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# Journal

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## Exploring the use of Facebook in teaching nomadic children in Kenya: A lesson for Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Social networking sites have become increasingly popular with the rise of Web 2.0. Social networking sites such as Myspace.com, Friendster, WhatsApp, Hangout, yahoo messenger and Facebook have experienced surging popularity, particularly among nomadic children in particular and youths in general who use these new technologies to create instant communities of practice. This paper focuses on the use of Facebook (FB) in the teaching of nomadic children in Kenya. The paper is located within qualitative paradigm. Seven nomadic secondary schools and fourteen teachers were purposively selected. After data generation, it was transcribed and subjected to coding. The themes that emerged from coding were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that FB is used in the areas of sharing of current and archival information, learn educative games and brainstorm and collaborative learning. Similarly, because of its wider audience and easy to pass information in the class, teachers in nomadic schools preferred the use of FB in the teaching process. In light of the above, it is recommended that nomadic school teachers in Nigeria should study and adopt Kenyan's method of teaching nomadic children.*

**Keywords:** Facebook. Kenya. Nomadic children. Nomadic education. Teaching.

### Introduction

In recent times, thousands of nomadic children in Kenya access Facebook (FB) to connect with their families and friends. In this paper, however, nomadic children refers to a group of young people that migrate orderly, logically, systematically and purposefully from one particular geographical region to the other in search of their means of livelihood (Akpan, 2016). FB was invented on 4th of February in 2004. In this paper, FB is a social utility that connects one with more people around the world. The aim in which FB was invented is to give people the power to share/connect and make the world more open and interesting. Mazer, Murphy and Simonds (2007) assert that FB is a highly interactive virtual social network. The majority of nomadic children use FB to search for vital information. Others use the platform to take pictures and send it to their friends. Like most online social networking sites, FB is used to maintain existing and develop new friends in any part of the world (Bosch, 2016). Freeman (2014) opine that everyday use of social media technologies such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs could lead to classroom use and that held pedagogical values are a precursor to technology adoption. It has been observed that many nomadic children spend more time socialising with their friends on the FB (Milošević, Živković, Arsić & Manasijević, 2015). Abdullah and Chan (2016) reported that others use it to perpetuate sexual immorality. Despite the grey areas highlighted, Block (2009), Junco (2012) asserts that the use of FB by children allows for participation in various micro-communities, some of which are educational. In Kenya, there are about 50 million people (Fratkin, 2019). Out of this number, seven millions are active FB users (Fratkin, 2019). Additionally, it is documented that from the seven million active FB users, thirty-three per cent are nomadic children (Parlasca, Hermann & Musshoff, 2019). In all nomadic secondary schools in Kenya, aside from

the conventional chalk-board method of teaching, social networks particularly FB is deliberately used to support classroom-based teaching and learning. This newly technological innovation introduced in all nomadic schools by Kenyan government, spark the researcher's curiosity to examine the use of FB in the teaching of nomadic school children in Kenya with the view of recommending its adoption within Nigeria teaching and learning space.

#### Focus of the Study

Social network platforms have become increasingly popular with the rise of Web 2.0. Social networks such as MySpace.com, Friendster, WhatsApp, Hangout, Yahoo Messenger and FB have experienced surging popularity particularly among nomadic children in Kenya. Therefore, the focus of the paper is to explore the use of FB in the teaching of nomadic children in secondary schools in Samburu County of Kenya.

#### **A brief description of research site**

This study is located in Samburu County of Kenya. This county is geographically found in the former Rift Valley Province, Kenya. It covers a landmass of roughly 21,000 square kilometres in northern Kenya. This county stretches north from the Wuaso Ng'iro River to the south of Lake Turkana. The County is predominantly inhabited by Samburu (term literally mean shepherd) people. However, there are other smaller tribes such as Turkana which live along with Samburu people. The majority of Samburu people are nomads. In other words, cattle, goats, sheep and camels play a crucial role in the life and culture of Samburu people. These people are highly dependent on their livestock for survival. Aside from income generation from sell of their livestock, Samburu people's staple food consists of mostly milk extracted from cattle. In addition, when they kill cattle the blood is eaten.

Educationally, there are conflicting reports on the number of nomadic secondary schools established in Samburu County. While some says that there are twenty-one nomadic secondary schools established, others reported that there are twenty-eight. Due to the limited time for the study, the researcher would have embarked on physical numeration of all the nomadic secondary schools in the County to establish its number.

#### **Objectives of the study**

This study is guided by two objectives.

1. To examine ways in which Facebook is used as teaching instrument at nomadic schools in Kenya.
2. To examine why teachers used Facebook as a teaching instrument at nomadic schools in Kenya.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the above stated objectives, the following research questions stated below were developed to guide the study.

1. How do Facebook used as a teaching instrument at nomadic schools in Kenya?
2. Why teachers used Facebook as a teaching instrument at nomadic schools in Kenya?

### **Literature Review**

Before highlighting the key findings of this study, it is appropriate to some extent to provide a brief review of key literature that relate to the study under investigation. There has been a global surge in media coverage on the FB phenomenon. Though, most academic research on the subject is based on North-American and Asian countries (Bosch, 2016). A search of major libraries in Nigeria and online journals yielded no positive result for studies on FB within the Kenyan context. Despite the drought in the literature, it will not be out of place to search for literature globally and apply it within Kenyan context.

Within the context of mobile learning, FB is one of social network sites used the world over (Farooqi *et al.*, 2013). Research has shown that teachers are recognising the possibilities of tapping into the already popular social network site to get to students. In recent times, however, the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak has resulted in the use of social platforms to educate learners globally. According to Mazer, Murphy and Simonds (2007), FB is a unique social networking site that creates connections between students and faculty within an online academic community. For instance, Hewitt and Forte (2006) looked at ways that students feel about receiving lecturers on FB, and how faculty participation affects professor-students' relations (Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007). Findings from Hewitt and Forte's (2006) study indicated that students feel great because they were able to interact academically with the lecturers in certain topics in which they find it difficult to comprehend. Bosch (2016) argues that one should consider the large numbers of students on FB who are actively participating in group discussion hence adopt it as a potential educational tool.

In addition, Shier (2005) opines that FB is a major platform that students today are meeting, communicating, and building community, therefore, it can be used to stimulate collaborative student-led learning. In a similar vein, Morin (2007) said that FB also allow for the creation of groups for particular academic courses, with wall posting used to discuss elements of the course. A study conducted by Stutzman (2008) on students' use of FB in the University of North Carolina indicated that majority of the students preferred using FB to conduct discussions on some major lessons than in face-to-face interaction. In some universities in United States of America, some lecturers have gone so far as to integrate FB into their university courses. For instance, at the University of Pennsylvania, Barnes (2007) reported that a particular professor used FB to teach concepts of social networking and to foster critical thinking, having students investigate the connections among their peers. Despite the importance of FB in the teaching process, Bugeja (2006) warned on the dangers of FB, arguing that it can be a distractive tool in the

classroom, and that the solution is not to block content. Rather, to foster in students the ability to discern when and where technology may be appropriate or inappropriate.

### **Conceptual framework underpinning the study**

Blended learning is used as a conceptual framework for conducting the study. Blended learning is not a new concept. It has its origin from corporate training and development in the United States of America. It is believed to have made its first appearance in the late 1990s. The term 'blended learning' has become one of the hottest buzzwords in education in recent time. According to Makri, Papanikolaou, Tsakiri and Karkanis (2014), blended learning is the thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences. In other words, blended learning combines "face-to-face classroom methods with online activities to form an integrated instructional approach" (Rydeen, 2011: 38). The key principle guiding blended learning is that face-to-face, oral teaching and online teaching process are optimally integrated, such that the strengths of each are blended into a unique learning experience congruent with the context and intended educational purpose (Garner & Oke, 2016). In the blended learning space, online interactions provide opportunities for students to create and build relationships. Garner and Oke (2016) maintain that the key digital elements of a blended class is the 'discussion forum' For instance, initially teachers used to ask students to do certain tasks individually and on face-to-face. However, in recent times they are asked to do it through FB and the students' performance is evaluated by e-portfolios. The use of FB by students enables them to share their thoughts and ideas with one another in the class. In furtherance to the above, because of the interactive nature of this environment, students are opportune to learn more about one another as they engage in conversations and share their thoughts and ideas about the topic of the discussion forum (Garner & Oke, 2016). From the above discussion, it is appropriate to adopt the concept to understand ways in which FB is used to teach in nomadic schools in Kenya.

### **Research methodology**

In the study, qualitative research approach was adopted. The premise of qualitative research is that it involves a subjective systematic approach to exploring and describing life experiences that enable meaning to be attached to emerging themes (Burns & Grove, 2010). This approach was used as the researcher was aimed at exploring the use of FB in the teaching of nomadic children in Kenya. In line with qualitative approach, interpretive paradigm is adopted. In qualitative approach, the goal of interpretivism is to value subjectivity (Khan, 2014), and eschew the idea that objective research on human behaviour is possible (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Following the point discussed above, the choice of interpretive paradigm is to understand from the participants' perspective the use of FB in the teaching of nomadic children in Kenya.

A total of fourteen teachers from seven nomadic secondary schools were purposively selected from the population to participate in the study. The criteria used for the selection of the participants were based on the following: teaching in nomadic school for more than five years and the ability to use FB during teaching. The instrument for information generation was developed. In other words, twelve interview questions were developed which border on the topic under investigation. According to Atkins and Wallace (2012), interview is frequently used in the collection of data in qualitative research due to its ability to allow the researcher to engage with research participants individually and on face-to-face basis. The researcher



applied online to Executive Secretary, National Commission for Nomadic Education in Kenya (NACONEK) for permission to conduct an interview. The application was granted after weeks of delay. Similarly, letters were dispatched online to all managers of the selected schools informing them of the intention to carry out research. On the said letters, date, time for the interview and the names of the participants selected were clearly stated. In the same manner, a consent letter was designed and presented to the participants to indicate their willingness to partake in the study. For confidentiality purpose, names of the participants were replaced with pseudonyms such as Azima, Ayo, Azizi, Ayubu, Abbo, Aruzi, Abarika, and Bavana. Others are Beno, Busara, Chilemba, Anasa, Angalia and Barasa.

The researcher was permitted for two week by Dean, Faculty of Education, National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) to travel to Kenya for conduct of the interview. Before the commencement of the interview, the consent letter was given to each participant to sign for voluntary participation in the research. During the interview session with all the participants, audio recorder and field-note were used as tools to elicit information. After the interview, information collected was transcribed manually. Furthermore, the transcribed data was subjected to coding. However, during pre-coding, the researcher was compelled to circle, highlight or underline significant words or sentences on the text. This was done in line with Theron's (2015) position who urged researchers to start the coding process whilst they are collecting the data, bearing in mind that the codes may change during later cycles. According to Creswell (2015: 156), coding is "the process of analysing qualitative text data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a meaningful way." Similarly, Saldaña (2016: 4) argue that "code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data." After coding, themes that emerged were analysed using thematic analysis.

### **Findings and discussion**

From the first research question which bordered on ways in which Facebook is used as a teaching instrument at nomadic schools in Kenya, the majority of the participants interviewed revealed that FB is used in the following ways: sharing of current and archival information, learn games and brainstorm and collaborative learning..

#### *Sharing of current and archival information*

Teachers interviewed revealed that they used FB to share some current and archival information in the class. They cited some topics in geography in which they used FB to demonstrate to the nomadic students in the class. According to one of the participants (Ayo), he said that anytime he taught topics such as map work, types of rocks, erosion features, types of vegetation or rivers, he often used FB to present these geographical features to the students. In a related report, Azizi stated that in her biology lesson, FB is used to demonstrate some task to her students. When probed further how she used FB to teach in biology class, Azizi replied:

*FB is one medium I adopted to teach my students. For instance, in my practical biology lesson, specimen such as human digestive system, animal cells, amoeba, among others are illustrated and circulated on the FB (personal interview with Azizi, November, 2019).*

From the quotation, it is obvious that FB was used to teach some important geographical and biological features in nomadic schools. Most nomadic school teachers used FB to show the diagram of human digestive system, animal cells and other important human organs. Furthermore, it was indicated that teachers used FB as a form of to teach some topics in geography lesson such as map work, river and types of rock formation. From the interpretive perspective, the use of FB enhances students' understanding of subject content hence impact positively students' academic performance. The finding is supported by Manca and Ranieri (2016) who claimed that FB application as an instructional material significantly improve students' academic achievement. Similarly, it was earlier stated by Baran (2010) that the use of FB by the younger generation of learners does not only quicken students' comprehension of the subject matter, but it is a simple way of making them (students) to embrace e-learning in formal education setting.

#### *Learn educative games*

All the participants interviewed unanimously said that there are different kinds of games on FB. They further reported that most of these games are extremely educative. For instance, Beno and Busara mentioned educative games used teaching mathematics and English language to include crossword, math game and scrabbles. Aside from the above two subjects, Aruzi declared that as a business studies and commerce teacher he adopted this medium to pass instruction to all his students during the lesson. In a similar vein, Abarika and Abbo maintained that supway surf, dr driving, cooking fever, checkers, sniper, temple run and dream legend are some of the educational puzzles they asked their students to download and used on the FB. Specifically, Abarika stated that during home economics lesson different kinds of food and the method of its preparation shared to all her students. Abarika concluded by saying that the use of FB in the teaching of business studies aside from effectively enhancing students' learning ability, it prevent the school authority from spending huge fund in the purchase of materials for practical.

From the narrative, it was established that there are educational games such as checkers, sniper, dream legend, among others on the FB in which teachers adopted in teaching nomadic children in Kenya. It was revealed that subjects like English language, mathematics, business studies and home economics deployed different types of games on FB as a teaching strategy during lesson. From the interpretive perspective, it has been widely documented that there is individual differences between/among students. Students have different ways on learning, while some are cognitive-based, others are either affective or psychomotor-based. Therefore, the use of games in FB as a teaching strategy enhances cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills of a student which invariably impact positively their academic performance. This finding is in agreement with Hamat, Embi and Hassan's (2012) position who said that students made use of FB for activities that were common for formal learning and they had a more positive view of social networking site and its effects on their lives as students. In addition, Ahern, Feller, and Nagle (2016) FB is one of the most popular social media sites that has gained a unique position as a learning technology for educational purposes.

#### *Brainstorming and collaborative learning*

From the analysis, it was discovered that FB has brought new opportunities for knowledge sharing and learning among students and teachers in nomadic secondary schools. Barasa and Beno were of the view

that FB is used to promote online discussion on topical issues between teacher and students. When interrogated on the possible ways of online discussion between a teacher and students, Beno declared:

*Sir, I want to make it very clear that this is digital age, where face-to-face contact between a teacher and his/her students is no longer viable. Therefore, cooperative and collaborative learning among students is achieved through the use of FB (personal interview with Beno, November, 2019).*

In a similar manner, Chilemba disclosed that although FB was not originally designed for educational purposes, but in recent times it has been used to enhance the learning among students and create a more conducive classroom environment. This is because a teacher does not need to move around the class during the lesson. Rather, he/she pass the information across to every student at the same time on their FB page. Notwithstanding Barasa, Beno and Chilemba's position, Ayubu said that FB facilitated brainstorming session among students. When asked to explain how FB influenced brainstorming, Ayubu narrated:

*Students in my class usually use FB to contact their classmates on questions regarding class assignments. They share ideas and brainstorm on the assignment given for better understand of the subject matter. (personal interview with Ayubu, November, 2019).*

It is evident from the analysis that FB significantly enhances both cooperative and collaborative learning among students. It was indicated that some students are very shy to contribute during lesson, while others were conformable expressing themselves in the class. Therefore, the use of FB as a medium of instruction appears to have bridged the gap between the introvert and extrovert students hence creating a storming session among them without necessarily being physical. From all indications, this finding is at the same pace with Balakrishnan (2017) position, this scholar postulated that despite the different perspectives of students from both countries on FB usage, they are positive towards using FB to enhance learning because it allows active interaction, improve communication with academics and peers, collaborate with experts, have easy access to study materials and maintain their social network at the same time. On the reasons for teachers' used of FB as a teaching instrument at nomadic school in Kenya, it was reported by all my participants that FB has audience and FB is easy to pass information in the class.

#### *FB has a wider audience*

From the interview conducted, the participants unanimously said that the key reason they adopted FB for teaching is because of it wide audience. Specifically, Anasa and Barasa reported that all students in the class subscribe to FB platform. Abbo added that he observed that all his students in chemistry lesson not only owned mobile phones, but they have FB application (app.) that they used for communication and exchange of pictures. In fact, Abbo went further to say that some students who for one reason or the other absence themselves from the class usually have idea on what was taught in the lesson. This is possible because students who are present in the class immediately send the topic of the lesson to those students who are absent. In addition, Aruzi said that though socialisation with peers and friends from far and near made students in the class to use FB app, however, he maintained that he was forced to introduce lesson through FB platform because of students' utilisation of this app.

In the same manner, Beno and Busara were of the view that they have large number of students offering subjects like mathematics and English language. For teacher to teach a class of about 52 students effectively was an uphill task. Conversely, the same number of students understanding a teacher adequately and properly is absolutely impossible. Consequently, the use of FB to teach appears to resolve the challenges associated with large class. In support to the above assertion, Selwyn (2007) held that FB in recent times has become the social network site of choice to college teachers because of its reach to the wider audience in and outside the class. Additionally, Smith (2016) stated that students believed that FB is a non-intrusive information tool that which provide valuable communications to a wider audience. According to Rutter, Roper and Lettice (2016), the ability for students to be able to interact/ask question to the teacher and having them answered via FB is a touch that could not exist in the conventional class setting.

*For easy access and information dissemination*

Another theme which was so pronounced on reason for the use for the FB in nomadic schools was the easy ways one used to access and dissemination of information to nomadic children in the class. Abbo asserted that despite the fact that students in the class used FB for immoral activities with one another, it is also an easier way to access and circulate information to students who are either present or absent in the class. The researcher was forced probed further the kind of immoral activities students use FB for. In response, Abbo said:

*I have come to the realisation that few students send love messages to their girl or boy friends. In fact, some bad ones even send nude pictures. This is one of abuses of FB by students (personal interview with Abbo, March, 2019)*

In addition to the above narrative, Ayubu responded:

*I want to tell you that there are some enumerated risks associated with FB users which include criminal activities like identity theft, fake contacts which is very prevalent today, sexual abuse, cyber bullying or harassment and unsuitable advertising (personal interview with Ayubu, March, 2019).*

In contrast to Abbo and Ayubu assertions, Chilemba said that FB users can easily access and circulate information during lesson. Ayubu quickly cited example in which FB was used to quickly access information in history lesson. He maintained that a topic on 'Pan African Nationalism' was taught in his class, the pictures of some Pan-Africanists such as Dr Azikiwe of Nigeria, Dr Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Dr Nkrumah of Ghana and Dr Nyerere of Tanzania were quickly accessed by two of his students and circulated in the class before the lesson was over.

From the narrative, though it was reported that FB users (students) perpetuated immorality such as cyber bullying using FB page, however, all the participants unanimously agreed that its importance during the lesson outweigh its disadvantages. From the interpretive position, it may be concluded that pockets of nomadic students actually used FB account to lure innocent ones into criminalities. Apparently, this might be the reason there are school violence of all sorts in most of the nomadic secondary schools in recent time. In spite of the ills stated above, FB users were able to access and circulate important educational information as it relates to the lesson as quickly as possible.

### **Discussion of findings**

The findings of this study indicated that social media platform such as FB was mostly used as instructional facility in nomadic secondary schools. For instance, it was discovered that nomadic schools teachers especially in arts, social sciences and natural sciences used the medium to illustrate salient topics to the students. Subjects such as English, Mathematics and Geography to mention but a few often dreaded by the majority of students were made simple through the use of games related or pictorial method. Alfirević (2015) have argued that games and pictures have been proven to be interesting and effective for acquiring English and increasing their motivation to learn the language. However, da Silva (2020) was of the view that students' enjoyment of vocabulary learning may stem from the reading activities and application of fun games. It was also revealed that the use of FB enhanced collaborative learning among students within or outside classroom setting. It is pertinent to argue that by using FB to work collaboratively allow students to work on their strengths, develop critical thinking skills and creativity, validate their ideas and appreciate a range of individual learning styles. From all indications, the use of FB gives the teacher an opportunity and structures by which students can help and support one another in their tasks. The findings is in agreement to Lee's (2018) position who held that FB proved to be an effective learning tool in supporting discussion, interaction, communication and collaboration between teachers and students, and among students.

The above assertion was canvassed by Ferdig (2007) when he stated that FB promote social interaction between students, potentially supporting active learning, social learning, and student knowledge construction within a student-centred, constructivist environment. Findings also indicated that FB has become the social network site of choice by nomadic secondary schools teachers and students. The reasons adduced for the use of FB were based its growing audience and easy information dissemination to students. Teachers used FB to connect easily with their students on assignments, useful links, and samples of work outside of the classroom. Aside from teachers, students used FB to contact their classmates on issues such as questions regarding class assignments or examinations as well as collaborate on assignments. From all indications, this singular act enables nomadic students to detach from teacher-centre to students-centre method which is adopted in all nomadic secondary schools in recent times. The findings affirmed the earlier position held by Bryant, Coombs and Pazio (2014), Shaw (2017) that FB offers powerful development and distribution capacities that allow students and groups to craft, control, and circulate messages to potentially large and widely dispersed audiences at relatively low cost.

### **Conclusion**

The study explored how and why nomadic teachers use FB for teaching in formal nomadic schools. The conclusion provides findings to the set of questions identified at the outset of the paper. From all indications, the disadvantages of FB usage were considerably lower in comparison to the advantages hence its adoption in nomadic secondary schools in Kenya. In light of the above, it was discovered that FB does not negatively affect students' academic performance, rather, it paves the way for the sharing of current and archival information, for cooperative and collaborative learning among nomadic school children. Furthermore, it provides information to the wider audience and easy transmission of information to all the members of the class at a shortest possible time.

### **Recommendations**

In all the nomadic schools visited in Nigeria, teachers still use the traditional chalk-and-board method to teach in their various classes. Similarly, the students-centre method of instruction being proposed by education scholars and researchers and adopted by other countries is yet to find expression within Nigeria educational space. Therefore, the achievement recorded within Kenya schools teachers in the context of the use of FB as a teaching aid, should be emulated by nomadic school teachers in Nigeria. From all indications, if FB is adopted in Nigeria educational setting, it will not only bridge geographical distance between the nomadic students and teachers, but it will also help students to be interested in learning and sharing of external instructional materials among themselves

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