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Research Article

The Networking Sites in Student Teaching and Learning. A Case Study at Zimbabwean University

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Abstract
The present-day university students, colloquially referred to as 'millennial learners' or 'digital natives', are a generation of learners that have grown up with the internet. Such students utilize Web 2.0 tools which include SNSs, which are easily accessible on electronic devices that are connected to the internet, presenting a lot of opportunities to enhance student teaching and learning. However, these tools have their downside: hence the need to assess the impact of SNSs on teaching and learning in universities. The study used the interpretive paradigm, qualitative approach method, and a case study design. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants who were composed of departmental chairpersons, lecturers, and students. Data were thereafter collected using interviews and were thematically analyzed. The study also established that participants used SNSs such as Facebook, YouTube, and instant messaging applications like WhatsApp and wikis. The Web 2.0 tools were used for sharing educational materials, research purposes, online tutorials, and study group discussions. The study also revealed the drawbacks and barriers that are associated with the implementation of SNSs in teaching and learning as addiction; negative socialization; cyberbullying health concerns, unreliable information, and reduced academic performance. The study recommends that the use of SNSs by students must be controlled. Students must be educated on the effective use of Web 2.0 tools while lecturers should be trained on how to implement SNSs in pedagogical processes and the use of technological tools.

Keywords: Blog, Instant Messaging, Podcast, Social Networking Sites (SNS), Virtual World, Web 2.0, Wiki

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites (SNS) are major Web 2.0 tools that have attracted millions of users' world over with technology integration thus supporting university students with opportunities to the outside world (Chouit, Nfissi, & Laabidi, 2017; Dantes et al., 2019; Dewi, 2024; Sobaih et al., 2021; Puspitasari, Suwastini, Blangsinga, Dantes, & Tuerah, 2021; Suwastini, Lasmawan, Artini, & Mahayanti, 2020; Suwastini, Utami, & Artini, 2020). Research has indicated that SNSs are successfully adopted as learning and teaching tools in universities (Sobaih & Moustafa, 2016; Sobaih et al., 2016; Sobaih et al., 2020; Manca, 2020; Sobaih et al., 2021). According to Moreira (2018), SNSs are not purposely designed to support teaching and learning activities, but their integration with learning management systems makes them vital. Students integrate SNSs to interact with their peers or lecturers they have met offline or to meet new people. SNSs include blogs, wikis podcasts, and some of the useful tools available on Web 2.0. The internet tools commonly used for collaborative, user-generated content are often freely available and open to the public. This has significantly changed the way students and educators use the internet, sparking widespread interest across the entire education sector. One expert, Ellahi (2018) suggests that social networking sites can be leveraged to extend learning beyond traditional classroom groups, potentially connecting learners with peers, instructors, professionals, and other communities. The SNSs can therefore be integrated to complement traditional known as face to face and online classroom activities. SNSs such as Facebook are popular among students

but not created for learning purposes. Facebook suggests informal learning which is not classroom-based or structured. The millennial students are a generation that has grown up with the internet at hand. Jalali & Moreau (2017) assert that the net generation is described as a digitally literate cohort, connected to others and experiential and social-centred beings. Amin and Sundari (2020) also point out that the characteristics of the 21st-century youth are technologically inclined and have a high preference for active and participatory experiences of both face-to-face and online learning. Hence the nature of present-day students who are pragmatic and exploratory with their wide usage of social networks calls for a closer look at the impact of SNSs in the teaching and learning.

1.1 Literature Review

This Social constructivists theory was used where knowledge is constructed within a social context and is usually collaborative, Feyzi, Behnagh and Yasrebi (2020) and Steffe, and Ulrich (2020). Sobaih (2021) assert that students learn with SNSs as they support knowledge construction. Thus by presenting ideas, understanding and beliefs. Students therefore learn by conversing using SNSs by collaborating with their peers, lecturers, members of the community. The proponent is Vygotsky who is a best known educational psychologist with a sociocultural theory, Zhou & Brown (2015). Vygotsky's sociocultural views have contributed significantly to social epistemology and highlight how learning is mediated by the context and experience with peers. According to Zhou & Brown (2015), the theory suggests social interaction that leads to continuous step-by-step changes in students' thoughts and behavior. Collaborative learning aims at social interaction between students to students; students to lecturers; students to professional experts and students to other communities. This therefore assists the students in advancing to the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). ZPD is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development under lecturer guidance or in collaboration with capable peers, Lin (2015). In learning both the lecturer and student are seen as active agents.

1.1.1 Social Networking Sites (SNSs) integrated into Teaching and Learning

According to Aljawarneh (2020), social media tools have become ubiquitous and students use them all the time. Social media tools are easily accessible on Web 2.0 with only an internet connection being a prerequisite. Singh, Goel, and Islamia (2016) investigated students' social media tools and their attitudes and perceptions towards these tools. The SNS media tools included Facebook, wiki, YouTube, bulletin board, LinkedIn, blogs, Twitter, podcasts, virtual worlds, RSS, Stumble Upon, Netlog, Delicious, Digg, Plurk, and Jaiku. Facebook, wiki, YouTube, bulletin boards, LinkedIn, blogs, and Twitter were discovered to be the most popular media tools among students, Jogezai, et al. (2021), Ahmad et al. (2021), Barton et al. (2021). From a study conducted almost all students (98.2%) used SNSs for academic-related purposes daily, Sobaih et al. (2020) and Awidi (2019). A study Aldahdouh, Nokelainen and Korhonen (2020). in the UK indicated students using SNSs for social networking, sharing emails, and instant messaging which are identified as the Web 2.0 tools. Users included students, researchers, collaborators, and publishers. Lecturers mentioned lack of training, lack of funding, security issues, and firewalls were possible obstacles affecting perceived usefulness and compatibility. Integration of Web 2.0 in universities has transformed teaching and learning in significant ways, Konstantinos & Hatzily (2015). Faizi (2018) concur that Web 2.0 tools namely blogs, wikis, podcasts, virtual worlds and social networking sites have changed the way teaching procedures are delivered in university education and has actually brought innovative learning technologies and possibilities that were not available before.

1.1.2 Benefits Derived from Integration of SNSs in the Teaching and Larning

According to Ellison (2008) SNSs are the most popular forms of communications amongst students. SNSs contribute to students' improvement in literacy and numeracy as well as preparing them for the global world. Vie (2008) says that SNSs enable self-regulated learning thus developing cognitive skills. Erzurum (2011), Sharov, Vorovka, Sharova & Zemlianska (2021) adds that through integration of SNSs students' communication skills improve and enhances participation and social commitment, self-efficacy, general

knowledge reinforcing peer support and ensure realisation of teaching and learning based on collaboration. Ansari & Khan (2020) posits that collaborative learning through SNSs has an impact on students' academic performance. Balci (2010) states that SNSs facilitate independence on time and location, individualization learning, the ability to have instant feedback, sharing of resource learning material collaboration amongst peers, lecturers, professional experts, and the community. The educational benefits of SNSs are not experienced equally by all students because of their socio-economic backgrounds. Some students live in remote areas and face persistent internet access and literacy. According to Valkenburg et al. (2006), there is a positive relationship between integration of SNSs and self-esteem. Social connections are also vital as it promotes the students' well-being.

1.1.3 Challenges/Barriers Faced in SNS Integration

In the UK a study indicated more than 50% of SNS users stated that it is associated with negative impact. According to Erzurum (2011), the use of SNSs has an impact on health problems, loss of future job opportunities, and potential damage to lecturer credibility derived from inappropriate use. Students and lecturers may not feel safe in terms of privacy concerns Au et al. (2015). Some students may isolate themselves choosing to communicate online rather than developing meaningful face-to-face relationships. Facebook can be a potential hazard to lecturers as some applications allow users to communicate through the SNS network. SNSs can be a distraction in teaching and learning. A study revealed that students spending more time on the Web and they become addicted yields low performance. While the SNSs connect students with peers, lecturers, professional experts, and the community, cyber-bullying, Chen (2015) can be used as a weapon for malicious behavior. Information shared on the SNSs can vary greatly therefore can be collated and data mined for illicit use. Faculty members have identified several challenges that hinder the adoption of social networking sites (SNSs) for academic purposes. These barriers include institutional limitations, concerns about privacy and security, unequal access to digital resources, difficulties in monitoring and controlling online interactions, inadequate information technology (IT) support, a lack of understanding about the potential benefits of SNSs, and insufficient infrastructure.

1.1.4 Effects of SNSs on Academic Performance

According to Salvation (2014), SNSs have attracted considerable attention among students and lecturers due to their growing popularity and their potential effect on academic performance. However, the studies appear to have opposing views on the impact of the SNSs on users. While proponents argue that the SNSs allow social connection, opponents claim that excessive use of these sites affect social, mental and physical health of the users. If the SNSs are used effectively in the teaching and learning, then it enhances academic performance (Apuke & Iyendo, 2017; Waqas et al., 2016; Bardakci, 2019; Çimen & Yilmaz, 2017; Gazibara et al., 2020; Kasperski & Blau, 2020; Melati, & Hadinugrahaningsih, 2024; Reychav et al., 2018; Tome-Fernandez et al., 2020). According to Reychav et al. (2018), the interaction of students with peers, lectures, professional exerts, and MKO through SNSs influences academic performance. On the other hand, if the SNSs are used for only socialization purposes and excessive time spent it then reduces students' academic performance, Peter (2015), Masood et al. (2020); Wu & Cheng (2019). Several studies reported that excessive usage of SNS, inappropriate use of SNS, and using them for purposes other than education, influence low students' academic achievement, Alotaibi (2019); Arora et al. (2018); Bergdahl et al. (2020); Molla-Esparza et al. (2020); Pedersen et al. (2018); Sampasa, Kanyinga et al. (2019); Sevic et al. (2020); Tenzin et al. (2019); Van Den Eijnden et al. (2018); Yan et al. (2017). Studies revealed that the integration of SNSs has a favorable effect on the academic performance of university students.

2. METHODS

The study used the interpretive paradigm, qualitative approach, and a case study design. A qualitative approach was employed in the study as it is mainly concerned with understanding the values, actions, beliefs decisions of respondents Purposive sampling was used to select the participants who were composed of lecturers, chairpersons of departments, and students. The interpretive paradigm and qualitative approach are particularly valuable for investigating networking sites in student teaching and learning at a Zimbabwean

university due to their focus on understanding contextual dynamics and exploring subjective experiences. The interpretive paradigm facilitates an exploration of how cultural and social factors in Zimbabwe shape students' engagement with networking sites, which is integral for meaning-making in this context. A qualitative approach effectively captures the unique aspects of the local educational landscape, such as technological access, infrastructure, and socio-economic influences that affect students' use of social networking sites (SNS).

This approach emphasizes student voice, allowing researchers to gather in-depth insights into the experiences, challenges, and successes students face while utilizing these platforms for learning, insights that quantitative methods may overlook. By prioritizing the meanings students attribute to their interactions, researchers can better understand the implications for teaching and learning processes. Moreover, the flexibility of qualitative methods permits the exploration of emergent themes, leading to potentially unexpected findings relevant to the specific educational context. Engaging participants through methods such as in-depth interviews and focus groups provides opportunities for iterative feedback, enriching data depth and accuracy. The interpretive paradigm aligns with social constructivism, recognizing that students co-create knowledge through their interactions, which necessitates a qualitative examination of these complex dynamics.

Furthermore, the use of triangulation through various qualitative methods enhances the reliability of findings by capturing multiple perspectives on SNS use in education, while rich, detailed narratives contribute to the validity of the research in both internal and external contexts. Techniques such as member checking reinforce trustworthiness by allowing participants to validate interpretations, and maintaining researcher reflexivity ensures that findings are optimally valid. Ensuring theoretical saturation through extensive data collection guarantees a comprehensive view of the phenomenon. In conclusion, the interpretive paradigm coupled with a qualitative approach is instrumental in uncovering the complexities of networking sites in educational practice, providing depth, context-specific insights, and enhanced reliability and validity in the findings that inform our understanding of digital learning environments within Zimbabwean universities.

2.1 Research Design

The Case study design was used and the study was limited to a faculty of a university with three departments. The study was limited to one faculty in the university to cater to the time to collect data.

2.2 Participants and Instruments

In this study, semi-structured interviews with lecturers and chairpersons, as well as focus group discussions with students, were used as the primary research instruments. These instruments were specifically designed to collect qualitative data regarding experiences and perceptions related to the use of networking sites in the educational context of Zimbabwean universities. Semi-structured interviews with lecturers and chairpersons, the purpose was to investigate educators' perspectives on the integration of networking sites in their teaching practices. This included their observations of student engagement and the challenges they face in this digital environment. To develop the interview questions, a comprehensive literature review on educational technology, social networking, and digital pedagogy was conducted. The questions targeted the perceived benefits and challenges of using networking sites and aimed to provoke in-depth discussion while allowing flexibility for participants. A pilot test was carried out with a colleague to refine the questions further. Feedback was utilized to clarify any ambiguous items and ensure that the language was accessible and relevant to the participants.

Focus group interviews with students aimed to gather collective insights into students' experiences with networking sites for academic purposes. This encompassed collaborative dynamics, motivation, and the overall impact on learning outcomes. A focus group guide was created using themes from the literature and preliminary findings from the lectures' interviews. This guide contained open-ended questions and prompts encouraging diverse viewpoints to emerge within the group. Participants were grouped by similar fields of study to promote a comfortable atmosphere conducive to sharing experiences and enable nuanced discussions about discipline-specific usage. Semi-structured interviews were conducted either in person or

via virtual platforms, adhering to ethical standards of informed consent and confidentiality. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes, allowing for a detailed exploration of the topics. Focus groups consisted of 4-8 students each and lasted around 60-90 minutes. A trained moderator guided the discussions to ensure that all participants had opportunities to contribute their views. All interviews and focus group sessions were recorded (with participants' consent) by writing on a book response and subsequently transcribed for thorough analysis. Additional notes and observations were taken to provide context and capture non-verbal cues that could enrich the understanding of the data.

The data collected through these instruments closely aligned with the thematic analysis method utilized in this study. The instruments were specifically crafted to elicit rich qualitative data that aligned with the research objectives focused on understanding the lived experiences of both educators and students regarding networking sites. Semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of educators' insights, while focus groups captured the collective voices of students. The open-ended questions encouraged nuanced dialogue, enabling participants to elaborate on points relevant to the research aims. Responses from the interviews and focus groups underwent thematic analysis, where transcriptions were coded to identify key themes and group-related responses. Themes emerged from both expected issues based on existing literature and unexpected insights that surfaced during data collection. This iterative process ensured that the findings were grounded in participants' experiences, enhancing both the authenticity and relevance of the conclusions drawn.

Utilizing both interviews with educators and focus group data from students offered diverse perspectives on the same phenomenon, strengthening the reliability of the findings. Insights from one group informed and enriched the understanding of the other. In summary, the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions effectively gathered qualitative data that aligned with thematic analysis. The careful design and implementation of these instruments allowed for a thorough exploration of the complex dynamics surrounding networking sites in the educational experiences of students and educators in Zimbabwean universities. The researcher observed ethics by seeking permission from The Ministry and the university under study to carry out the research. The researchers also sought consent from the respondents.

2.3 Data Analysis

Following data collection through interviews, the analysis employed thematic analysis, a method well-suited for qualitative research that focuses on identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. This approach allowed for a systematic examination of the richness and complexities of participants' narratives regarding their experiences with networking sites in the educational context (Walther, et al., 2017). Data were transcribed and the recorded interviews verbatim to capture the participants' voices accurately. Researcher then engaged with the transcripts multiple times to develop a deep familiarity with the content, which facilitated the identification of initial codes.

Using an open coding strategy, key phrases, ideas, and concepts relevant to students' experiences and perceptions of networking sites were highlighted and categorized (Hennink, et al., 2017). This process involved both descriptive codes, which summarize sections of data, and interpretive codes, which delve into the underlying meanings of participants' responses. After coding, the next step was to group related codes into broader themes that encapsulate significant aspects of the participants' experiences. This thematic framework was developed iteratively, allowing for themes to evolve as the researchers revisited the data.

Once preliminary themes were established, they were reviewed both within the dataset and against the research questions to ensure they accurately reflected the data (Roberts, et al., 2019). The researcher sought input from colleagues and, where possible, from participants themselves (through member checking) to validate and refine the themes, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis. The final thematic analysis was then contextualized within the broader literature on social networking sites in education, allowing for a rich interpretation of how these platforms influence learning dynamics in a Zimbabwean university context. By connecting emergent themes to existing theories and frameworks, researchers could provide insightful implications for educational practice and policy. Finally, the results were documented and presented thematically, with direct quotations from participants included to illustrate key points and lend authenticity to the findings. This narrative approach highlighted the voices of students, ensuring their perspectives are central to the discourse on the impact of networking sites on their

educational experience. In summary, the thematic analysis of interview data provided a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences with networking sites, emphasizing both the complexity of their engagement and the socio-cultural dynamics at play within the Zimbabwean educational landscape. This analytic process not only enriches the findings but also informs actionable insights that could enhance the integration of digital platforms in teaching and learning environments.

3. RESULTS

The study established that participants used SNSs such as Facebook, and YouTube, and instant messaging applications like WhatsApp and wikis. The study also revealed the benefits, drawbacks, and barriers that are associated with the implementation and integration of SNSs in teaching and learning.

3.1 SNSs Used in the Teaching and Learning

Lecturers indicated Facebook, WhatsApp, wiki, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs, twitter as SNSs used in the teaching and learning. They also mentioned that Facebook and WhatsApp are the most used by them and their students.

Chairperson 1: "Indicated WhatsApp and Facebook and YouTube"

Chairperson 2: "Indicated WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Facebook and wiki"

Chairperson 3: "Mentioned Facebook and WhatsApp"

Focus group 1: "We use Facebook, wiki, YouTube and WhatsApp"

Focus group 2: "There are various SNSs like Facebook, wiki, YouTube, blogs, and Twitter but in our T & L we use Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp"

Focus group 3: "Facebook and WhatsApp are the SNSs we integrate into our learning"

Focus group 4: "In our learning, we use WhatsApp with our lecturers, peers, and other experts"

Focus group 5: "SNSs as we research there are so many and include Facebook, wiki, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs, Twitter, podcasts, Net log. In our lessons, we use WhatsApp and sometimes Facebook"

Focus group 6: "The SNSs we know include Facebook, wiki, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs, Twitter, and virtual worlds but in teaching and learning we use mainly WhatsApp with our lecturers and peers"

The lecturers, chairpersons, and students indicated various common SNSs integrated into teaching and learning as WhatsApp, Facebook, wiki, and YouTube, and WhatsApp and Facebook being the most used in their lessons. The finding that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most commonly used social networking sites (SNSs) in teaching and learning among lecturers, chairpersons, and students aligns with the initial hypothesis that anticipated the use of various digital platforms to enhance educational practices. This result suggests that the participants are leveraging familiar tools to foster communication and engagement, which is a positive indication of adaptability in digital pedagogy. However, it diverges from the hypothesis that posited a reliance on specialized educational platforms, indicating a preference for general SNSs over dedicated e-learning tools. This divergence implies that future research should investigate the reasons behind this preference, including aspects of accessibility, usability, and effectiveness, as well as explore the pedagogical strategies employed with these platforms to fully understand their impact on learning outcomes.

3.2 Benefits of SNSs in the Teaching and Learning

Lecturers indicated collaborative teaching and learning, fruitful group discussions, research, fast communication, and improved academic performance.

Chairperson 1: "Sharing of resources, assignments between peers, between student & lecturers, collaboration"

Chairperson 2: "Communication is facilitated, students can discuss as peers or with their lecturers and other experts in the outside world and improves the academic performance of the students from extensive research using SNSs"

Chairperson 3: "Collaboration, exchange of information at any given time"

Focus group 1: "We learn new knowledge from peers in other universities and from professional experts, room for close communication, and sometimes our performance improved"

Focus group 2: "Considering that most people are on SNSs communication is faster as it can be done any time and collaboration with the world at large is excellent"

Focus group 3: "Sharing of learning material is easy and can be done at any given time. Materials can be revisited again and again, communication is very possible with our lecturer and peers"

Focus group 4: "Online tutorials can be effectively be done sharing ideas. Learning is done at own pace and time"

Focus group 5: "Communication and 21st century skills are achieved when using SNSs. Group discussions sharing of resources and collaborations are possible with locals and outside world online"

Focus group 6: "We can have meaningful discussions as peers or with our lecturers. We can also exchange knowledge and skills with students and lecturers from other local and international universities"

The lecturers, chairpersons and students indicated that SNSs were used for sharing educational materials, research purposes, online tutorials, study group discussions, and collaboration thus easing communication. The results showing that lecturers, chairpersons, and students use social networking sites (SNSs) for sharing educational materials, research purposes, online tutorials, study group discussions, and collaboration align closely with the initial hypothesis that predicted SNSs would facilitate communication and enhance collaborative learning in educational settings. This confirms the expectation that these platforms serve as effective tools for enhancing engagement and resource sharing among participants. However, if the hypothesis anticipated a more significant reliance on traditional methods or formal learning management systems for these activities, the findings represent a divergence, suggesting a shift toward more informal, flexible digital interactions. The implications for future research include a need to explore the specific features of SNSs that contribute to their effectiveness in educational contexts, as well as an investigation into the potential impacts of this shift on traditional teaching methodologies and learning outcomes.

3.3 Challenges/Barriers of SNSs in the Teaching and Learning

Lecturers mentioned that there is also the sharing of wrong ideas by students with peers or other experts. There is also the danger of cyberbullying. They also highlighted that students are sharing computers and the ratio is not conducive for learning. Overuse of the internet may affect physical in terms of obesity; and eyesight problems since more time is spent glued to the computers.

Chairperson 1: "Large workload Time-consuming. Internet challenges sometimes affect connectivity"

Chairperson 2: "Difficulties in monitoring the vast information. SNSs also decrease face-to-face communication skills and lack emotional connection"

Chairperson 3: "Computers are few and it affects our students as they have to share and the ratio is bad"

Focus group 1: "SNSs may distract as sometimes we are tempted to watch movies or listen to music. Being a new faculty we share a laboratory with another faculty and sometimes scheduled times clash and students to computer ratio is not conducive for learning. In a mass lecture, you may find the students to computer ratio being 6:1"

Focus group 2: "Most SNSs are commonly used for communication purposes, thus we get carried away in unmeaningful conversations instead of researching. Operational computers in the laboratory are few and we resort to using our own which is still a challenge as the Wi-Fi connection is a disappointment in that location. Maybe a health hazard if more time is spent on the internet thus affecting eyes and the back"

Focus group 3: "Some lecturers struggle to integrate the SNSs in the teaching and learning situation and find it difficult to lead the class thus engaging students who seem to understand better though some will be doing a trial and error"

Focus group 4: "We also tend to get false information posted by others online" We are not sure if the curriculum allows us to use the SNSs for our lessons as it is not spelt out in the course synopsis. Most students and lecturers struggle to use the SNSs in class"

Focus group 5: "Long posture also affects us health wise can be eyesight, back aches and fatigue. Most computers are obsolete and we have to share with peers. If you share with someone with adequate knowledge on use of the SNS you may never touch it yourself as some tend to personalize the computer. Sometimes personal gadgets are not compatible with the SNSs"

Focus group 6: "Challenges we face are health-wise and cyberbullying. Most lecturers do not know the integration of SNSs"

Lecturers, chairpersons, and students shared the same sentiments that challenges/ barriers of SNSs include addiction; negative socialization; cyberbullying, health concerns, unreliable information, inadequacy of resources, and illiteracy on how to use the SNSs. Lecturers and chairperson went on to say that information and technology policy should be spelled out clearly and maintain its rigidity for effective implementation and integration. The shared concerns among lecturers, chairpersons, and students regarding the challenges and barriers associated with social networking sites (SNSs), such as addiction, negative socialization, cyberbullying, health issues, unreliable information, and resource inadequacy, diverge from the initial hypothesis that primarily anticipated the benefits of SNSs in educational settings. This result highlights a significant aspect of the digital learning environment that may have been overlooked, emphasizing the complexities and risks involved in integrating SNSs into education. Furthermore, the commentary from lecturers and chairpersons advocating for a clear and rigid Information and Technology policy underscores the need for structured guidelines to mitigate these challenges. This suggests that future research should focus on identifying effective strategies for implementing policies that balance the positive potential of SNSs with the need to address their inherent risks, as well as exploring educational programs aimed at enhancing digital literacy among both educators and students.

3.4 Effects of SNSs on Academic Performance

Lecturers mentioned students are carried away by social media as they tend to divert their intentions and it affects their academic performance.

Chairperson 1: "Students tend to spend more time researching social issues that have nothing to do with their teaching and learning. This disturbs their learning and it yields declining performances"

Chairperson 2: "If SNSs are effectively used in teaching and learning, student's academic performance is improved through research and exchange of fruitful ideas"

Chairperson 3: "Students who spend time researching and collaborating tend to have a good academic performance reputation"

Focus group 1: "Un educational pop up after pop-up adverts at the end of the day affect our academic performance as we tend to follow them and we find ourselves spending more time following and our research studying times is robbed"

Focus group 2: "Collaboration has improved our performance academically and we exchange ideas with local and internationals and even ask what we don't know from those with knowledge. The motivation is excellent as both stakeholders appreciate each other"

Focus group 3: "SNSs are distractive and addictive which affect our academic performance in the long run"

Focus group 4: "SNSs affect academic performance as we tend to concentrate more on social events, watch movies, and listen to music thus overriding the time spent on researching on learning aspects."

Focus group 5: "As we spend more time using SNSs meaningfully our performance declines."

Focus group 6: "We try to balance social life and learning curriculum by minimizing researching on irrelevant things. We collaborate and exchange ideas with our peers, lecturers, and other people who know how and it improves our academic performance in tackling problems and how to present complex projects. It has also improved article writing for publication purposes."

Lecturers, chairpersons, and students had mixed feelings about SNSs affecting their academic performances positively and negatively. Lecturers and chairpersons emphasized the importance of clear guidelines and policies for the use of SNSs in teaching and learning. Students highlighted the need for balanced use of SNSs and prioritizing academic work. The majority of participants agreed that SNSs can improve academic performance when used effectively. Some participants expressed concerns about the potential negative effects of SNSs on physical health and social skills. Overall, the results suggest that while SNSs can be a valuable tool for teaching and learning, they require careful consideration and regulation to ensure effective use and minimize potential negative effects. The mixed feelings expressed by lecturers, chairpersons, and students regarding the impact of social networking sites (SNSs) on academic performance both align with and diverge from the initial hypothesis, which likely suggested that SNSs would predominantly enhance educational outcomes. While the acknowledgment that SNSs can improve academic performance when used effectively supports the hypothesis, the concerns about potential negative effects on physical health and social skills highlight a significant divergence that points to the complexities of technology integration in academia. Furthermore, the call for clear guidelines and policies from educators emphasizes that a structured approach is necessary for maximizing benefits while minimizing drawbacks. This indicates that future research should investigate the development and implementation of comprehensive policies governing SNS use in educational settings and explore best practices for fostering a balanced engagement with technology that prioritizes academic success while safeguarding student well-being.

The key findings of the study indicate that lecturers, chairpersons, and students share a nuanced understanding of the impact of social networking sites (SNSs) on academic performance, recognizing both potential benefits and drawbacks. While there is consensus that effective use of SNSs can enhance academic outcomes, concerns about issues like addiction, negative socialization, cyberbullying, and health implications were prevalent. These results partially align with the initial hypothesis that primarily emphasized the positive aspects of SNSs in education; however, they also reflect a more complex reality that includes significant challenges.

The unexpected depth of concern regarding negative effects might stem from an increasing awareness of mental health issues and the burgeoning discourse around digital well-being, as highlighted in recent literature. Unlike earlier studies that often portrayed SNSs as primarily beneficial tools for engagement, this research emphasizes the need for caution and structured use, resonating with contemporary studies that advocate for digital literacy and responsible technology use. The similarities with past research include the acknowledgment of SNSs as valuable educational resources, while the differences lie in the heightened attention to potential adverse effects and the necessity for clear policies, reflecting a broader societal shift toward a more critical examination of technology in education. This contextualization not only enhances understanding but also underscores the significance of establishing clear guidelines for the use of SNSs in academic settings to ensure their effective and balanced integration.

4. DISCUSSION

The results indicate that Social Networking Sites (SNSs) are used by lecturers, chairpersons, and students for teaching and learning purposes. The most commonly used SNSs are Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs, and Twitter. The benefits of SNSs include collaborative teaching and learning, fruitful group discussions, research fast communication and improved academic performance. On the other hand, the challenges/barriers of SNSs include sharing of wrong ideas by students, cyberbullying, overuse of the internet affecting physical health (e.g., obesity, eyesight problems), limited resources (e.g., few computers, poor Wi-Fi connection) and illiteracy on how to use SNSs. The effects of SNSs on academic performance were mixed, with some students improving their performance through collaboration and research, while others were distracted by social media and experienced declining performance.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Access to SNSs allows the students and lecturers to share educational material, carry out research, and partake in online tutorials and study group discussions. The SNSs have their merits and demerits. The integration of the SNSs has both a positive and negative impact on academic performance. Appropriate integration of the SNSs promotes innovation, interactivity, and interconnectivity translating to good academic performance.

Based on the findings the study recommends that the use of SNSs by students must be controlled. Students must be educated on the effective use of Web 2.0 tools while lecturers may be trained on how to implement SNSs in pedagogical processes and the use of technological tools. The responsible authorities need to invest in technology accessible to students and lecturers. Internet broadband should be also increased to cater to the vast mass capacity of the university. Researchers should continue to examine the relationships between academic performance and social media usage as it is steadily increasing and is a major part of students' everyday lives. Further research is needed on the role of SNS integration in the entire university and more than one university.

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