Integrating Social Media in English Language Instruction: Views of Primary School English Language Teachers in the Manzini Region of Eswatini

Siphelele Dlamini[a], Zodwa Gcinaphi Nxumalo[b]*, Sithulisiwe Bhebhe[c]

[a,b,c]*University of Eswatini, Faculty of Education, Department of Primary Education, Eswatini*

[a]*Email: pelenkhoc21@gmail.com*

[b]*Email: zsbhebhe@uniswa.sz*

[c]*Email: nxumalo@uniswa.sz*

Abstract

The study sought to establish the views of primary school English language teachers on the integration of social media in English language instruction and was based on the following research questions: What are the teachers' views on integrating social media in English language instruction at primary school level? What are the benefits of integrating social media in English language instruction at primary school level? What are the challenges of integrating social media in English language instruction at primary school level? Having adopted the qualitative research approach with a case study research design where a sample of five (5) private schools drawn from a population of fifteen (15) private schools was randomly selected, ten (10) teachers (two from each school) were purposively selected to take part in the study. The data were collected using a semi- structured interview guide and an observation guide. The study found that integrating social media in English language instruction was beneficial to teachers and learners as it enhanced the teachers' instruction and in this way the learners benefitted from the instruction. Social media also ensures that learners collaborate, interact, and are actively involved as they control their own learning with minimal guidance from the teachers. The challenges of integrating social media in English language instruction were that learners use social media for purposes for which they have not been instructed. Also integrating social media in instruction is complex and requires that teachers be trained on its use. The study recommends that The Ministry of Education should provide frequent in-service training workshops for teachers so that they can be able to appropriately integrate social media in their teaching of English Language. Disciplinary measures should be clearly stated and known by teachers, parents and the learners in order to control the abuse of social media in the classroom and at home.

Keywords: views; integrating; social media; instruction.

----

* Corresponding author.

1. Introduction

21st century education has been characterized with the integration of social media in the teaching of different subjects. While there have been dissenting views on the integration of social media in teaching, specifically the teaching of English Language, the realization that it is unavoidable has been made by a number of educators, hence, it is used to enhance instruction in a number of countries [1,2]. Social media has been integrated with instruction in a number of countries for the benefits that it has on the learners' education. One of the countries where social media is used specifically for the teaching of English language is China. The justification for using social media when teaching English in China is that it provides opportunities for interaction among the learners which in turn enhances their development in the target language [3]. For author [4] the texts, videos, photographs, audios, and PDF's allow for interaction as learners share information through emails, and other forms of sharing information such as WhatsApp which in turn facilitates enhanced speed and breadth in the dissemination of information.

Another country where social media is used for instruction purposes is Egypt where the justification for its use is that it gives learners the opportunity to interact, using a two-way communication. What this means is that learners who have online accounts can share their opinions with other users of social media [5]. These theorists further opine that social media has become one of the greatest educational tools in that it encourages a collaborative environment, information sharing, as well as an open forum which accelerates the development of the learners' creative, critical thinking, and communication processes which are very important aspects in learning. For this reason, author [6] proposes for the integration of social media in all lessons that are taught in a school, more especially English lessons.

According to author [7] social media serves a number of beneficial functions in education in general. Some of these are that some sites serve as repositories for learning materials, networking platforms, and language exchange all of which provide learners with opportunities to connect, share, and discuss ideas [8]. These networking sites also enable learners to share knowledge as well as personalize their learning and increase their autonomy by being able to access information at any time of the day. Social media also allows learners more freedom to connect and collaborate with others beyond the physical classroom [4]. It is beneficial mostly to learners who are introverts as they are able to freely communicate with others without having to physically communicate with them as this makes most of this type of learners uncomfortable [6]. Social media increases teacher-student interaction which is good for the teaching of a language. What this means therefore is that there is a lot that learners can gain if their instruction integrates social media.

Social media is beneficial in the teaching of English because language teaching occurs mostly in the context of a social climate. Since social media connects people of all cultures it makes it easy for people to learn a language more especially if the language is going to be used as a common language for communication between these individual cultures who wish to communicate [9].

1.2 Statement of the problem

The problem in the study is that despite that English language has lost its status as a passing/failing subject in all education levels in Eswatini; a pass/credit pass in English still remains a requirement for entry into all institutions of higher learning in Eswatini. In addition, in order for learners to be considered for the award of a scholarship they are required to have a credit pass in English language. What this means therefore is that the teaching of English language should be done in such a way that learners do not just pass it but they get a credit pass in it, hence teachers need to engage innovative teaching methods and strategies to ensure that learners get these credit passes. One of the ways in which this can be done is by integrating social media in English Language instruction. Our observation as former teachers however, is that teachers still use traditional methods of teaching English where they use materials such as charts, chalkboards, and pictures to enhance the teaching of new concepts. These materials bore the learners yet social media more especially, phones are learners' favorites.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Explore teachers' views on integrating social media in English language instruction at primary school level.

2. Establish the benefits of integrating social media in English language instruction at primary school level.

3. Determine the challenges of integrating social media in English language instruction at primary school level.

2. Theoretical framework

The study adopted an eclectic theoretical framework. It was framed within two models, the TPACK model by author [10] and the SAMR model by author [11]. These two models were used because they support the integration of technology in different perspectives. While the TPACK model looks at social media integration from the teachers' perspective, and focuses on the different areas of knowledge a teacher should possess in order to be able to integrate social media more effectively during instruction, the SAMR model looks at social media integration from the perspective of the materials used by both the teachers and learners during teaching/learning. For author [12] the ideal person to integrate social media in instruction is someone who knows how to teach and has knowledge of social media. Elaborating on the SAMR model author [11] states that the model analyses the way in which social media tools can replace traditional procedures during teaching/learning. The model is viewed as a ladder that teachers can use to effectively enhance instruction during teaching/learning. Both models are relevant in this study as they provide direction on how teachers can successfully integrate social media in their instruction and in the process maximize resources and learner activities.

2.1 Literature review

The review of literature that is related to this study indicates that integrating social media into the teaching of

English is beneficial to both the teacher and the learners. A study by author [13] which was conducted in Iran revealed that internet based learning creates openness and overcomes traditional education in terms of time and space barriers so that anyone, at any time, in any place can choose content that is in line with their learning styles. Internet based learning is also learner centered as it encourages learners to actively participate hence they become independent learners. Internet based learning was also found to be a big interest stimulant to language learning which results in autonomy during learning where learners take charge of their own learning and manage their learning process independently.

Another study by author [3] unveiled that the use of social media when teaching was beneficial to teachers as it enabled them to informally teach, albeit constructively as learners could use YouTube, e-Learners' Blog, Forum or Wiki tools during their learning of the language. The study also revealed that social media encourages communication which is good for language learning. On a similar note author [14] conducted a study on the use of social networking sites for foreign language learning and the study disclosed that social media was beneficial when used during language learning lessons. Author [15] who conducted a study in the United Kingdom found that the use of YouTube as a learning tool benefitted language learners as it gave them the opportunity to view videos that were uploaded for language learning purposes and information sharing.

For author [16,17], and [18] social media platforms expand learners' opportunities to express themselves, participate, collaborate, find information, reflect, and learn. In support of innovative methods of teaching English language where the use of social media is one, author [19] conducted a study which uncovered that such methods help learners to learn faster and in an efficient, interesting, as well as interactive manner. In this regard teachers are encouraged to ditch traditional methods of teaching and adopt the innovative ones.

Despite the benefits that social media has on the teaching of English Language, literature also discloses that integrating social media in one's teaching could have challenges. Studies by author [20] in Malaysia; [13;21,22], revealed that some of the challenges of integrating social media when teaching were that social media mostly uses informal language so when it is combined with instruction, some learners have a challenge differentiating between the language used in social media and formal language which is used at school and when writing examinations. Also, in social media learners are exposed to a lot of information which sometimes confuses them; the information is also very difficult to control. So learners are just exposed to information of all types. Again since learners are unable to see each other in some social media platforms, they are unable to use some gestures and facial expressions that are used when people communicate.

3. Methodology

The study adopted the qualitative approach in line with author [23,24]'s view that if there are no numerical values that are going to be attached to the research, and in instances where the research will be focusing on the understanding of people's perceptions or views, then the qualitative approach is the best to use. The case study research design was adopted for use as the intention was to explore the phenomenon within its natural setting which in this case was the school [25].

3.1 Study sample

The study was conducted in five (5) private schools which were randomly selected from a population of fifteen (15) private schools in the Manzini region of Eswatini. Private schools were selected on the basis that gadgets such as phones are allowed as they are considered to be part of the learners' learning materials. From each of the five (5) private schools that took part in the study two (2) teachers from each school were purposively selected. This gave a total of ten (10) teachers that were selected to take part in the study. The teachers that were purposively selected were those that teach English at upper primary, that is grade 5-7.

3.2 Data gathering instruments

An interview guide and observation schedule was used to collect data from the teachers. The two data gathering instruments were used so that the data could be triangulated [23]. The interviews gave the researchers the opportunity to interact with the participants as they were asked questions based on their views on the integration of social media in English Language instruction. The semi-structured interview guide was developed from the research objectives and it ensured that the teachers answered the research questions. Other questions that were asked emerged as the researchers were probing the responses given by the teachers. The observations gave the researchers the opportunity to see how the teachers integrated social media in their English Language instruction.

4. Data analysis

The data gathered from the English Language teachers through the semi-structured interview guide and the observations were analyzed using thematic content analysis. What this means is that content analysis formed the basis for drawing conclusions on the research study as indicated by author [26]. The data were read, re-read, described, classified, and interpreted and conclusions were drawn.

4.1 Benefits of integrating social media with English language instruction

The study revealed that the integration of social media during English Language instruction had numerous benefits to both the teachers and learners. One of the benefits was that, integrating social media with English Language instruction aids teachers' teaching methods as it serves as a teaching aid. In the event a teacher's teaching method is inadequate or deficient, social media serves as a teaching aid thus enhancing learning. Upon inquiry on how social media is beneficial in the English lesson, a large fraction of the teachers admitted that they are not perfect in their teaching and that they sometimes confuse the learners during instruction. Therefore, they view social media as a great aid to their weaknesses. In Eswatini a primary school teacher is expected to teach all subjects even though there are specializations in teacher training programs in tertiary. Since a teacher cannot have equal strength in the teaching of all the subjects, social media comes in handy. This was reflected by one teacher who teaches English without much training on it;

I am not really an English specialist but I have taught English for ten years now and social media has been my guide. The learners are doing quite well in the subject because I integrate social media in my teaching of

*English (*Teacher 1).

Other teachers also said that they benefitted from integrating social media because it encourages independent learning as it provides learners with a platform to research where learners get information. This encourages exploratory learning which is ideal for English Language learning. One teacher mentioned that;

*Integrating social media allows the learners the opportunity to take part in their own learning. The learners learn to collaborate, interact and share information independently as language is complex (*Teacher D).

In addition, with the integration of social media in the teaching of English Language, the teacher does not have to do most of the talking in the classroom; the learners are actively involved and control their own learning through the teachers' guidance. The integration of social media in English Language instruction also ensures that students and teachers do not only rely on information from textbooks as they can get same from different social media platforms.

Explaining this one of the teachers stated that;

Social media integration in instruction is helpful for learners in terms of acquiring new vocabulary and information instead of only relying on textbooks and their teachers for information (Teacher D).

The responses provided by the respondents revealed that the teachers view the integration of social media in English Language instruction positively and have seen its benefits in their English lessons.

4.2 Challenges of integrating social media in English language instruction

One of the major challenges faced by most teachers who participated in the study was that using social media was addictive and that it restricts learners' thinking resulting in some learners relying solely on it. This makes it difficult for the teachers to realize the child's true capabilities in language development. It also becomes a challenge for teachers to know the aspects of language that need to be enriched. To support this, teacher A from school 1 stated that;

Social media is addictive to a point that it does not allow learners to think outside the box, they tend to be dependent slaves of the internet.

In addition, some of the teachers pointed out that, it is quite challenging to integrate social media in the teaching of English as the learners are so much abreast in social media so much that they surpass the teachers. This makes it difficult to control and manage instruction. Since learners are abreast with social media, they tend to use it for other things that they have not been instructed to do, for example during the classroom observations they were seen watching movies and playing music yet the teacher had not instructed them to do that.

On another note, one of the teachers pointed out that he did not encounter any problems with the integration of social media in his English classroom. He further stated that he is the one who controls its use in the classroom

and the school WI-FI has restrictions on non-scholarly applications. While other teachers complained about the lack of support from both parents and the school administration in terms of providing WI-FI so that all learners could access the internet, other teachers however, heaped accolades to the administration for always ensuring that the school has a WI-FI connection.

Another challenge according to some of the teachers emanated from the complexity of integrating social media with instruction as it requires teachers to be trained and have knowledge on its use in line with the TPACK theory which states that consistent technical assistance is needed to help teachers control instruction. Also according to the theory, close supervision is required to ensure that learning is enhanced. Sadly though, most teachers lacked this training as well as the said technical assistance.

5. Discussion of findings

The study found that teachers had a fairly good understanding of the term 'social media'. Even though they were unable to come out with a comprehensive definition of social media, they were, however, able to state that social media had something to do with interaction and gathering of information from electronic sources. The study also found that while most of the teachers said they integrated social media in English Language instruction, some of the teachers said they did not. When both sets of teachers were asked to give reasons for their stances those who said they integrated social media in their English Language instruction said doing so benefits both the learners and the teachers in various ways. They further stated that the integration of these two resulted from their knowledge of technological devices which they thought could assist if they were combined with certain teaching methods. What this means is that teachers of English Language used social media when they taught English Language in line with the TPACK model which states that in order for a teacher to integrate these two, the teacher should know the subject matter as well as the technological devices [12].

With regards to the benefits of using social media in English Language instruction, the study found that the integration of social media when teaching English has many benefits to both the learners and the teachers. One of the benefits was that integrating social media when teaching assists the teachers in that it enhances their instruction. According to the teachers their instruction is sometimes inadequate/deficient and needs to be supplemented so that learners can benefit fully from it. The teachers said that they realized the deficiency of their instruction when teaching subjects in which they did not specialize which is what they did since primary school teachers in Eswatini are compelled to teach all curriculum subjects in line with the contract that they sign when they are employed. For such teachers therefore social media is both a teaching aid and a guide which enhances and aids their instruction. This finding is in line with author [1] and [2] as they also say that social media enhances instruction and is an important tool which ensures that learners benefit fully from the instruction provided.

The study also found that social media was beneficial when used in the teaching of English because it ensures that learners are actively involved and that they participate actively during teaching/learning. Social media encourages independent learning as it allows learners to search for information themselves instead of relying on their teachers for information all the time. Social media therefore encourages exploratory learning which is a

kind of learning that is ideal for English Language. It also ensures that teachers and learners do not only rely on the information they get from the textbooks as they can get information from varied media platforms. In line with this finding, authors [3,4,5]   also said that social media encourages a collaborative environment and information sharing, hence develops learners' creative and thinking skills and expands learners' opportunities to express themselves, participate and share information.

The study also found that social media limits teachers from dominating in talking in the classroom. According to the findings of this study language learning is effective when learners are the ones who do much of the talking in the classroom instead of the teachers. Through the integration of social media, learners get the opportunity to search for information, share the information among themselves, and with the teacher and in this way they control their own learning. Social media also provides learners with opportunities to increase their vocabulary. This is in line with the results of the study by authors [3,4,5] which unveiled that the integration of social media in English language instruction encourages interaction among the learners as well as increase their vocabulary. This is beneficial to the learners in that there is very little vocabulary that is taught by teachers so if learners were to rely only on that vocabulary they would be very deficient in terms of vocabulary.

The fraction of teachers whose response was that they did not use social media when teaching English Language said they did this because of the challenges that social media has, not just in the teaching of English Language but other subjects as well. In this regard the study found that social media is addictive and restricts learners' thinking resulting in some learners overly relying on it. This makes it difficult for teachers to realize the learners' capabilities and deficiencies in the English language; hence it is difficult for them to identify aspects of the language that need attention. Another challenge was that learners' knowledge of social media tempted them to do things that they have not been instructed to do. In this regard learners do other activities that are not in line with the teacher's instruction such as watching videos and playing music. This according to the teachers works against their intentions of integrating social media in their instruction as this is meant to enhance their instruction. Teachers also felt that the learners' knowledge of social media is vast, so much that it even surpasses that of their teachers and therefore it is a challenge to manage and control its use in the classroom. This finding is congruent with findings from the study by author [13] which unveiled that the information that learners get from social media is most often very difficult to control, hence, teachers find it very difficult to control and manage. The study also found that much as some teachers would like to integrate social media in their instruction, they were unable to because they were not trained on how to integrate it in their teaching of English and they also did not get support from the parents as well as the school administration in terms of providing WI-FI so that all learners could have access to the internet. There was however, a fraction of the teachers who indicated that they were supported by both the parents and the school administration in their bid to utile social media in their English Language instruction.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that teachers view the integration of social media in English Language instruction as very beneficial to both themselves and the learners as it provides them with varied sources of information as well as that it is an innovative resource. It is also a teaching aid and a guide to the teachers as well as a pool of

vocabulary for the learners. Social media in the teachers' instruction encourages independent learning, interactive learning, and exploratory learning which is good for language learning. The practice however also has a number of challenges to both the learners and the teachers. Most teachers' knowledge of social media is very limited and they find it difficult to control the leaners. The study also concludes that integrating social media in English Language instruction can be improved by providing the teachers with training on how they can effectively integrate social media in their instruction.

7. Recommendations

In line with the findings and conclusion, the study therefore recommends that:

- The Ministry of Education should provide frequent in-service training workshops for teachers so that they can be able to appropriately integrate social media in their teaching of English Language.
- Disciplinary measures should be clearly stated and known by teachers, parents and the learners in order to control the abuse of social media in the classroom and at home.
- Sufficient provision of resources that support the integration of social media like computers, tablets and WIFI should be done in the schools.

8. Limitations

The study was limited by the approach and design that it adopted. The qualitative approach allowed for the use of a small sample which was not representative of all the schools and English language teachers of Eswatini, hence the results of the study cannot be generalized to the whole of Eswatini. The results however, can be used to provide explanations in similar situations. The case study design also limited the study in that focus was only on a few schools in one region of Eswatini out of a total of four regions. Again this makes the results not to be generalizable to all the four regions of Eswatini. As already indicated, the results can be used in similar situations.

References

[1] A. M. Kaplan & M. Haenlein. Users of the world, unite! The challenges and Opportunities of Social Media. Vol.53, 59–68. Retrieved from
http://businesshorizons.doi:10/1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003/, 2010.

[2] G. Dietrich. *International journal of educational technology in higher education: Taking social media into the classroom*. Retrieved from http://www.springeropen.com/2018/08/22/social-   media-into-classroom/spfx/ ,2018, pp61-62

[3] V. Liz. *International Journal of Learning and Teaching: Social Media in English Language Teaching and Learning*. Vol. 3, No. 2, 2017. pp.148-153

[4] H. Cohen, *What is social media*? Retrieved from http://www.heidicohen.com/article/2018/05/16, 2011.

[5] T.A.El-Badawy & Y. Hashem. *International Journal of Business Administration: The Impact of Social Media on the Academic Development of School Students*. Vol. 6, (1) Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273770861, 2015, pp.47-54

[6] C. Goble & K.T. Leicht, Education PBS news hour: Should a teacher be using social media in the classroom? Retrieved from http://www.pbs.org/2014/10/01/should-a-teacher- be-using-social-media in-classroom/ptml/,2014

[7] B. Brick. *The Role of Social Networking Sites for Language Learning in UK Higher Education: The Views of Learners and Practitioners*. International Journal of Computer- Assisted Language Learning and Teaching (IJCALLT), volume 2 (3), pp. 35-53. DOI: 10.4018/ijcallt.2012070103 , 2012, 35-53

[8] G. Conole G. & P. Alevizuo. *A review of literature of the use of web 2.0 tools in higher education*. HEA academy, New York, 2010

[9] S. Abdullah. *International Journal of Humanities and Management Sciences (IJHMS) Challenges for teaching English as a second Language and its remedies*. Vol.3; ISSN 2320–4044, 2015, pp.372

[10] P. Mishra & M. Koehler. *Technological pedagogical content knowledge: A framework for teacher knowledge. Teach,ers College Record [online]*. Available at: http://punya.educ.msu.edu/publications/journal_articles/mishra-koehler-tcr2006.pdf , 2006, pp.54

[11] P. Puentedura. *Transformation, Technology, and Education [online]*. Available at: http://www.hippasus.com/rrpweblog/archives/2014/06/29/LearningTechnologySAMR Model.pdf,2006, pp.17

[12] V. Saumell. *Principles for meaningful technology integration*. Vol 25. No. 2, Retrieved from http://www.modernenglishteacher.com/ 2012, pp. 15-17

[13] B. Daneshdoust . & M.A.K. Hagh, M.A.K.. *Journal of Social and Behavioral Sciences: The advantages and disadvantages of Internet-based language learning in Iran*. Vol. 31, pp. 607 – 611. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.12.113/ , 2011, pp.607-611

[14] C. Clark & P. Gruba. *The use of social networking sites for foreign language learning: An autoethnographic study of Livemocha*. Retrieved at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229001225, 2010

[15] D.E..Murray & P. McPherson. *Using the Web to support language learning*. Sydney: National Center for English Language Teaching and Research, 2004, pp.76-95

[16] C. Crook. *Web 2.0 technologies for learning: the current landscape –opportunities, Challenges and tensions*.Retrieved

from:http://partners.becta.org.uk/uploaddir/downloads/page_documents/research/web2_technologies_l earng.pdf, 2008, 16-72

[17] M. Moody. *Teaching Twitter And Beyond: Tips For Incorporating Social Media In Traditional Courses" Journal Of Magazine & New Media Research.* 11 (2) .pp 1-9, 2010, 1-9

[18] J. Liburd, J. Christensen & F. Inger‐‐‐Marie "*Web 2.0 I videregående uddan‐‐nelser*" Idéhæfte fraeVidenCenter®–Det Nationale Videncenter for e-læring Århus Købmandsskole Viborgvej 159A, Hasle 8210 Århus V, 2011, pp.99-108

[19] C. Grove. *Engaging with your teen's online world will make it easier to have difficult conversations about some of the risks and ways to manage them*. Retrieved from
        http://www.shutterstock.org/how-parents-and-teens-can- reduce-the-impact-of-social- media-on-youth-well-being/pnhm9?/ , 2017, pp.4-6

[20] S. Thurairaj E. P Hoon , S. S Roy, & P. K., Fong, *The Electronic Journal of e-Learning: Reflections of Students' language Usage in Social Networking Sites Making or Marring Academic English. Volume 13 Issue 4. Retrieved at www.ejel.org,* 2015*, pp. 302-305*

[21] S. Bolkan, *Content-based language teaching: Convergent concerns across divergent contexts. Language Teaching Research, 15*(3), pp. 279-288, 2015,pp.279-288

[22] S.J. Pierson, *Bridges to Swaziland: Using Task-based Learning and Computer-Mediated Instruction to improve English Language Teaching and Learning*. Vol. 15(2), pp 105-119, retrieved from http://www.tewtjournal.org , 2014, pp.105-119

[23] P.D. Leedy & J.E. Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning And Design* (8th Ed). Pearson: Merrill Prentice Hall. 2010, pp.5-24

[24] J.W. Creswell, *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, Evaluating Qualitativeand Quantitative research.*4th ed. New Delhi: Sage, 2015, pp.204-252

[25] W. Rose, *What are Qualitative Research Ethics?* United Kingdom: University of Central Lancaster, Bloomsburry collections, 2012, pp. 89-90

[26] R. K.. Yin, *Qualitative research from start to finish*, 2nd Ed. New York: the Guilford Press ISBN:9781-4625-1797-8. pp. 386, 2009, pp.386