly provided me with a holistic perspective on its impacts, enhancing my excitement and profound appreciation for the evolving nature of education in the digital age. I must say that this experience has not only contributed to my academic growth but it has also enriched my understanding of the intricate dynamics between technology and education, inspiring in me a renewed commitment to fostering continuous development in the educational sector.

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APPENDIX A: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Request for permission to conduct research at Ekurhuleni East TVET College –
Brakpan Campus

Title of the research: THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO SUPPORT TEACHING
AND LEARNING IN TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING
COLLEGES

Date: 18 November 2022

The Principal
EEC TVET College
Brakpan Campus

Dear Ms.X,

I, Nokuthula F Dlamini, am currently studying for the degree of MEd in Curriculum and Instructional Studies at the University of South Africa under the supervision of Dr Mathomo Moila (PhD), a lecturer in the College of Education.

I am writing to request permission to conduct research at an FET TVET College in Ekurhuleni East, as part of the requirements for the successful completion of my studies.

The study aims to investigate how the use of various social media sites has contributed to supporting teaching and learning practices in higher education institutions. The research has a special focus on TVET Colleges.

The study was motivated by the recent coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19), which dramatically changed the educational landscape around the world and impacted the country's educational system as a whole. The pandemic offered an

opportunity for the use of social media platforms to remotely rise as part of a solution to support the continuation and completion of teaching and learning during the academic year of the lockdown period.

I selected FET TVET colleges in particular because during my research I discovered that not many studies have been conducted about this specific sector. The scholarly literature that is available nationally and or otherwise concerning this topic, in particular, is predominantly based on higher educational institutions such as Universities and other Private institutions.

The study is of a qualitative methodology and will entail lesson observations and interviews with subject teachers and individual students who have been selected through the use of a questionnaire designed with structured questions that will help identify which of the lecturers and students are active users of social media sites when conducting schoolwork, i.e. during class lessons, while studying a particular topic or when doing homework or other school work assessments.

The benefit of this study is to explore how the ongoing COVID-19 crisis has compelled many higher educational institutions that have been delivering in-class teaching and learning, to rethink their delivery approach. Social media platforms have become one of the most significant communication tools revolutionizing the facilitation of teaching and learning activities. It is therefore important to understand how this global adoption of technology in the phenomenon of social media is continuing to open the door to new ways of teaching and learning, thus transforming in its path the future of education as we know it. It is because of the COVID-19 pandemic that schools have had to take a significant look at how they can best utilize various tools like social media sites to help promote home-based learning for all students.

The research study includes the participation of lecturers and students at a TVET college. Participants are non-vulnerable humans above the age of 18 years. The study involves no apparent risk, harm or discomfort to the participants and no sensitive and/or personal information of participants will be divulged other than race, gender and age. The study is strictly interested in the participant's usage of social media sites for conducting their academic teaching and learning purposes only.

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research. Participation or lack thereof will not have any impact on work or academic performance. The study will also cause no disruptions to the normal running of the institution and/or classes as any interactions with participants will be scheduled for during their free period.


The feedback procedure will entail the researcher creating a virtual video that will be posted on various social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and Facebook to name a few. Research feedback and findings will be explained in detail in the composed video and shared with all participants to access on their preferred social media platforms.

I sincerely hope my request will be granted in this regard and therefore count on your support. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely in research,
Nokuthula F Dlamini
Lecturer

Approval Statement:

I, Ms X (Full name & surname), Principal of EEC (position held) certify that I have read and understood the content of this letter. I therefore officially give my consent to the researcher, Nokuthula F Dlamini (name & surname) to proceed with conducting the research investigation at the indicated institution.



25.04.2023

Principal's Signature

Date

APPENDIX B: INFORMATIONAL LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant

This letter serves as an invitation for your participation in a research study to investigate how the use of various social media sites has contributed to supporting teaching and learning practices in higher education institutions.

The study was motivated by the recent coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) which dramatically changed the educational landscape around the world and impacted the country's educational system as a whole. The pandemic offered a premise for the use of social media platforms to remotely rise as part of a solution to support the continuation and completion of teaching and learning during the academic year of the lockdown period.

I selected FET TVET colleges in particular because during my research I discovered that not many studies have been conducted about this specific sector. The scholarly literature that is available nationally and or otherwise concerning this topic, in particular, is predominantly based on higher educational institutions such as Universities and other Private institutions.

The study is of a qualitative methodology and will entail lesson observations and interviews with subject teachers and individual students who have been selected through the use of a questionnaire designed with structured questions that will help identify which of the lecturers and students are active users of social media sites when conducting schoolwork, i.e. during class lessons, while studying a particular topic or when doing homework or other schoolwork assessments.

The benefit of this study is to explore how the ongoing COVID-19 crisis has compelled many higher educational institutions that have been delivering in-class teaching and learning, to rethink their delivery approach. Social media platforms have become one of the most significant communication tools revolutionizing the facilitation of teaching and learning activities. It is therefore important to understand how this global adoption of technology in the phenomenon of social media is

continuing to open the door to new ways of teaching and learning, thus transforming in its path the future of education as we know it. It is because of the COVID-19 pandemic that schools have had to take a significant look at how they can best utilize various tools like social media sites to help promote home-based learning for all students.

I therefore ask for your cordial assistance in making this study a success by being part of the observation and interview process which will be the method used to collect data. The interview will be about 30 minutes, and you are asked to try and answer all questions as honestly and accurately as you can. Please be informed that your participation in this study will be treated as confidential and voluntary. Your name will not at any point be mentioned anywhere in the resulting report of the study. If you are not clear on any questions during the interview, please do not hesitate to ask for clarity.

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research. Participation or lack thereof will not have any impact on your work or academic performance. The study will also cause no disruptions to the normal running of the institution and/or classes.

The feedback procedure will entail the researcher creating a virtual video that will be posted on various social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube and Facebook to name a few. Research feedback and findings will be explained in detail in the composed video and shared with all participants to access on their preferred social media platforms.

I look forward to working with you.

Yours sincerely in research,
Nokuthula F Dlamini
NF Dlamini
Lecturer

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

(with return slip)

Dear Participant

CONSENT/ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY (Return slip)

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

It has been explained to me and I have understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I am willing and prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to be interviewed as it is the method that the researcher will utilise for data collection.

Participant's Name and Surname

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Name & Surname

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX D: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LECTURERS AND STUDENTS

(Please circle the appropriate answer)

1. Do you currently have a smart mobile phone with internet access?
Yes
No

2. Are you currently subscribed to any social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp etc.?
Yes
No

3. Do you enjoy using social media sites?
Yes
No

4. Do you find it easy to navigate social media sites and consider them user-friendly?
Yes
No

5. Do you consider social media as a tool that should be utilized by educators and students at TVET colleges?
Yes
No

6. Do you use social media to communicate with your teachers or students?
Yes
No

7. If you answered no to Q2, then would you be interested in using social media as an educational tool?

Yes

No

8. Which of the following social media platforms are you currently subscribed to?

Facebook

TikTok

WhatsApp

Twitter

YouTube

Instagram

Messenger

Snapchat

9. Which of the following social media platforms would you say you normally use for any work or study-related purposes?

Facebook

TikTok

WhatsApp

Twitter

YouTube

Instagram

Messenger

Snapchat

10. Do you think that students would perform better academically if the use of social media was integrated into lessons?

Yes

No

11. How would you describe your usage of social media sites as a current communication tool pertaining to work and studies?

Excellent

Good

Average

Poor

12. How long do you spend on social networking sites during a typical day?

No time

5 – 10 minutes

10 – 30 minutes

30 minutes – 1 hour

1 – 2 hours

2 – 3 hours

3 – 4 hours

4 – 5 hours

5+ hours

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR LECTURERS AND STUDENTS

CATEGORY 1

The first part of the interview will be devoted to the demographic characteristics (gender, age, course and level of study/job title and subjects they offer).

Demographic characteristics

1. Gender:

Male

Female

Other: _____

2. Age:

18–19 yrs.

20–21 yrs.

22–23 yrs.

24–25 yrs.

25 and above. Please specify _____

3. Course and Level: _____

4. Job title and subject offering: _____

5. Race: _____

CATEGORY 2

The second part is related to the context of SM usage; here the researcher will consider which SM sites are used, how often, and when, and also establish the reason for usage.

Social Media (SM) usage:

1. Please outline the top three main reasons why you use social networking sites (e.g. talk to friends, work or study reasons etc.)
2. Which social media platforms would you say are most user-friendly for work/academic-related purposes and why?
3. How much time do you spend on social networking sites during a typical day for work/school-related purposes?
4. Do you think using social media sites provides an easy and quick way to communicate with students/teachers? Please provide a reason to support your answer.
5. When do you mostly log on to your social media sites?

CATEGORY 3

The third part will be about the experience in an academic setting with the use of SM. Participants will be specifically asked whether they have engaged in SM interactions for work/academics and which platforms are often used.

Social media experience in an academic setting:

1. Do you think that teachers should make use of social media such as YouTube videos/ WhatsApp/ blogs/ Facebook/ Instagram in the classroom for teaching and learning purposes? Provide a reason for your answer.
2. How does using social media enable you to better alert students and/or your peers to relevant course materials?
3. In what ways have you used social media sites to complete assignments or homework activities at home or in class?
4. Do you share or post any content on any of the various social media sites related to academic work? (e.g. notes, videos explaining topics of study etc.). Provide examples to support your answer.
5. Explain how you have referred to any social media content during classroom lessons and discussions related to a particular lesson or topic studied.
6. Which social media platforms do you often use for academic teaching and learning-related content and why?

CATEGORY 4

In the fourth part of the interview, the perceived effects of TL experiences will be assessed. Both educators and the students will be asked how SM has enhanced or made an impact in their TL experiences. The researcher aims to find out whether or not participants felt more interested in the educational activities due to SM.

Impact of using social media for teaching and learning:

1. Since you have started using social media as part of a teaching and learning tool, in what ways have your learning/teaching experiences improved?
2. Explain how using social media sites has increased or decreased your interest in your work/studies.
3. How does social media provide an effective forum for educators and/or students to share and reflect on their work?
4. Do you think that you could achieve better results if social media was integrated into lessons? Provide a reason to support your answer.

CATEGORY 5

The fifth category will be about student support. Educators will be asked about the motivation and support that they provide to their students using SM and its possible effectiveness. In contrast, the students will be asked if they feel more encouraged to engage in the discussions, class planning, and completion of assignments via the use of SM.

Student support:

1. What strategies or motivations do you use to support the students and or your peers that are using social media for learning?
2. Since you have been using social media, have you felt more encouraged to engage in the discussions, class planning, and completion of assignments via the use of social media?

CATEGORY 6

The final part of the interview process is devoted to the barriers or difficulties that the educator or student faces when using SM for TL purposes. Participants will also be asked to add any comments or suggestions about the use of SM for academic purposes in TVET colleges.

Barriers or difficulties in using social media for teaching and learning:

1. What challenges have you faced when using social media as a learning/teaching platform?
2. Explain whether or not you are concerned about the potential abuse of social media by educators and/or students.
3. Do you have any privacy concerns when connecting with educators or students via social media? Provide a reason for your answer.
4. What do you consider to be the main advantages of the use of social media in TVET colleges?
5. What do you consider to be the main disadvantages of using social media in TVET colleges?
6. What do you consider to be the main pitfalls of the use of social media in an educational setting?

Any further comments:

Would you like to add any comments or suggestions about the use of social media for academic teaching and learning purposes in TVET colleges?

APPENDIX F: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

The researcher will conduct a document analysis study to investigate the online behaviour of participants' (educators and learners) social media usage for evidence of formal academic teaching and learning activities engaged in by participants within a time frame of the past four (4) weeks. This will be done by physically looking at evidence from the participants' mobile phones for posts shared, reviewed, recorded, or commented on, for any teaching and learning purposes only.

	Always	Almost Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Are there any posts sent on social media by the participants to check class assignments and/or homework activities?					
Has the educator or student sent or received any study course material on any of their social media platforms lately?					
Has the user subscribed to any platforms to create stronger learning communities?					
Does the participant log on to any social media sites to view lectures pertaining to their study curriculum (whether live or recorded)?					
Has the participant facilitated any online discussions related to assignments and/or projects?					
Has the participant posted and/or downloaded useful					

academic videos, links, and academic supporting material?					
Has the participant posted any student's academic accomplishments or achievements on social media pages?					
Has the participant used any social media site as a communication tool between educator and/or student?					
Has the participant posted or answered any comment and/or make any enquires on academic-related in any of their social media platforms?					
. How often does the participant engage in teaching and learning activities using their social media?					

APPENDIX G: IDENTIFIED THEMES, SUBORDINATE CATEGORIES, AND EXAMPLES

Below, is a table presenting the identified themes, their subordinate categories, and examples from the data that illustrate each theme.

Table 1: Identified Themes, Subordinate Categories, and Examples

THEME	SUB-CATEGORIES	EXAMPLES/EXCERPTS FROM DATA
1. Purposeful SM Usage and Student Engagement:	Connecting with family and friends	“I use SM to stay in touch with my friends and family.”
	Instant messaging and chat features that enable discussing coursework and assignments	“I use SM to ask my classmates for help with TL exercises and to engage with my lecturer.”
	Sharing academic content and updates.	“We create study groups on SM to discuss assignments.”
	Receiving feedback and guidance	“My lecturer provides feedback on any classwork or homework assignments to be completed through SM.”
2. Integration of SM in Academic Setting	Accessing educational content	“I follow pages for tips and resources that help me with my Marketing Management course.”
	Seeking TL-related information	“SM helps me stay updated with my schoolwork.” “I discover new TL materials through SM.”
	Types of social media used	“I prefer using the WhatsApp groups to send notes.”

3. Impact on Learning and Collaboration	Sharing study materials and resources	"We share helpful TL materials on SM."
	Accessing past papers and sample questions	"I find previous exam papers and practice questions on SM."
4. SM Sites Serve as a Communication Tool in TL	Flexibility in communication Faster dissemination of information	"I use SM to ask my classmates for help with classwork or homework exercises and to engage with my lecturer when I have questions."
5. Advantages and Disadvantages in TVET College	Convenience and accessibility of information	"SM allows me to connect and have access to study materials anytime and anywhere."
	Potential distractions	"I sometimes get distracted by other content on SM while studying."
	Privacy concerns and online safety	"I am cautious about my privacy when using SM."

APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR MARKETING MANAGEMENT STUDENT

(Participant)

CATEGORY 1

The first part of the interview will be devoted to the demographic characteristics (gender, age, course and level of study/job title and subjects they offer).

Demographic characteristics:

1. Gender:

Male

Female

Other: _____

2. Age:

18 – 19

20 – 21

22 – 23

24 – 25

25 and above. Please specify _____

3. Course and Level: Marketing Management – N5

4. Job title and subject offering: Student

5. Race: African

CATEGORY 2

The second part is related to the context of SM usage; here the researcher will consider which SM sites are used, how often, and when, and also establish the reason for usage.

Social Media (SM) usage:

1. Please outline your top three main reasons you use social networking sites (e.g. talk to friends, work, or study reasons etc.)

Answer:

To communicate with family and friends
Gathering information about modules that I study
Music and business information research

2. Which social media platforms would you say are more user-friendly for work/academic-related purposes and why?

Answer:

YouTube, Instagram, and Bingo

3. How much time do you spend on social networking sites during a typical day for work/school-related purposes?

Answer:

About 30 min to an hour.

4. Do you think using social media sites provides an easy and quick way to communicate with students/teachers? Please provide a reason to support your answer.

Answer:

Yes, because it makes it easy for us to understand what we didn't know while learning and asking questions where we didn't understand.

5. When do you mostly log on to your social media sites?

Answer:

Around the afternoon to check for messages and get knowledge about a certain thing and link new research with the old information I have.

CATEGORY 3

The third part will be about the experience in an academic setting with the use of SM. Participants will be specifically asked whether they have engaged in SM interactions for work/academics and which platforms are often used.

Social media experience in an academic setting:

1. Do you think that teachers should make use of social media such as YouTube videos/ WhatsApp/ blogs/ Facebook/ Instagram in the classroom for teaching and learning purposes? Provide a reason for your answer.

Answer:

Yes, because in that manner it will project the actual thing and what the teacher is teaching, so in that way the students will understand better on their lessons.

2. How does using social media enable you to better alert students and or your peers to relevant course materials?

Answer:

By using social media, I am able to gather a lot of information and when I am looking for old question papers or notes I get them much easier and quicker and it makes it easier for me to share and receive information with other students.

3. In what ways have you used social media sites to complete assignments or homework activities at home or in class?

Answer:

By searching for information that is related to the assignment on Google and sharing it with peers/students. In class, we use it to check for diagrams and images that have something to do with the lessons on YouTube.

4. Do you share or post any content on any of the various social media sites related to academic work? (e.g. notes, videos explaining topics of study etc.). Provide examples to support your answer.

Answer:

I do not post, but I do share it with my classmates so that they get a better understanding of what we were doing in the class in our class group chat.

5. Explain how you have made reference to any social media content during classroom lessons and discussions related to a particular lesson or topic studied.

Answer:

We once had a discussion of different products and branding, and we came up with Zodwa Wabantu's products the brand name was not suitable for the product and we ended up finding the solution on a group chat on Facebook.

6. Which social media platforms do you often use for academic teaching and learning-related content and why?

Answer:

Bingo and YouTube, to understand what I am studying better as I can gather information quicker.

CATEGORY 4

In the fourth part of the interview, the perceived effects of TL experiences will be assessed. Both educators and the students will be asked how SM has enhanced or made an impact in their TL experiences. The researcher's aim is to find out whether or not participants felt more interested in the educational activities due to SM.

Impact of using social media for teaching and learning:

1. Since you have started using social media as part of a teaching and learning tool, in what ways have your learning/teaching experiences improved?

Answer:

I have improved in a great way, as I am able to gather information or discuss things I didn't understand during my school hours.

2. Explain how has used social media sites increased or decreased your interest in your work/studies.

Answer:

It has helped me keep up with the new, up-and-coming industries in the business world as the circulation of information is much quicker than many platforms.

3. How does social media provide an effective forum for educators and/or students to share and reflect on their work?

Answer:

It makes it easier for us to reach the lecturers or other students if we have questions without waiting for the following day. Mostly class group chats are a very great help.

4. Do you think that you could achieve better results if social media was integrated into lessons? Provide a reason to support your answer.

Answer:

Yes, information is at the tip of our fingers, videos help clarify/review what was not understood.

CATEGORY 5

The fifth category will be student support. Educators will be asked about the motivation and support that they provide to their students using SM and its possible effectiveness. In contrast, the students will be asked if they feel more encouraged to engage in the discussions, class planning, and completion of assignments via the use of SM.

Student support:

1. What strategies or motivations do you use to support the students and or your peers that are using social media for learning?

Answer:

I encourage them to join our group chat discussions.

2. Since you have been using social media have you felt more encouraged to engage in the discussions, class planning, and completion of assignments via the use of social media?

Answer:

Yes, my understanding has greatly improved as I have no excuse for not understanding my lecturer, social media allows me to engage with students and the lectures outside of class. This ensures that I will understand all my class lessons no matter the challenge/misunderstanding I may encounter during class lessons.

CATEGORY 6

The final part of the interview process is devoted to the barriers or difficulties that the educator or student faces when using SM for TL purposes. Participants will also be asked to add any comments or suggestions about the use of SM for academic purposes in TVET colleges.

Barriers or difficulties of using social media for teaching and learning:

1. What challenges have you faced when using social media as a learning/teaching platform?

Answer:

Running out of data becomes a problem as you may miss out on what is going on in class or studies.

2. Explain whether or not you are concerned about the potential abuse of social media by educators and/or students?

Answer:

My concern is students rely so much on social media that they don't study their textbooks or notes as they know they will get them from their peers or lecturers. Sometimes this causes students not to be ready for exams as they don't study personally.

3. Do you have any concerns regarding privacy when connecting with educators or students via social media? Provide a reason for your answer.

Answer:

Yes, students or educators may do unethical/or talk about inappropriate things not related to studying this will be invading someone's space and taking advantage of permission of using social media for learning.

4. What do you consider to be the main advantages of the use of social media in TVET colleges?

Answer:

Understanding lessons in your own pace, access to information and connecting out of class for discussion and asking questions through social media group chats or private chats.

5. What do you consider to be the main disadvantages of using social media in TVET colleges?

Answer:

Not having data, distractions during class from non-related topics to studying

6. What do you consider to be the main pitfalls of the use of social media in an educational setting?

Answer:

Most students won't come to physically attend class.

Any further comments:

7. Would you like to add any comments or suggestions about the use of social media for academic teaching and learning purposes in TVET colleges?

Answer:

There must be rules during and off school hours on how to use social media as a learning tool.

APPENDIX I: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANT

The researcher will conduct an observational study to investigate the online behaviour of participant's (educators and learners) social media usage for evidence of formal academic teaching and learning activities engaged in by participants within a time frame of the past four (4) weeks. This will be done by physically looking at evidence from the participants' mobile phones for posts shared, reviewed, recorded, or commented on, for any teaching and learning purposes only.

	Always	Almost Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Are there any posts sent on social media by the participants for the purpose of checking class assignments and/or homework activities?		X			
Has the educator or student sent or received any study course material on any of their social media platforms lately?			X		
Has the user subscribed to any platforms with the purpose of creating stronger learning communities?				X	
Does the participant log on to any social media sites to view lectures pertaining to their study curriculum (whether live or recorded)?			X		
Has the participant facilitated any online discussions related to assignments and/or projects?				X	
Has the participant posted and/or downloaded useful				X	

academic videos, links, and academic supporting material?					
Has the participant posted any student's academic accomplishments or achievements on social media pages?				X	
Has the participant used any social media site as a communication tool between educator and/or student?		X			
Has the participant posted or answered any comment and/or made any enquires on academic-related in any of their social media platforms?			X		
How often does the participant engage in teaching and learning activities using their social media?				X	