USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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To explore the experiences of such teachers, this study explored the use of social media for the teaching of English as a second language in township schools. The study used an interpretivist qualitative approach in an exploratory case-study design to understand teachers' initiatives and strategies in teaching English as a second language using social media. Data collection was done using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions and document analysis. Teachers' voices, actions and documents on the use of social media were analysed inductively and thematically. The research findings indicate that the sampled English teachers used social media for collaboration, networking, communication and out-of-school digital literacy practices as their initiatives. These digital initiatives lead to the utilisation of digital connection platforms for socialisation and teaching and learning English. In addition to dividends of connectivism, visual communication and cyber linguistics were found to have become critically important practices for learners learning English as a second language. The implication is that the education policy-makers and planners in South Africa need to revisit the policy on e-learning and Information Communication Technology (ICT) usage in schools to incorporate the methodological requirements and competences for teachers to use in the teaching of English using social media. In addition to improvements in policy measures, English teachers in resource-constrained township secondary schools need to improve their digital literacy skills to line up themselves for online and out-of-school literacy learning requirements.

Technological development and the teaching of English as a second language have been the focus of debate among academics and language specialists in the past decade. English language teachers in secondary schools have been compelled by technological innovations and curriculum needs to update their teaching and learning skills in line with technological requirements and policy. The purpose of this article was to explore the digital development and technological innovations that have changed the communication landscape the world over and is true for the African continent as well. The presence of social media has provided many opportunities for teaching and learning English as a second language. In South Africa, teachers are required to use digital technology for teaching subjects such as English as recommended by the syllabus rolled out in 2011. Social media in the South African education system is not widely used officially because of disciplinary challenges and financial constraints. According to Dzvapatsva, Mitrovic and Dietrich, social media has a chance to improve participation by learners who perform poorly because social media can cater to different personality profiles. Social media is also convenient as individualised learning experiences. Social media, thus, connects cultures through collaborative authorship and digitally connected and networked knowledge communities in a participatory culture.

In support of becoming knowledge communities, practising teachers must be aware that single authorship is now an option and that the classroom extends beyond the visible walls, as it is connected to digital resources and learning partners. For computer technology to support cognitive functions and encourage higher learning outcomes, teachers have a duty to reconceptualise the way digital tools are used in the integration of theory and practice. The reconceptualised procedure should result in a shift away from a teacher-centred approach to instruction that attempts to engage learners in collaborative activities that support knowledge construction in an integrated fashion. In the modern paradigms of language teaching, teachers are not necessarily knowledge reservoirs but are facilitators who should enable learners to discover and understand their environment. Ingre and Basil (2017) claimed that social media comprises platforms that promote interactivity and community building among users. According to Savage and McGoun (2015), digital classrooms, digital music, cell phones, smart phones, video games, digital music players,

online entertainment, cyber learning and collaboration, massive open online courses, video cams and all other forms of digital toys have characterised the environment of the child of the digital age across international boundaries.

In this research, we also sought to understand the strategies used by English teachers while teaching in resourceconstrained schools without making a comparison with other subjects in the curriculum. This study is unique in the South African context in that it explores the use of social media in the teaching of English in resource-constrained secondary schools where cell phone usage during class time is highly controlled and access to smart phones for connectivity poses a challenge to learners from poor communities.

Social media largely benefits active participants (through interaction) either as consumers of knowledge or architects on knowledge construction sites (cognitive function). For English second-language learners in township settings, critical thinking skills, collaboration and networking provide a platform to exchange ideas across international physical boundaries where English is used as a medium of instruction in schools or for communication in business and socialisation. Social media therefore combines socialisation and learning at the same time.

Social media combines a number of practices such as creativity, networking, content selection, entertainment, electronic writing, editing and evaluation, critical thinking and problem-solving through collaboration. The above-mentioned practices combine to make social media practices a set of human experiences and practices in organised social settings such as schools. If literacy is understood as the relationship between the reader and the text, social media participation provides more opportunities in text construction, deconstruction, analysis and interpretation for meaning-making. Creativity, networking, content selection, collaboration and connectivism all add up to critical thinking in problem-solving using digital literacies. The aim of the article was to explore the opportunities, unpack the experiences and authenticate English teachers' initiatives on the use of social media in teaching English as a second language.

The main findings indicate that English teachers use social media to communicate with learners on matters relating to school work. English teachers and learners use online resources to research and then share the information with their classmates on social media groups in spite of the fact that the use of social media in teaching English has not been advocated by the Department of Basic Education policy on methodology. The platforms commonly used by teachers and learners are WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Learning English also involves the innovative use of new and existing cartoons, games and puzzles to understand and practice the use of different language aspects using the social media platforms. Most of these resources are in electronic format. Findings reveal that teachers and learners combine socialisation, working and learning through extended hours in digital literacy practices. While on the school premises, teachers and learners limit the use of digital tools for typing, storage, transfer, curation and retrieval of information, but they continue to access the same information sources even after school hours on their smart phones. In other cases, teachers use applications such as Share it and Bluetooth to share information with learners and colleagues.

The social media is an extension of the class activities, and learners construct knowledge through interaction. Data collected show that teachers and learners connect and chat on WhatsApp groups, participate on Twitter, and share pictures and videos, thereby improving their communicative ability and language proficiency. Lessons observed indicated that the cartoons shared on social media, jokes and images are also used for communication.

The reality of social media in township secondary schools, as observed and understood from interviews, indicates that English teachers and learners were doing their best to use social media for learning and teaching even though many learners do not have access to smart phones and the Internet. English teachers who participated in the study were concerned that learners who do not have smart phones or access to the Internet could not participate in social media activities. In some cases, learners from families with no access to the Internet or social media tried to make use of their friends or neighbours' resources, but there was limited progress in such instances.

This study could have covered a number of resourceconstrained schools; however, because of financial constraints, the opportunity for participation was limited to selected schools. It was also not easy to access digital devices for some English teachers and learners, especially on their socialisation patterns.

The use of social media for learning and teaching extends the classroom activities beyond the school programme. In view of the technological development, social media supports the teaching of English as a second language by providing electronic writing opportunities, use of symbols and images for communication, thereby improving proficiency, multiliteracy and multimodality skills. Teachers need to develop pedagogical skills in the use of social media in teaching English as a second language. In terms of policy development and implementation, the Department of Basic Education needs to provide professional training for English language teachers to be able to use social media in the teaching of English in resource-constrained secondary schools.

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