TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS WITH BLENDED EDUCATION AT BANGLADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY: AN ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS’ USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Social media (SM), a platform where people can share, exchange, and communicate their ideas and knowledge, has been the part of human’s life and has become the new trend in communication and learning. Technology has profoundly changed education and its delivery mode. This study aims to explore the usage of SM by the students, and to discover the most common resources used in teacher education. Furthermore, it aims to illustrate students’ belief about the influence of SM on their learning. This study administered validated questionnaires to students of B.Ed./M.Ed. from School of Education (SoE) of Bangladesh Open University. A non-probability sampling technique was utilized with a sample size of 195 students (females, n=117; males, n=78). The most common website used by both genders was Facebook. With regard to utilizing SM for learning, the students believed that it was beneficial. SoE needs to improve the utilization of SM by its faculty, tutors and students by developing activities and encouraging the usage of SM in blended program of teacher education program.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has gained reliability over the years as a trusted source of information and has been an effective platform where organizations can interact with audiences [1]. Students are fond of using social media, and that is why, educational institutions have been using social media to provide students to connect with learning groups and other educational systems that make education convenient. This is simply network that enables sharing and interaction, and at Bangladesh Open University (BOU) works as learning management system (LMS) because institutions communicate with students via YouTube and Facebook. Video is a prominent tool in BOU trends that are effective and anyone can use it to share useful videos that inspire students and help them in their course subjects. BOU has the ability to connect with students through social media networks such as Facebook and YouTube. Currently there are 972 videos uploaded at YouTube and these videos are also available in BOU official page of Facebook. BOU has already established a separate channel named ‘BOUtube’.
These channels are being used to make announcements and provide students with useful information. Social media builds engagement between BOU and students which helps tackle many student issues through the group interactions. Through social media such as YouTube, Facebook, the engagements between students and the SoE has been sustained. As Teacher Education program at Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is run through Blended Learning (BL) mode i.e. the program is run through media mix – face to face (F2F), video lectures and use of OER (open educational resources) repository – for professional development of the teachers from the schools and colleges. That is why the programme is called Blended M.Ed. where a lion share of the program delivery through ICT. M.Ed. books and video lectures are stored in the BOU OER Repository titled “e-Book” and “BOUTube” and which are downloadable free of charge and free to use. Social media has been paramount important as it has impacted positively human’s life [2]. This paper aims to examine how the B.Ed./M.Ed. students are using the social media for educational purpose.

Objectives

Social networking adds a different dimension to current teaching strategies of the School of Education (SoE). It uses Facebook as supported or supplemented teaching platform – a widely and freely available social networking platform which provides synchronous and asynchronous communication technique. The aim of this paper is to analyze the role of social media, in particular, Facebook, as an educational tool in higher education. This paper evaluates introducing Facebook in the teacher education programs at the SoE in running the blended programs. It also achieves the following objectives:

1. to assess the SoE has used technology to enhance the social aspect of learning process in running blended teacher education programs;
2. to ascertain how Facebook assists in enhancing academic upliftment;
3. to assess how Facebook in blended teacher education program increases access to program related information; and
4. to suggest for improvement of learning through social media in teacher education programs;

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the Facebook group, [3] found that indeed it serves as a tool which can promote learners’ engagement and collaboration and increase the sharing of ideas well after face-to-face classroom lecture sessions in conventional mode. They also found that Facebook group for academic purposes does not happen immediately as results of mere request or announcement, and they concluded that Facebook should be used in teaching and learning is not the right one. The real
issue is “how” teachers and students can take advantage of the unquestionable Facebook potential powers of networking, linking, and sharing and use them for the realization of learning outcomes. Facebook is mainly used for social communication and subsequently, education institutes found it is also useful in interaction for learning. Therefore, Facebook has been the convergence of private use and educational use. In another study, [4] found that students perceived a distinct divide between educational and private use of social media, and their result indicate that there is yet another type of use: social media as a tool for career-building purposes, or what is labeled as professional use. Consequences of social media for use in higher education are of three roles as performed by the individual: the student role in educational settings, the professional role for career-building, and the private role. Menzies et al. [5] found that students look for appropriate social networking sites, amongst them, Facebook, to enhance their learning experience, and they use Facebook as a learning platform as well as mapping such activities to pedagogy and curricula. Facebook strategy is useful in promoting collaborative learning alongside the face-to-face delivery of content, and they rebuked the perceived blurring of educational and social purposes. Northey et al. [6] also found that students’ engagement increase learning and educational outcomes. The use of a social networking site (Facebook) as a tool to facilitate asynchronous learning opportunities that complement face-to-face interactions and thereby enable a stronger learning ecosystem. This student-centered learning approach offers a way to increase student engagement and can have a positive impact on academic outcomes. They used data from a longitudinal quasi-experiment, found that students who participated in both face-to-face on-campus classes and asynchronous online learning opportunities were more engaged than students who only attended face-to-face classes. In addition, their findings showed that participation in the asynchronous setting relates significantly and positively to students’ academic outcomes. The findings have notable implications for marketing education through Facebook. In the research of [7] it was to determine the use of social media in education based on the perceptions and practices of teachers enrolled in Pangasinan State University's Open University Systems. Some basic features of social media could have a great impact on the development of the teaching-learning process. Their study focused on the role of social media in education for high school teachers in Pangasinan, specifically those enrolled in the educational management major at both master and doctoral levels. It sought to discover the use of social media in teaching by investigating the profile of the teachers, the role of social media in education in different school activities and the acceptance of the role and use of social media in education. The results of the study showed that social media contributes to learning but there are some disadvantages which users need to be aware of. In line with this, it is recommended that teachers blend social media with other free learning management systems i.e. Facebook. Chugh and Ruhi [8] identified there were multiple benefits of Facebook usage for teaching and learning such as
increased teacher-student and student-student interaction, improved performance, and higher engagement. Through review of the literature, this paper explores the use of Facebook as an educational instrument for learning and teaching at the School of Education of Bangladesh Open University.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Instrument**

A questionnaire based on technology-enabled learning (TEL) research was developed in discussion with five faculties of School of Education (SOE). In addition, discussion was conducted with the students as active users of Facebook to share their own experiences, suggest questions and clarify Facebook related terminology. The instrument was designed and covered all aspects of research questions.

The questionnaire was structured in two parts and it addressed:

1. The demographic – containing the age, gender, courses of studies i.e. the program name, location (RC and SRC),
2. The use of Facebook for SOE students completing anonymous questionnaire on (1) their perceptions of Facebook as a social environment, (2) their academic practices and (3) their views on the administrative information,

A range of answer choices (multiple-choice, Likert-type scale and open-ended) were selected to enable participants to indicate preferences, attitude and to elaborate on their views and practices. The questionnaire was piloted with a small group (n=7) and ambiguity in the questions were reworded. The final questionnaire consisted of 21 items. The questionnaire also explained the purpose of the study and put encouraging remark for students to participate who were Facebook users of teacher education program.
Participants

195 B.Ed./M.Ed. students of SOE participated in this study. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of program-wise respondents in this study.

There were 117 female and 78 male participants who studied teacher education courses at the SOE of BOU. This study was based on cluster sampling and six regional centres (RCs) were randomly selected out of 12 RCs. Figure 2 illustrates the cluster sampling of data collection.

Nearly half (43%) of the students were aged older than 35, 33% were 30-35, 18% 25-30 and 6% less than 25. Figure 3 illustrates the age group of study participants.
91% of the students were employed that means they are in-service teachers in different schools and colleges. Six % are unemployed and very negligible number were self-employed (only 3%). Employability is illustrated in the Figure 4.

Data Collection and Analysis

The preliminary result was exported SPSS data files for each level to Excel. The means and standard deviations (SD) of each item were calculated and the open-ended answers thematically coded. For further analysis, the whole data file was cleaned and exported to SPSS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Part one of the questionnaire sought feedback on the participants’ perception of different aspects (such as social, administrative, academic) of Facebook as social media.
Learners’ Social Aspects

Internet users, mainly traditional aged college-age students, largely accepted social media in the realm of social networking websites such as Facebook. In most cases, these students have somewhat parallel lives, accurately representing themselves in both realms, in other cases; they may be two totally separate identities, living almost a “second life” in the social networking realm. Social media is positively impacting students of tertiary education, their development, and/or the university environment. Student development is based on a collection of cognitive, socio-cultural, and psychological theories that relate closely to an individual’s growth throughout the college experience [9, 10]. Therefore, social aspect i.e. socio cultural areas of the networking through websites impact on learning of students. Abbas et al. [11] stated that application of social networking sites presents enormous benefits for as well as risks to university students and their implications on students’ psychological adjustment or learning behaviors are not well understood. Their study applied the social gratification theory to examine students’ behavior practicing social media usage. They found that the usage of social media in Pakistan has a negative influence on a student’s behavior as compared to positive aspects. Table I illustrates the socio-cultural aspects of Facebook in learning.

**TABLE I. SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS OF FACEBOOK IN LEARNING**

| Items                                                                 | N  | Mean | SD  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----|------|-----|
| I prefer using Facebook for educational purposes                      | 192| 3.77 | 1.33|
| I prefer using Facebook in problem solving case with my colleagues    | 193| 3.82 | 1.25|
| Using Facebook in my studies in teacher education program helped me to find and organize all required learning resources | 191| 4.13 | 1.17|
| Using Facebook in studies motivated me for study rather than conventional methods. | 190| 3.97 | 1.19|
| Using Facebook in studies helped me to discuss freely my ideas with fellow students | 191| 4.09 | 1.19|
| Communication through Facebook helped me much to improve my social skills. | 189| 4.33 | 1.15|

Table I reveals results of B.Ed./M.Ed. students who were asked to express their opinion on socio-cultural aspects of learning through Facebook, and this section of questionnaire has six items to cover the broad area. Most of the students showed their agreement in favor of using Facebook for educational purpose (mean 3.77 and SD 1.33). Here it is noticeable that SD of this item is higher than that of other items, that means there are variations in using Facebook in their courses. The students are also connected with other peer students (mean 3.82 and SD 1.25) which means that Facebook performs a social role for the students. The teachers are promoters of use of Facebook for educational purpose (mean 4.13 and SD 1.17) and for organizing the learning resources (4.13 and SD 1.17). Facebook motivates students (mean 3.97 and SD1.19) because it helps in sharing ideas (mean 4.09 and SD 1.19) and also improves the social skills of learners.
Academic Aspects of Social Media

Bedassa [12] found that time spent on Facebook and addiction to it negatively and significantly affects students’ academic performance. With the increasing popularity of Facebook, students are joining and using it in their social and academic lives. Huge popularity of Facebook among the students has brought the researchers’ attention to investigate the phenomenon. This research is also that of its kind. Most research regarding online social networks, particularly Facebook use has explored at these networks in terms of profile management, identity creation and friending behavior. The daily use of Facebook is increasing communication among the users; consequently, Facebook users participate more in extracurricular activities than non-Facebook users. Among the University students, Facebook has a perception as a cheap, fast and entertaining medium of communication and students do not consider Facebook as a dominated phenomenon over their studies [13]. Table II illustrates the academic performance of the Facebook users.

| Items                                                                 | N   | Mean | SD  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|-----|
| It was very good idea to use Facebook as learning tool in teacher education program | 190 | 3.82 | 1.23 |
| Using Facebook in the study program facilitate my learning           | 185 | 3.62 | 1.17 |
| Using Facebook in teacher education program facilitate my learning   | 184 | 3.57 | 1.10 |
| It was so funny to use Facebook as an educational tool in teacher education | 182 | 3.58 | 1.22 |
| I preferred attending classroom in which fellow students used social networks beside traditional classes | 182 | 3.01 | 1.43 |
| Using Facebook in teacher education helped me to improve my writing skills. | 182 | 3.46 | 1.33 |
| Video content uploaded on Facebook helped me to understand some difficult issues. | 184 | 4.34 | 3.14 |
| I think using Facebook and social network in teaching courses will help to improve my critical thinking skills. | 184 | 3.77 | 1.17 |
| Using Facebook in teacher education helped to improve myself directed learning skills. | 178 | 3.51 | 1.33 |

Students has the agreement on the using the Facebook in teacher education program (mean 3.82 and SD 1.23) as it facilitates learning (mean 3.57 and SD 1.10), and it serves as platform of learning (mean 3.58 and SD 1.22). It is found that there is less agreement on the statement of ‘I preferred attending classroom in which fellow students using social networks beside traditional classes’ (mean is 3.01 and SD 1.43). It refers that using Facebook is not about uplifting the status because it has been the part of life. As the SD is higher than all items, there are variations in giving the opinion for this item. There is also agreement on the items of ‘Using Facebook in teacher education helped me to improve my writing skills’ (mean 3.46 and SD 1.33) that means it is very near to the neutrality. Facebook helps learners in understanding difficult issues, critical thinking, and improves the
directed learning skills as all the items related to these issues are of 3+ and nearly 4, also SD is close to 1+).

Course Administration Aspect of Social Media

When social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter appeared, the world was divided into online and offline. Social media are online technology platforms help to connect people together far and near. It is used to build relationship among people. According to [14] who stated that with help of social media, people can communicate with each other, even on different continents, listen to music, read books, look at photos and much more. Social media have greatly simplified lives and tightly tied to everybody. Table III illustrates the course related administrative information such as admission, tutorials and evaluation while undertaking the program.

| Items                                                                 | N  | Mean | SD  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|----|------|-----|
| Communication with staff members and my colleagues through Facebook helped me to gain good learning experience | 186| 4.20 | 1.16|
| Using Facebook in teacher education helped me to study at any time. | 186| 3.63 | 1.33|
| Privacy and security were my main concerns about using Facebook for teaching. | 186| 3.40 | 1.32|
| Many of program staff members are using Facebook and other social networks for teaching. | 186| 3.67 | 1.30|

Everybody will express that Facebook has been a powerful platform of communication (one to one, one to many etc.). The findings revealed that B.Ed./M.Ed. students communicated with courses administrator through Facebook and it helped in gaining learning experiences (mean 4.20 and SD 1.16). Talae [15] stated that in social networks, there are also things useful for the development of the students. In this study, the students have agreement that Facebook provides opportunity for studying any time (mean 3.63 and SD 1.33) which is central to blended approach of teaching. Students also expressed their opinion that Facebook may have the concerns of privacy and security while using it in educational purpose (mean 3.67 and SD 1.30).

CONCLUSIONS

Findings indicate that students of B.Ed./M.Ed. programs are using a range of Facebook features to expose themselves to the teacher education in their study and to communicate through Facebook with peer group for academic purpose. Facebook was used as an educational tool in B.Ed./M.Ed. program for timetable and assessment announcement, uploading course-related materials including PowerPoint, video, figures, group discussion and frequently asked question,
Students-students and tutors-students interaction, formative assessment, students’ results assessment and private message were used also for solving special course-related problems. Learning experiences on Facebook were not perceived as useful for the teaching practice (TP), the hand-on context which suggests the need for bridging strategies between informal and formal learning environments in teacher education program under blended mode at Bangladesh Open University. In addition, communication with peers through social networks can benefit a student socialize, find new friends, discuss with them issues related to studies in teacher education programs. Thus, it can be concluded that social media have a dual impact on student achievement, and it is necessary to approach tertiary students’ use of social networks with ultimate responsibility.

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