Social Media Learning Work Groups for Youth Skills Development in Agricultural Learnership Programs

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Abstract. Social media has prompted researchers to reconsider how researchers teach and train within educational research discourse. It is essential to investigate and understand how social media platforms contribute to the teaching and learning process. These platforms offer various functions, such as creating groups via smartphones, which are used to gather learners attending the same classes and are expected to perform the same tasks. In youth skills development programmes, like learnerships for agricultural courses, many participants have little to no prior agricultural education. This paper examines the importance of social media work groups for young learners in the learnership programmes. The study disbursed participatory action research for a group of learners, allowing them to participate freely as equals. The learners' discourse was analysed using critical discourse analysis. What emerged from the talks was that learners often feel confused about what they are being taught. The introduction of social media work groups has created an environment where learners can collaboratively share and review information. These groups turned out to be both enjoyable and effective tools for reinforcing training content and motivating learners to continue. They also serve as educational and social platforms, helping learners develop social skills. The study clearly shows that social media work groups foster a sustainable learning environment during agricultural learnerships. It recommends further research into the ethical and sustainable use of social media work groups in education, as well as ways to improve their integration into teaching and learning processes.

Keywords: *Social media, sustainable learning environment, Agricultural learnership, Youth, Skills development.*

1. Introduction

Nthoesane and Teele (2024) and Giwu et al. (2025) reported that youth participation in agriculture is influenced not just by a lack of motivation or inspiration, but also by the resources needed to acquire and practise farming skills. The scarcity of job opportunities and uncertainty about the future drive youth in South Africa's townships to engage in available skills development and learning programs (Maisiri & Van Dyk, 2021), regardless of their ambitions or aspirations related to these programs. In the realm of learning, digital technologies go beyond mere support; they transform how people learn and interpret learning itself (Momani et al., 2023). These technologies offer the potential to diversify learning activities across various social contexts (Sutherland, 2020). In a post-digital perspective, distinctions such as online versus offline, digital versus analogue, or hybrid

versus blended lose significance in understanding learning (Sayaf et al., 2022). Social media has altered the way researchers perceive this social form. Digital learning spaces encompass activities enabled by digital technologies, including access to social media (Momani et al., 2023). These spaces emerge from various social forms, including individual and self-directed work, collaborative and cooperative efforts, collective activities, and stigmergic production (Zheng et al., 2023). Learning activities such as inquiry, construction, and communication take centre stage, with roles within each learning space including cognitive partners, collaboration tools, sharing mechanisms, network relations, and network effects. Overall, the social media learning space can enhance individual agency, facilitate collaborative knowledge building, promote transparency, and encourage interaction with others (McLaren et al., 2022).

Young learners in the twentieth century have become digitally savvy and gadget enthusiasts (Jackson & Gifford, 2023; Kurniawati & Sutharjana, 2023; Roy, 2021). Smartphones play a pivotal role in their daily social lives, as information is sourced and exchanged through these devices via social media (Cordella et al., 2020). Social media could play a vital role as an andragogical learning tool for young adult learners because they are already operating in that space (Vera et al., 2023; Yadav, 2021). Emerging from the colonial and apartheid-era agricultural education, agriculture has been portrayed as an unattractive field for previously disadvantaged communities in South Africa (Gallo, 2020; Gamble, 2021). Preceding an era where, in the educational practice, agricultural activities in schools are directly or indirectly used as punishment for the young learners (Mahlangu et al., 2021). In public schools emanating from apartheid public schools, it has become a norm that problematic learners are sent to work in the gardens when their teachers are dissatisfied with their behaviour in classrooms (Gamble, 2021). These actions influence how learners would perceive agriculture as a field of learning or practice. Young adult learners would lose or not develop any interest in agriculture; blended and online learning have reshaped the educational modalities. This paper aims to explore the relevance of social media work groups as a potential motivator for adult learners in the agricultural education sector.

2. Literature review

2.1 Individual digital learning versus cooperative digital learning

In the realm of individual digital learning, learners take ownership of their tools and refine their work methods (Dietrich et al., 2021). Each learner must customise their tools by aligning them with their goals and taking purposeful actions (Kümmel et al., 2020). The working group consists of several learners who closely collaborate within a shared practice (Kwiatkowska & Wiśniewska-Nogaj, 2022), embodying a spirit of cooperation. Cooperative work breaks tasks into independent components, while collaborative work signifies a collective effort from all group members (Lu & Smiles, 2022). A community of interest encompasses a potentially large group of individuals united by a common interest (Abidin et al., 2021). The concept of collective activity pertains to the combined efforts of multiple individuals who may have different objectives but contribute to a greater activity that surpasses what any single person could accomplish alone (Carroll et al., 2023). Online communities foster a social environment where learners collectively construct a learning space for cooperative tasks (Lu & Smiles, 2022). An online community often emerges from a common interest, without a shared aim, goal, or problem (Shaw et al., 2021; Yuhanna et al., 2020). Stigmergic production supports the digital learning environment, described as open connections, where learners create, contribute to, and interact within online social networks. The term 'stigmergic' denotes structures that grow naturally without a central authority or guiding force (Casamayor-Pujol et al., 2020). Collaborative knowledge building involves the emerging idea of 'collective knowledge construction'. Digital technologies can enhance a group's ability to build collaborative knowledge by offering various tools and spaces for cooperation (Kwiatkowska &

Wiśniewska-Nogaj, 2022). These technologies play a vital role in fostering transparency within a community. Open communication refers to a communication style that is accessible and available to everyone, thereby enhancing transparency regarding learner activities and facilitating the effective use of collective resources among learners (Shaw et al., 2021). Engaging in open communication, such as through collaborative groups on social media, can aid learners by enabling them to observe and learn from their peers' work. The connections facilitated by network relations and effects allow learners to engage with people and resources worldwide (Lewis, 2020). The concept of networked learning directly links networking to educational experiences. It emphasises the importance of creating connections among learners, between learners and trainers, and between learners and their educational resources. Through a diverse network, learners can gain inspiration and knowledge while also contributing their thoughts, posts, and questions to the network, thus participating in stigmergic production. This paper attempts to explore the impact of social media learning work groups as an andragogical tool for skills development of young learners.

3. Conceptual framework

This study is based on two interconnected theories: connectivism and constructivism, forming the philosophical framework of constructive connectivism (Mattar, 2017; Zhou & Brown, 2015). Connectivism emphasises three key aspects: community, knowledge, and learning (Herlo, 2017). Communities generate knowledge, which drives learning, and the knowledge gained by learners influences the community (Downe, 2012). A core principle of connectivism is that each learner acts as a source of information, crucial for forming connections that support personal growth and the broader knowledge network (Hendricks, 2019). The theory encompasses concepts such as networks, chaos theory, and self-organisation (Herlo, 2017), alongside epistemological roots in behaviourism, cognitivism, constructivism, and humanism (Shrivastava, 2018). Connectivism promotes self-directed learning through social networking and collaboration tools (Langridge, 2023), utilising various online information sources. From this perspective, learning centres on establishing and maintaining connections among learners (Alam, 2023; Langridge, 2023). These connections are essential for constructing knowledge within a dynamic educational setting, rendering traditional methods of delivering dense content less effective. Overall, connectivism is particularly relevant for online education, emerging as a modern educational theory aligned with the extensive use of internet technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) (Corbett & Spinello, 2020; Langridge, 2023).

The second theory, constructivism, is a generative learning theory that details how learners create meaning from their experiences and build knowledge both individually and socially (Suhendi et al., 2021). Stemming from psychology and philosophy, constructivism likely originated from Piaget's work (1950) and was expanded upon by theorists such as Vygotsky and Brunner (1961), who emphasised that individuals internally generate knowledge through their personal experiences (Mayer, 2008). This framework serves as an educational philosophy that clarifies various other theories like situated cognition, activity theory, experiential learning, anchored instruction, and authentic learning (Mattar, 2017). Key principles of constructivism highlight (a) active learning, (b) the importance of language in the learning process, and (c) a learner-centred environment (Efgivia et al., 2021). Instruction grounded in constructivist concepts is typically collaborative and exploratory, often lacking clearly defined outcomes. It frequently includes critical thinking activities, peer review, and group projects. Learners can greatly benefit from utilising their surrounding networks to share experiences and knowledge. This collaboration will enhance trainers' efforts, as their instructions will reach multiple learners who can then support one another's learning. The philosophical lens of constructive connectivism would allow learners using social media to be viewed as active creators of knowledge, utilising

various sources as nodes connected to learning during training sessions. Where they, as a community, create and learn from each other, the knowledge they share amongst themselves.

4. Research methodology

The agricultural learnership learners and trainers engaged each other during classroom sessions and were viewed as co-researchers throughout the study. Co-researchers participated in the learnership program for the accredited Mixed Farming Systems qualification by AgriSETA (Agricultural Sector Education and Training Authority), which is a South African government-funded accreditation body. Invitations for learners were communicated through announcements in classes during sessions, encouraging their participation in the study.

4.1 Research design

The research was conducted at training venues over a six-month period, involving discussions and collaborations among co-researchers. All participants served as research partners or co-researchers to create an environment where they realise their power while minimising power imbalances, especially between learners and trainers (Cornish et al., 2023; Teele, Mahlomaholo & Nkoane, 2020). The co-researchers voluntarily participated in the study throughout the research period. A key decision is to perceive research partners as co-researchers rather than subjects (Rumsey et al., 2022). Although co-researchers may have limited material resources, all participants contributed their insights as knowledgeable participants in the knowledge production process (Brydon-Miller et al., 2020). The learners and trainers, as co-researchers, were made aware that they were part of an ongoing research project during the study period.

4.2 Research method

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology was adopted, integrating elements of connectivism and constructivism, while also drawing on behavioural, humanistic, cognitive, and constructivist epistemologies (Mattar, 2017). PAR emphasises the value of experiential knowledge in addressing issues caused by unequal and harmful social systems and in envisioning and implementing alternatives (Cornish et al., 2023). It involves the participation and leadership of people experiencing issues, who take action to produce emancipatory social change through systematic research that generates new knowledge (Guy et al., 2020). PAR fosters engagement between researchers and communities aiming to document, challenge, and transform social justice conditions (Fine et al., 2021). A WhatsApp group with seventy-two learners was created via smartphone, with all participants enrolled in the same course (Bates et al., 2018). Learners were invited to join the group themselves and were recognised as co-researchers throughout the study to promote a shared power dynamic and engagement (Cutter-Mackenzie & Rousell, 2019). Both learners and trainers contributed throughout the study as co-creators of knowledge and partners in reviewing, analysing and understanding the findings. Learners engaged with one another and with their trainers in the same group. The team, comprising six learners and two trainers, was formed and guided by a shared vision to assess how social media learning groups could support the development of youth skills in agricultural learnerships. This team was responsible for taking action, planning, assessing, reviewing and analysing generated data. The process of a PAR that the co-researchers' team followed included building relationships, establishing working practices, developing a shared understanding of the issue, observing, collecting, and generating materials, conducting collaborative analysis, and planning and implementing actions.

4.3 Generating data

By participating in direct interactions (in-person or via technology) and thoroughly analysing empirical data, co-researchers distil key themes (listed in Table 1) that reveal the assumptions and meanings influencing the cultural context (Krzyżanowski, 2020). The sessions were video- and voice-recorded using a smartphone's voice note and video camera, as well as WhatsApp text messages. Additionally, camera and voice note recordings were included, along with notes made by co-researchers during sessions by learners to express their experiences during the study period. The learners and trainers engaged in conversations about their experiences using social media in the learning work group during the course of skill development. These sessions were started by the proposal of a topic such as "the impact of social media work group". The idea was not to make it look like a questioning session, but rather to propose a topic where everyone would be involved and able to engage. This resonates with the application of PAR, where, in the process of generating data, the lead researcher does not attempt to use co-researchers as instruments of data collection, but rather conducts research with them. Co-researchers who were unable to participate during sessions but wished to contribute later were also permitted to submit their contributions via text or voice recording through WhatsApp.

4.4 Data processing

Data were organised using a SWOT framework, highlighting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This analysis helped co-researchers identify four themes to inform the analysis of transcribed data. The transcribed data were deliberated upon by the team of co-researchers to assign all relevant contributions to the relevant themes. The key areas included themes that addressed the distribution of course materials, preparation of lessons, continuation of in-class engagements, and reinforcement of teachings from class. A SWOT analysis was used by co-researchers to analyse weaknesses, strengths, opportunities, and threats within the contributions to those themes. Given the complexity of studying social phenomena, a multidisciplinary and multimethodological approach is essential (Zhao et al., 2014; Zhao et al., 2018).

The team of co-researchers familiarised themselves with the transcribed data and formed codes by labelling data segments to demonstrate patterns in transcribed text and talks. These codes were grouped into clusters that align with the patterns supporting the potential themes. The co-researchers then reviewed the potential themes to identify those that closely related to the codes, and those that did not meet this criterion were discarded. Then each selected theme was conceptualised based on its relevance to the objective of this study.

4.5 Data analysis

Insights from discussions recorded in audio and video formats on WhatsApp were transcribed and examined through critical discourse analysis (CDA) to extract discursive practices and underlying meanings (Fan, 2019; Webster, 2015). CDA was conducted to explore both written and spoken texts, revealing sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias (Catalano & Waugh, 2017; Flowerdew & Richardson, 2018). Generated data included routine audio and video recordings, as well as written materials (Pedapudi & Vadlamani, 2023). Data analysis included all dimensions of discourse relevant to communicative events, interpretation, and comprehension (Krzyżanowski, 2020; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Special attention was given to the dynamics of power, dominance, and inequality, particularly how these elements are reproduced or contested by participants in both conversation and text (Machin & Abousnnouga, 2013). The goal was to reveal what is implicit, obscured, or not readily apparent regarding control over discourse and the legitimising structures that underpin it (Zhao et al., 2018). The analysis exposed

dominance and resistance strategies, as well as the ideologies that drive either the reinforcement of or opposition to dominance and inequality (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). This study investigated the effectiveness of social media work groups in the youth skills development program towards agricultural qualification.

5. Findings

The engagements amongst co-researchers took place in the classrooms during theoretical sessions of agricultural learnership. The engagements focused on the reflections of the co-researchers on their experiences using social media as an educational aid during learnership. The co-researchers consisted of qualified agricultural assessors who were accredited by AgriSETA, as well as young adults, some of whom had not completed their tertiary education, while most were school leavers who had recently completed their basic education and were awaiting entry to higher education or the labour market. The conversations were not conducted in the form of questions or interviews; rather, topics that relate to experiences using social media working groups for the purpose of agricultural learnership theory teaching and learning were posed, and conversations flowed from one to the other. Everyone was allowed to speak their mind freely without restriction from anyone; everybody understood that they were equals. These sessions were recorded, and those who couldn't express themselves were encouraged to send their contributions in the form of a voice note, video note, or text message via WhatsApp group. The video and voice recordings were transcribed, and only those that were relevant to the themes were analysed and tabulated.

Table 1: Research findings from the discussions of the study

Co-researchers	Contributions
1. Distribution of training course material	
Co-researcher 4	*"I remember when I lost one of my course materials, I just went to the group and had access to the one that was sent in the group previous"*
Co-researcher 2	*"without asking, I was also able to go to previous messages in the group and get the course materials that I did not have"*
Co-researcher 9	*"it saves time when documents are sent in the group rather than sent individually"*
2. Preparation for training lessons	
Co-researcher 7	*"at first I did not understand what I was expected to do with the information the trainer shared in the group, but as time went, I saw how important the information is for me to prepare myself for next class"*
Co-researcher 2	*"every time the trainer shares information that we must prepare for next class with, that becomes a reminder to me that I have to search information to prepare for next class"*
Co-researcher 8	*"I think it is important so that we do not become surprised by information presented in class"*
Co-researcher 6	*"the first lesson before the WhatsApp group was created, when the trainer was talking in class I couldn't understand anything, everything sounded gibberish"*
Co-researcher 3	*"the information shared for preparation in group helped to search relevant information, read it and I can participate more in class because most things sound like reminders and I ask questions for clarity"*
3. Continues engagements after class	
Co-researcher 5	*"sometimes this group overload my phone with many messages, I will have about 50 unread messages, but they are fun to read"*
Co-researcher 10	*"I am anti-social, but in this group I am able to engage with other students about jokes and our work"*

Co-researcher 3	*"me too I am very shy, but through this group it is like I am used to everyone, we chat about things that were discussed in class, this group has helped me to continue with this learnership"*
Co-researcher 7	*"at some stage I wanted to quit, but this group has helped me to want to continue, everybody is now like a big family, we chat, share jokes and important information about agriculture"*
4. Reinforcement of teachings from training lessons	
Co-researcher 9	*"I used engagements from the WhatsApp group as reminder for instructions and teachings that were shared in the group"*
Co-researcher 1	*"the learnership WhatsApp group is very important to me because it reminded me of many things that were discussed in class"*
Co-researcher 6	*"I enjoyed the group because some of my questions were answered in the group without me asking them"*
Co-researcher 2	*"the information that we share in the group remain there as long as the group is not deleted, I always read those messages, and they are fun to read because they remind me of many things that were taught in class"*
Co-researcher 8	*"some learners write useless things in the group, but I enjoy them because it's mostly jokes. What I love about this group is the trainer's responses, many of our questions are answered while we are at home without waiting for the next class"*

5.1 Theme 1: Distributing course materials

The course material distribution in the theoretical learnership programs still follows the traditional way of distribution. The trainer or facilitator distributes the hard copies to the learners, and they must carry the materials with them every day they attend class. In cases where some learners experience difficulties or lose their materials, it becomes challenging to reprint and deliver the course materials to them. Co-researcher 1 demonstrates the significance of the social media work group as a platform that stores information for later use or as a referral when they said, "…I just went to the group and had access …". This highlights the importance and role of the social media work group in training, where it is used as an instrument for circulating course materials. Co-researcher 2 and Co-researcher 9 stated that, "without asking, I was also able to…" and "it saves time when documents are sent in the group…", similar to the sentiments of Co-researcher 1. This highlights the value of the work group as a user-friendly platform and database for storing and sharing course materials throughout the course.

5.2 Theme 2: Preparation of lessons

The learners in the learnership program are presented with the learning documents in the course materials. These learning materials are available in hard copy form and are susceptible to damage or loss. Similarly, these materials could serve a better purpose when they are electronic and could circulate amongst WhatsApp group members. To prepare learners for the coming learning sessions, written instructions and directives are texted in the group by the trainer or facilitator.

Learners find lessons confusing and difficult to understand during training sessions. Co-researcher 7 expresses this frustration by saying, "…I did not understand what I was expected to do …". They further elaborate, mentioning that "…I saw how important the information is for me to prepare myself for the next class", highlighting the role of the work group as a tool that provides crucial information to be considered for subsequent sessions. Co-researcher 2 indicated that the "…a reminder to me that I have to search for information to prepare for the next class", suggesting that posting necessary reading materials for the upcoming class serves as a reminder to learners to prepare. This shows the effectiveness of work groups in lesson preparation, as evidenced when Co-researcher

8 stated, "…we do not become surprised by information presented in class", implying that the information posted by the trainer helps learners understand the training content. The learners revealed that the initial classes are often difficult to grasp, possibly because some are unfamiliar with the content. Co-researcher 6 said, "…when the trainer was talking in class, I couldn't understand anything…", which demonstrates how the work group, through information shared by the trainer, guides learners towards relevant study materials for the next session. Additionally, Co-researcher 3 emphasises this point, adding that "…I can participate more in class…", showing the potential of work groups to motivate and improve learner participation during training. When they mentioned that the information shared in the work group "…helped to search relevant information, read it…", it underscores the importance of work groups in motivating learners to find and utilise relevant information to participate effectively in the learning process.

5.3 Theme 3: Continuous engagement in class

The traditional training approach in the learnership program is that learners and trainers or facilitators only engage in classrooms, and the lessons end there. In the WhatsApp working group, learners gain clarity and have the opportunity to continue engaging with the group and freely interact with their trainer. The shy or more reserved learners are able to engage and ask questions in the group. Even the trainer has the opportunity to repeat or provide further clarity on some learning-related issues that might have been left behind during classroom sessions.

Co-researcher 5 warns of the burden of text messages during engagements after class on the work group, stating "…this group overloads my phone with many messages…". However, they also approve of the content by saying "…they are fun to read", and Co-researchers 10 and 7 mention "…jokes…". Co-researcher 10 demonstrates the work group's ability to create a social space where individuals can express themselves, saying, "I am anti-social, but in this group, I am able to engage with…". Similarly, Co-researcher 3 expresses, "…I am very shy, but through this group…", indicating that the work group acts as an enabler of engagement for learners with social issues. When they state, "…we chat about things that were discussed in class…", it implies that the work group is also used for ongoing discussions after training sessions. Consequently, when Co-researchers 3 and 7 say, "…this group helped me…", it reflects their gratitude for the group as a source of encouragement to continue participating in the training. Co-researcher 7 adds, "…everybody is now like a big family…", highlighting the welcoming and friendly relationships among learners fostered through the social media work group for educational and socialising purposes.

5.4 Theme 4: Reinforcement of teachings from the training lessons

The trainer or facilitator uses the group to stress the points that they feel need more emphasis. Where they feel that a specific topic still needs more clarity or debate, and more engagement with the learners. Since the trainer has the opportunity to send text messages, voice or video recordings, this gives the trainer a more conducive platform to express themselves.

Co-researchers 9 and 1 concerning recycling of training content said, "…as a reminder for instructions and teachings that were shared…" and "…it reminded me of many things that were discussed…", illustrating the role that the social media work group plays in reinforcing lessons after classroom sessions. Co-researcher 6 said, "…my questions were answered in the group…", while Co-researcher 8 mentioned, "…the trainer's responses…" and Co-researcher 2 noted, "…remain there as long as the group is not deleted…" — this shows the effectiveness of the work group as a convenient platform for questions, answers, and accessible learning resources for the learners by the trainer. They further state, "…they remind me of many things that were taught in class," indicating how

the work group becomes an immediate source of shared teaching materials after training sessions. Co-researcher 8 said, "…learners write useless things…"; they expressed dissatisfaction with some of the content circulated by other learners in the work group. However, they added, "…but I enjoy them because it's mostly jokes…" to demonstrate their acceptance of the content as fun and entertaining.

6. Discussion of findings

Yang et al. (2018), aligning with this study's findings, propose that social media is the optimal platform for communicating various aspects and exploring how to effectively engage learners through its interactive features. In training, incorporating social media into curricula involves creating lessons that connect relevant content, social media platforms, and learner interests. Salamah et al. (2022) found that a universal training approach is ineffective due to the differing knowledge and experiences of learners. Consistent with this study's perspective, they advocate for adaptive training, requiring trainers to develop skills that enable them to adapt to evolving training environments. Bonnes et al. (2020) reported that trainers who attended digital media courses demonstrated higher media-didactical competence and self-efficacy and used digital media more frequently in training to address educational workgroups within social media contexts. Social network tools offer learners and institutions numerous opportunities to enhance learning methods (Sasikala et al., 2021). Social media matched training objectives for motivating learners and offering flexible delivery methods (Callan & Johnston, 2020).

Hamid (2020) observed that most learners use social media for knowledge sharing. Similar to this study, social media tools, such as WhatsApp groups, facilitated academic sharing and activities. Sasikala (2021) recommended integrating social media plug-ins that enable sharing and interaction. Luttrell (2025) uses weekly posts on Facebook via the Student Media Centre outlets. The findings align with Dahdal (2020), who found that WhatsApp group discussions enhance engagement and motivation, with learners being more involved in assignments that incorporate WhatsApp. Social media is also a tool for learners to build professional networks (Sasikala, 2021). Van De Beemt et al. (2020) warned that inconsistent research results and low-quality studies hinder clear conclusions about the classroom use of social media. Callan and Johnston (2020) highlighted Facebook's appeal for accessibility, ease of use, and fostering collaboration, noting that different social media forms attract various learner types. Oh et al. (2020) demonstrated the effectiveness of social media in education by increasing learners' willingness to learn, especially in courses involving e-portfolio development on Facebook. They argued that using social media conditionally in project-based learning can foster motivation (Tzur et al., 2023). Conversely, Rouse (2020) cautioned about the risks associated with learners' self-expression on social media.

Freeman and Maloney (2021) explored the use of avatars for self-representation and opinion sharing. Singh et al. (2020) utilised Working Groups to strengthen teamwork, while Forsentlund et al. (2021) emphasised managing posts and establishing rules for group discussions. Social media promotes learner engagement by making idea sharing and opinion expression more comfortable (Purwanto et al., 2022). Its capacity to foster collaboration allows educators and learners to exchange ideas, enriching the educational experience. Purwanto et al. (2022) suggest using online communities regardless of the learning format—online, blended, or face-to-face. Dragseth (2019) found that student feedback highlights social media's contribution to learning and advocates its future use. Mpungose (2020), Greenhow and Galvin (2020), Cavus et al. (2021), and Aduba and Mayowa-Adebara (2022) support these findings, noting that social media platforms provide a comfortable environment for students to express themselves freely.

7. Recommendations

The study recommends further research on the regulated and ethical use of social media within training, teaching and learning. The educators and trainers' education must include digital literacy that incorporates social media as a learning tool. In light of the use of social media in educational discourse, concerns arise that trainers or facilitators may engage in illicit activities that reflect poorly on their professional judgment and attitudes or harass learners in a manner that makes them uncomfortable. The development of policies that protect the interests of learners must be explored; moreover, where trainers or facilitators engage in highly controversial activities, they should be held accountable. What is important is that facilitators or trainers in their private capacity must take reasonable precautions to ensure that their activities on social media are not connected to learners or their professional identities. To address challenges in the use of social media, educational institutions must develop comprehensive social media policies that address these ethical concerns, provide training on digital literacy, establish clear standards for privacy and academic integrity, and ensure equitable access to technology.

Professionals must safeguard their online reputation while actively using social media to enhance their professional learning networks. Trainer or facilitator education programs must accept the responsibility of ensuring that trainers or facilitators enter their classrooms with a clear understanding of both the transformative capabilities of new technologies and the risks they may present. Highlighting the significance of transparency, especially regarding prioritising clear communication about information circulated in the groups. This involves informing learners and their families about the collected information used for other purposes and who has access to it. Such transparency is not only a legal requirement under data protection laws but also an ethical duty that fosters trust and integrity in the educational space. Sharing information on social media raises significant concerns about intellectual property rights. There must be respect for intellectual property and special emphasis on the importance of educating learners on ethical media use. This includes teaching learners about copyright laws, encouraging proper citation practices, and ensuring that all digital content used or shared on social media is either owned, licensed, or falls under fair use. Facilitators must lead by example by crediting sources and using copyrighted material responsibly, thereby establishing a professional standard for learners to emulate.

8. Conclusion

Social media platforms are proven to be effective tools for teaching and learning in young adult training settings. The motivation of young adult learners is influenced by several factors, including the use of social media for discussions, reinforcement, and the sharing of information. When used as educational tools during skill development, social media platforms must be monitored for relevance and focus. The study demonstrates that to successfully integrate social media into the curriculum, educators need to develop adaptable training and digital skills. Social media work groups offer an appealing way to keep young learners engaged during skill development programmes. The inclusion of these groups helps attract the attention of young learners in skill development initiatives. The study suggests that factors affecting the use of social media work groups include educational culture, attitude towards social media, support, professional development of trainers or facilitators, learning goals, and a clear position of social media work groups in the curriculum.

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