USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR LEARNING IN THE FET PHASE

BY

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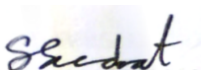
Declaration

I declare that this report is my own unaided work. It is being submitted as a partial fulfilment of the degree of Masters of Education by coursework and research report in the Faculty of Humanities, to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination to any other university.

……  ……

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Abstract

The use of information and communication technology (ICTs) has been increasing in the educational domain since the early 2000s. This study aimed to explore how an app, such as WhatsApp, which was not designed for teaching and learning is influencing the educational domain. Purposeful sampling was used in which 9 grade 11 educators and 70 grade 11 learners from a small private school in Johannesburg were selected to complete questionnaires regarding their use of social networking for teaching and learning. Axial coding was used to analyse their responses of how they are utilising social networking in an educational domain. The study found that learners and educators are using social networking groups more for the sharing of subject related information, rather than for engaging in meaningful discussions about the content which fosters a constructivist approach to learning. However, these social networking groups have the potential to create communities of practices amongst educators and learners which can be beneficial for learning as well as for the social well-being of learners as it creates a sense of community and belonging. This study recommended that further research needs to be conducted in terms of learners' attainment and the use of social networking groups for teaching and learning, as well as learners social well-being and the use social networking groups for learning and teaching.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Background

I live in a rather small urban community and since 2010 there has been an increase in the use of ICTs (information and communication technology) and more specifically the use of social media amongst the community. Social media involves the use of websites or applications which allow people to instantly communicate and share resources with one another. People in my community have started using social media to connect with neighbours and people in surrounding areas. Many people have started using social media not only in their personal lives but for professional use as well. I have been teaching Business Studies at an FET level in a private school in my community for the past eight years and during these eight years the social media app known as WhatsApp has become a popular means of communication within the school. The school is situated in the south of Johannesburg and comprises of learners from a mixed economic background as the school has a 40% bursary policy, which implies that 40% of the learners are from less affluent families and this adds to the diversity within the school.

WhatsApp is a free social messenger app that is owned by Facebook. This app can be easily downloaded on mobile devices and allows people to send text messages, videos, files, voice notes, mapping locations and photos instantly either to a single user or to a group (www.WhatsApp.com).

Not only were we using WhatsApp in our personal everyday lives, but a work chat group was created so that educators could keep up to date with the happenings of the school. Social media apps have been gaining popularity amongst the learners as well. Many of these teens have spent their entire lives growing up being surrounded by technology, unlike the generations before them. They are exposed to various forms of media including watching TV, surfing the web, playing video games and social networking. Teens of today are part of the so called “Facebook generation” or “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001). Prensky (2001) chose the term ‘digital natives’ to describe how todays children and teens are native speakers of the digital language of computers, video games and the internet. Often, teenagers use technology without worrying about the pros and cons and are accustomed to the instantaneity of technology. For educators, even though, for the most part, we are not ‘digital; natives’, but

rather to continue with Prensky's (2001 pg 1) metaphor, "digital migrants", technology has influenced the way we teach in terms of the tools we use, be it from the changeover of green chalk boards to smart boards, or from overhead projectors to data projectors. Thus, the use of ICTs in education is becoming increasingly popular as time goes on and technology is becoming more advanced.

In 2015 learners at my school started forming class chat groups on WhatsApp where they would discuss anything from school work to general happenings of the day. The learners would often refer to these chat groups in class especially when they had homework tasks to complete. On numerous occasions I heard learners say that they would discuss the homework on the chat group especially when presented with challenging homework or assessments to complete. Eventually learners started requesting educators to form subject related WhatsApp groups so that they may discuss content as well as share content with their peers as well as the educator instantly. These WhatsApp groups were not a formal requirement by the school but were rather spontaneously formed by the educators and learners. These groups were being formed with the intention of discussing content knowledge, and all learners were encouraged to collaborate on these groups with their peers and their educator. These groups may be thought of as a community of practice as Lave and Wenger (1991) define a community of practice as a group of people who share a common interest and aim to improve their knowledge about the common interest through collaboration. These WhatsApp chat groups were formed with the intention of knowledge discussion so that the learners could grow from novices to experts as they interact with others and increase their understanding of the specific content knowledge.

At first many educators, myself included, were apprehensive to form these social media chat groups due to privacy and having to engage with learners after school hours. However, after agreeing to form my first subject specific chat group, in 2016, I realised that it had many advantages as well, especially for grade 12 learners who were often away on lengthy study breaks. I was able to share valuable content with the learners and answer any questions they came across while studying. Learners were also able to have discussions with each other about the content under my supervision.

And so, despite some drawbacks such as worrying about learners having access to our personal contact numbers or having to engage with learners after school hours, a number of educators at the school started using WhatsApp as a platform for learning even though it was

not designed with educational purposes in mind. WhatsApp is not an app that was created to be used in learning, however due to its easy accessibility on mobile phones and the instantaneity of communication, it is becoming increasingly popular amongst learners not only in schools but at university levels as well. For example, one of the first things we as Master of Education Students did during our first seminar was share our cell phone numbers so that we could form a WhatsApp group to chat about the content in our electives as well as share information. Everyone in the seminar was very eager to join the WhatsApp group as we viewed it as a platform where we can share information and concerns about the elective and our M.Ed WhatsApp chat group gave us a sense of belonging to a community and that if we find difficulty during the course of the year there are people aside from our lecturer readily available to try and assist us.

The use of WhatsApp chat groups in an educational setting is becoming increasingly popular as it is perceived to be a useful tool, however little research has been done particularly at a school level to determine whether or not it is a useful tool for learning and teaching and how it is being utilised by both educators and learners.

1.2.Aims and Objectives

This study aims to explore the ways in which a social media app, specifically WhatsApp, which was not designed for learning, can facilitate developing a community of practice amongst grade 11 learners and educators, and how the use of the app can enhance or hinder learning and teaching in the FET phase. By exploring the ways in which learners and educators use social networking as a tool for learning and teaching this study seeks to understand how an app which was not designed for learning and teaching is influencing the educational domain.

1.3. Research Question

1.In what ways can a mobile app such as WhatsApp, which was not designed for learning and teaching, influence the educational domain?

I intend answering the above question by looking closely at the following aspects:

Sub- questions:

1) In what ways can we think of a WhatsApp chat group as a community of practice?

2) What is the nature of communication amongst educator and learners and between learners themselves in the WhatsApp chat group?

3) What are the advantages and disadvantages of using a social networking group for educational purposes in the FET phase?

1.4.Rationale

I am particularly interested in conducting research on the ways in which social media, as a means to develop a community of practice can hinder or enhance learning and teaching at an FET phase, because the use of ICTs is becoming increasingly popular in an educational setting. As educators we cannot ignore the advancements of technology and the role these play in education, however we need to know how best to use technology to improve learning. As an educator I often find myself feeling uncomfortable with the use of ICTs in education and I would like to further explore how ICTs, in particular social media apps, could be used in education. I am interested in social media apps as our dependence on social networking is increasing and if we better understand the pros and cons of using social media for teaching and learning, we could integrate these social networking apps into our teaching practices so that it may improve learning.

As mentioned briefly above, a lot of research has been conducted on the use of social networking in higher education such as that of Thinyane, (2009), Bosch (2009) , Hao (2016) and Rambe and Nel (2015), however, not much research has been conducted on the use of apps that were not specifically designed for learning and how it may either improve or hinder education especially within a secondary school setting. Finally, the more research is done, the more our teaching will be informed by research and knowledge, which will improve our teaching and have a positive impact on learning.

It is hoped that through this research educators who are curious about the benefits and short comings of ICTs, and social media as an extension of their teaching practices will make more informed decisions about when and how to use such forms of technology.

1.5.Outline of Chapters

This study is divided into 6 chapters which collectively explore how learners and educators in a private high school in the south of Johannesburg are using an app which was not designed for learning and teaching in an educational context.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to my research and describes the research problem and research questions, as well as establishes the background and rationale behind my proposed study. In this chapter I discuss the need to conduct research regarding the use of social media apps in education and how the use of social media apps in an educational setting could be viewed as a community of practice.

Chapter 2 comprises of my literature review in which I firstly discuss the theoretical background of social constructivism and theories of communities of practice and how these theories link to the use of social networking in an educational setting. Thereafter I explore some of the recent studies that have been conducted regarding the use of ICTs and the collaborative nature of the use of ICTs in education. My exploration focuses on the different ways in which those studies have influenced the nature and framework of my study and what possible contributions my study could make to the educational context.

Chapter 3 details my research methodology. It illustrates that my research is a small-scale investigation in which I had 2 groups of participants selected through purpose sampling. The first group comprised of grade 11 educators and the second group comprised of Grade 11 learners at a school in Johannesburg. It explores the reasons why those groups of participants were selected to participate in my study and the nature of their participation. Each participant was provided with a questionnaire to complete which I then analysed using axial coding looking for key themes such collaboration, nature and frequency of participation in social networking groups for educational purposes.

In chapter 4 I provide a presentation of my data and a discussion of my findings from the educator's questionnaires. 9 grade 11 educators from various subject disciplines completed the questionnaire in which they answered questions on how they may or may not be using social networking for teaching and learning. I firstly look at their general use of social networking and their competences in using social networking. Thereafter I analyse how educators are using social networking for learning and teaching and their opinions regarding learners forming social networking groups to discuss and share subject related content.

Chapter 5 comprises of a presentation of the data and summary of the findings in the learner's questionnaires, 70 grade 11 learners completed the questionnaire by responding to questions based on how they utilise social networking for educational purposes. I firstly look at the general use of social networking by the learners and their level of expertise in the use of social networking. Thereafter I analyse how learners are using social networking in an

educational domain, whether they are merely sharing information or engaging in meaningful discussions about the content.

In chapter 6 I aim to use my findings from chapter 4 and chapter 5 together with my literature review in chapter 2 to answer my research question and explore the implications of using an app which was not designed for teaching and learning in an educational setting. I also discuss how using a WhatsApp chat group can be seen as a community of practice if it is utilised effectively by all members of the group. This chapter also discusses the limitations to my study and future recommendations for research in the filed of ICTs and education.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

As digital information and communication technology has advanced it has influenced teaching and learning as well. Educators and learners alike are beginning to use technology as a tool in an educational setting and there has been much research conducted as to whether technology is changing the ways in which leaners acquire knowledge. This chapter explores some of the recent research on the use of ICTs in education and how the use of ICTs could contribute to collaboration and communication which is the key elements to a constructivist view of learning.

2.1. The role of technology in education

The use of technology in education has been increasing since the early 1990s, recently in South Africa, the Gauteng education MEC Andrek P. Lesufi together with the Gauteng Department of Education has launched a strategic plan through which they aim to provide functional and modern schools with quality teaching. The modernization process involves building classrooms of the future through ICTs so that learners are not only exposed to technology at a university level (Strategic plan 2015-2020,). The strategic plan consists of ten pillars and pillar six includes the integration of ICTs in education, this strategic plan correspondence with *The National Integrated ICT Policy* (2016), which states that by 2030 ICTs will underpin the development of a dynamic and connected information society with a vibrant knowledge society which is prosperous. In order to reach the 2030 vision part of the implementation strategy is exposing learners, from a young age to technology, through the use of ICTs in the classroom.

However, while we are moving towards integrating ICTs in the classroom, there have been various debates regarding the role that technology plays in education and questions whether there is any room for technology in education. This debate has been on going and much research such as that of Bosch (2009), Friesen and Lowe (2012), Rambe and Nel (2015), Cox et al (2004) since the early 2000's has tried to provide an insight into ICTs and education. Some research has focused on teaching specific topics using ICTs such as the use of ICTs in teaching geometric shapes, while other research has tried to focus on the overall effect ICTs have on education (Gilakjani, Leon & Ismail 2013). Cox, Abbot, Webb, Blakeley and Beauchamp (2004) conducted an in-depth literature review in trying to determine the effects that the use of ICTs have on learner attainment. They noted that while the use of ICTs are

becoming increasingly popular in education, the effects are dependant on how the educators are making use of ICTs. Therefore, the pedagogy selected by the educator has a greater impact on the learner's attainment than the mere use of ICTs. For example, if the educator is merely substituting the traditional black board with the use of a smart board but not adjusting their pedagogy accordingly Cox et al (2004, pg 48) noted that this does not have an impact on the learners attainment, as the pedagogy is still viewed in the traditional sense of teaching and learning. Therefore, in using ICTs as part of education, there is no automatic improvement in learners performances but rather it is the manner in which the educator uses the ICTs that has a greater impact. There has been much debate as to whether or not the introduction of ICTs into education has actually changed the way learners acquire knowledge, and in order to examine how ICTs are influencing learning we need to have an in depth understanding of the theories that govern learning.

The advantages of using ICTs in education has been grounded in the philosophy of constructivism, which focus on the idea that education is a very social process which involves the constant interaction between educators and learners and between learners themselves, and through using ICTs this collaborative nature can be enhanced (Oliver, 2002). Therefore, the way educators use ICTs is important as it should fit in with the social nature of learning and not merely be used as a substitute to traditional methods of teaching.

With the increase use of ICTs these social aspects of learning are being transformed from a physical experience to one that is virtual. Social Constructivism emphasises that learning takes place within a context often with others, and in a modern society through the use of technology an environment can be designed which encourages learners to interact and collaborate as technology can create contexts (Gilakjani et al, 2013). Through using ICTs, a learning environment can be created and manipulated in a way that aids social learning.

2.2 Social Constructivism and ICTs

Social constructivism emphasises the notion of constructing knowledge in groups, through collaboration and communication and it seems to be the natural pairing of how social networking can contribute to knowledge construction and learning. Many authors such as that of (Woo & Reeves, 2007; Millard, 2001; Heinz & Procter 2006 and Churcher, Downs & Tewksbury, 2014)) have linked the social constructivist theory to the use of social networking in an educational domain.

Constructivism originated from Piaget's (1967) theory of learning, and the main premise of constructivism is that learning is a process of constructing meaning about one's experiences. Constructivism can be divided into two components a) cognitive constructivism and b) socio constructivism, Piaget (1967) was concerned with cognitive constructivism while Vygotsky (1978) focused on socio-constructivism. Piaget (1967) focused on how a child experiences the world and based on these experiences the child constructs meaning about the knowledge encountered during these experiences. The focus was on meaning making on a personal level of the child. Vygotsky (1978) contributed to social constructivism as he focused on how knowledge is created based on our interaction with others as this interaction forms part of our experiences. Vygotsky acknowledged that humans are social beings, and that the process of knowing is mediated by community and culture.

Social networking facilitates communication between people due to its instantaneity in nature, as with just the click of a button one can easily send a text or a voice note, and communication is viewed as one of the key aspects that allows learning to occur. A social constructivist theory explains how interaction between people can create knowledge and encourage learning. In explaining how social networking can promote learning, Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism theory of learning and Lave and Wenger's (1991) community of practice theory can be useful in explaining how interacting with others individually or in groups can promote learning.

Vygotsky (1978) is one of the key theorists in developmental psychology and the development of cognitive functioning. His work contributed significantly to sociocultural learning theory and continues to promote interest in social, cultural and historical aspects of learning and development, since Vygotsky's (1978) main contribution is based on the idea that interaction with others is a key component for cognitive development to occur. Therefore, without social interaction the structures and patterns of cognitive functioning may not occur. In a classroom situation there is constant social interaction between educator and learners and between learners themselves. This idea of social interaction within a classroom can be extended beyond the classroom, when we think about how apps such as WhatsApp can facilitate communication beyond the classroom.

With digital social networking learners and educators can use social media apps to form groups with each other, and in these groups' classroom discussions can be extended beyond the classroom and beyond notional teaching time. The learners have a platform through

which they can discuss any misunderstandings of the lesson with each other at any time, and if the educator is part of the online group the educator can further mediate learning. Based on Vygotsky (1978) social constructivist theory it is evident that for effective learning to occur a learning environment should have some sort of mentoring, facilitating and scaffolding. Oliver (2004) noted that there is continuous research being conducted on how best technology can provide or increase the level of mentoring and scaffolding needed for effective learning to occur and much of the research focuses on the ideas of collaboration and communication between peers and educators. Therefore, it is not just about making use of ICTs in education, but rather about how ICTs can increase and influence the nature and frequency of communication and collaboration.

This notion of communication and collaboration can be linked to the term "mediation" which is often used to describe what occurs between the educator or more knowledgeable other and the learner during the learning process. When a task is too difficult for a learner to solve him/herself generally with the help of a more knowledgeable other the learner can solve the problem and attain meaning. Vygotsky (1978) makes use of the theory of the "Zone of Proximal Development" to illustrate the importance of a mediator during the learning process. The Zone of Proximal Development is the distance between the actual developmental level and potential developmental level of the learner. In a classroom setting an educator steps in or mediates when a task is too difficult so that a learner may solve the problem and reach a higher level of mental functioning. Therefore, it could be seen that the role of an educator is to lead learners to higher levels of thinking.

Mediation could occur using ICTs as educators can guide the conversation on the social network chat group and assist learners when they do not understand certain concepts allowing learners to move to a higher level of cognitive functioning. Other learners can also be viewed as more knowledgeable others and can mediate learning through peer interaction. Thus, educators or peers do not need to mediate the learning process only physically but, mediation can extend beyond the classroom using ICTs. Dialogue and communication are thus central to the learning process, and the use of social networking groups allows for the creation of virtual communities of practice, where the dialogue and communication about the subject content can be extended beyond the classroom (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

2.3. Communities of Practice

Since Vygotsky (1978), constructivist learning theory has dominated much of the educational theories. It can be argued that the starting point for the theory 'Communities of Practice' was the social aspect of constructivism (Jing, 2017). Vygotsky was the first person to bring social aspects into learning therefore, any theory that holds social interaction as an important aspect of learning cannot deny the role constructivism plays in our understanding of learning.

The term 'Community of Practice' was coined by Lave and Wenger in (1991), the idea of a community of practice is a relatively new concept which they developed through their study of legitimate peripheral participation in apprenticeship situations. In 1998 Wenger built on the communities of practice theory and since then it has been associated with knowledge development in the work place as well as schools. A community of practice refers to a group of people who share common interest and aim to improve their knowledge about the common interest and increase their competence in engaging with the subject matter (Wenger, 1998). In an educational setting the common interest would generally be the subject discipline and the knowledge around the subject discipline. There are three main elements that constitute a community of practice and these are; the domain, the community and the practice. (Wenger, 1998)

The domain refers to the identity defined by the shared interest, it is important that the reason for being part of the community is based on the shared interest and all members have a collective understanding of what the community is about (Wenger, 1998). In my study the domain is the subject specific WhatsApp group that learners and educators are part of. Group members share an understanding that the group is about discussing and sharing information about a specific subject at a grade 11 level. This illustrates an important point of the work that the domain does, that is the main idea of the domain is to define who is included and who is excluded from the group and this is an important aspect in defining the community. Not just anyone is part of the group but rather it is exclusively for grade 11 learners doing physical science for example, as they all have some level of competence and willingness to gain information about physical science.

The second element is the community, the idea of engaging in discussions with each other and sharing information (Wenger, 1998). This allows relationships to form where people in the group can learn from one another. This emphasises Vygotsky's (1978) notion of learning being a social process and that dialogue and speech are important components for learning to

occur. In my study this will involve learners sharing information with each other and having discussions about the content knowledge. Educators can also be part of the groups by sharing useful resources and guiding the discussion of the learners, as the educator may be viewed as being more competent in the specific area of discussion. In such a role the educator would be viewed as a mediator of learning (Vygotsky, 1978) as the educator will guide the discussions and not merely disseminate information.

The third element is the practice, the ability to develop a shared repertoire of resources which could include experiences, notes and ways of solving problems (Wenger, 1998). In my study the ability of building shared resources which all members have access to would include sharing of ideas, notes, past exam papers and discussing how to complete homework activities or assignments. There is also an additional aspect of practice which is how to use social media to communicate, members on the group could ask for assistance in the sharing of documents or voice notes as they may not be familiar with the practice. This illustrates that their communication is based on the ability to use these resources and improve their competence within a subject discipline. The members of the group may not even be aware of the idea that they are gaining skills in the use of social networking as well.

Wenger (1998) further stated that if learning is fundamentally social and it is our social nature as humans that make us know and understand, then based on these assumptions the key element to learning within a community of practice is the nature of communication and collaboration that occurs. The main aim of the community of practice theory is to develop an account for the social nature of learning, emphasising that we do not learn in isolation (Wenger, 2000). Thus, learners need to constantly engage and communicate within a community for learning to occur, so that they may gain knowledge which is valuable to them and valuable to the community. It is important to note that within a classroom setting learners are able to engage in discussions and communicate about the knowledge, thus forming a community of practice, however social networking allows this discussion to carry on beyond the classroom and does not replace the valuable in class activities that occur.

Theories of communities of practice also emphasises the idea that individual and shared meaning making occurs during the learning process. This concept is similar to that of Vygotsky (1978) that learners acquire knowledge from others, through dialogue, and in the process creates meaning about the knowledge for themselves. In a similar way in a community of practice learners are in constant dialogue with others about the knowledge at

hand and this allows them to engage with the knowledge and to construct meaning for themselves. Any curriculum is not only about the body of knowledge being presented, but rather it is also about how the knowledge is communicated to foster leaning and research, and for that reason Lave and Wengers (1991) community of practice theory has become very popular in an educational setting to explain how learning occurs.

Being digitally literate and able to use ICTs to communicate is an essential skill which is needed in the 21st century and part of the 2030 vision for South Africans as stated in the *National Integrated ICT Policy* (2016). Through participation in online communities of practice learners and educators can develop these skills while collaborating about subject content knowledge. This will allow for the mastering of not only the subject content, but improving ones skills in the use of technology for communicating as well, since social networking apps are constantly being updated to incorporate more features to ease communication. Communities of practice theories places an emphasis on language as essentially it views learning through dialogue and communicating with one another. This notion draws from Vygotsky's (1978) idea of language being used as a tool for thought and knowledge creation. Through social networking there is that constant ability to communicate with others who have a similar interest to you with the aim of developing shared resources so that one can improve their knowledge in the subject matter. Social networking allows for the conversation to continue beyond the classroom and can be valuable especially in a school setting where there are time constraints.

Within a community of practice, a learner's role is to participate in a community through discussions and as a learner progresses their identity changes (Jing, 2017). Their identity changes from being a novice to becoming an expert in the community as over time through interactions with others they gain more knowledge and develop a higher cognitive level. Both the educator and learners can be viewed as experts in their fields, as the educator could be an expert in the content being discussed while the learners could be experts in technology itself as young teens and kids seem to grapple technology faster than adults. Therefore, both the educator and learners could share their knowledge with each other so that learning occurs. The mastery in a community of practice is dependant on the level of mastery of the expert in the group, there is a possibility of one of the members leading the whole group astray particularly if the educator is not part of the group.

Communities of practice are, therefore, the basic building blocks of social learning as the aim of the community is to engage in discussions to improve competence. This idea emphasises that learning is a social activity and with the improvement in ICT's it is becoming easier to communicate with each other virtually. People can potentially engage in discussions as well as share resources which would be available for all members on a chat group to view and utilise. In this study one of the main focal points is on how ICTs have the ability to extend a classroom community into a virtual community of learners and educators and how WhatsApp groups function as community of practice.

In this study I will explore how through the use of social media a learning environment can be created which fosters learning and facilitates the idea of creating virtual learning communities where knowledge and experiences can be shared, keeping in mind the social constructivist theory and theories of communities of practice. I would like to determine if the theory does indeed match up with the practice and if learners and educators view any benefit in using social networking groups for educational purposes. Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory and Lave and Wengers (1991) communities of practice theory will assist me in interpreting the data and making sense of the ways in which learners and educators are using an app which was not designed for learning in an educational domain and if social networking apps such as WhatsApp can be beneficial for teaching and learning.

I will identify the components of the chat groups using the communities of practice theories, as a means to analyse the members interactions and to work out what learning, if any is taking place and how it is taking place. I will also explore ways in which group members move from novice to experts in both the content knowledge as well as the practice of social networking. The social constructivist theory will form as a guide in establish how communication over social networking constitutes mediation and allows for cognitive development.

In my study my intention is to not only focus on teacher and learner perceptions, or only on the collaborative nature of using social networking in education, but rather my intention is to focus on a combination of these factors. I intend looking at how learners use social networking between themselves for learning and how educators can facilitate this learning process when they are part of the groups and the nature of collaboration within these groups. I would also like to determine whether both educators and learners believe that there is room to use an App that was not designed for learning in an educational setting.

My study therefore makes reference to social constructivism and the community of practice theory in order to further understand the collaborative nature of social networking and if it can indeed foster learning. There have been various studies about learner and teacher perceptions when using ICTs and the collaboration that is possible when ICTs are used effectively, however my study aims to bring in theories of community of practice to further explore this collaborative nature.

2.4. Classroom Learning Communities and ICTs

Using social media in an educational setting does not take away from the traditional mode of learning in schools which involves an educator delivering content to learners who engage with the content in different ways so that learning may occur. From a social constructivist perspective, the learners engage with the content and interact with others in a way through which meanings may be constructed. In a learning community the educator as well as learners discuss the content in such a way that meaning is negotiated and renegotiated and the learners are viewed as having valuable knowledge as well (Barab & Dodge, 2008). This idea of a classroom as a learning community emphasises the social nature of learning and that communication regarding the knowledge needs to occur so that meanings may be constructed. In a learning community, the learners are constantly in communication with each other about the content and work collaboratively to achieve their goals. The educator is part of the collaboration as he/she works together with the learners to construct meaning. With the increase use of technology mediated communication in educational settings learners and educators are now able to collaborate with each other not only face to face but also distributed across space and time (Barab & Dodge, 2008). However, ICTs should not be viewed as the centre point of learning and teaching, but rather as a means that can facilitate and enhance the nature of communication. Cox and Webb (2004) conducted an in-depth literature review based on published literatures regarding the use of ICTs and pedagogic practices among teachers and they noted that one of the challenges is that educators often think of the technology first and then think about how the technology will influence learning. Educators should rather first assess the impact that the use of ICTs will have on learning and then decide how best to utilise it, and that merely making use of ICTs in teaching and learning does not necessarily mean that learning can be improved, it is largely dependant on the pedagogic practices of the educator.

Using social networking chat groups effectively allows educators and learners to continue collaborating outside of the classroom setting especially when there are time constraints placed in schools. Many times, educators are time pressured to complete certain activities and cover content, however by using social media learners and educators can continue collaborating with each other about the knowledge. Using the concept of 'classroom learning communities' the learners are viewed as having valuable knowledge as well and thus through collaborating with each other knowledge can be shared. Therefore, the educator does not need to be active in all group discussions but rather the educator can monitor and guide the group discussion. Through collaborating both physically and through time and space using social media, knowledge can be socially constructed and shared in communities of practice.

2.5. ICTs and Education

Due to debates around whether ICTs could be the salvation of education (Flacnoe, 2002) or the view that ICTs undermine the practices of the educator (Livingstone, 2012), research around ICTs and education should be viewed as an asset in trying to solve or gain clarity in the matter (Reeves and Oh, 2016). Reeves and Oh (2016) conducted research by analysing education technology research papers in the *Educational Technology and Research Development Journal*, from 1989-2014 to determine how research is being conducted on the use of technology in education. They have noted that there has been a significant increase in the interest of ICTs in education and that majority of the research since 2009 focuses on how learners and educators perceive the use of ICTs in education.

In my research I will be focusing on the practice of using a social networking app such as WhatsApp for learning, and in doing this I will touch on the perceptions of both educators and learners to get a broader understanding of the benefits and hindrances of using social networking for learning. The perceptions that learners and educators have regarding the use of ICTs in education is important as this will influence the manner in which the ICTs are being used. The educators perception regarding the use of ICT serves to be more valuable as Cox and Webb (2004) noted in their extensive literature review, that educators who have a positive perception of ICTs tend to integrate it more effectively into the learning process and those educators also value collaboration and enquiry based learning. The perceptions educators have about the use of ICTs tend to influence their pedagogic practices. Reeves and Oh (2016) however, concluded that we need to move away from the notion of concentrating on perceptions and the use of ICTs and conduct research based on what is the problem with

education technology and how we may solve it. However, I believe that in trying to solve the problems with the uses of ICTs in education one first needs to gain an in-depth understanding of how it is being used and what are the educators as well as learners' perceptions regarding its use. In viewing how, learners and educators use social networking for learning I aim to determine its benefits as well as weaknesses and discuss ways through which we can overcome these weaknesses. These benefits and weaknesses will not only be linked to the use of social media itself, but also to social constructivist learning theories around the use of ICTs for educational purposes.

2.6. Social Networking and Education

Social media is increasingly being used in an educational setting by both educators and learners in various ways. It is no surprise that we are using social media in education since many have become largely dependent on social media since the early 2000's (Burbules, 2016). Teenagers have been captivated by this new phenomenon and spend a large portion of their time using social media. In a recent study conducted by Thinyane (2009) in two universities in the Eastern Cape in 2009 it was established that 98.1% of first year university students have access to mobile phones and some students even owned multiple mobile phones. It was also recorded that 62% of these students use their mobile phones for social networking daily. Even though this study was conducted at a university level, the situation is no similar to that of a school level, particularly a secondary school as more and more teenagers are gaining access to mobile phones. Mobile phones are thus seen as one of the most widely accessible forms of technology in South Africa and these mobile phones could possibly play a role in education and learning. However, the use of social media in education could have both positive and negative implications especially because most social media apps, such as WhatsApp, were not designed with educational uses in mind, especially at a school level.

Connecting with others through social media has become increasingly easy as with just the touch of a few buttons one can send content to others as well as engage in discussions. Therefore, it is no surprise that learners are opting to use social networking in an educational context as it is simple and convenient, provided that they have access to data and a smart phone. Learners can easily forward lesson content to peers or simply ask for assistance with their homework. Friesen and Lowe (2012) looked at the history of social networking and how it has started contributing to the idea of e-learning by reviewing a range of literature from

1998-2011. Friesen and Lowe (2012) noted that using social networking for learning provides learners with a sense of empowerment as they are taking charge of their learning. Learners can access knowledge on their own terms and in their own spaces. This creates a new dimension for learning which is worth exploring and in my findings I hope to elaborate on this point further

In my study it would be valuable to determine how learners are using dialogue and collaboration out of school hours, about the content knowledge, or if they are merely using social networking to remind each other about tasks and activities and not really engaging in discussions about the knowledge. If learners are indeed using social networking for debate and collaboration, then I can further explore the ideas of Friesen and Lowe (2012) regarding the environment that social networking creates for learning and the sense of autonomy that it brings with it.

2.7. Social networking and Collaboration

Many previous studies and authors (Oliver, 2004; Bosch, 2009; Burbules, 2016; Lai et al 2016; Hughes and Daykin 2002 and Thinyane 2009) regarding the use of social media in education have linked the ideas that social networking fosters collaboration which contributes to a constructivist view of learning. Burbules (2012) states that people collaborate because they are committed to content or purpose and they are committed to achieving the goals of the community. This can be true for using social media in education as learners as well as educators are committed to the content and the idea of gaining an understanding of the content knowledge. Generally, the commitment stems from learners wanting to pass the course and educators aiming to assist learners however possible in passing the course.

While Burbules (2012) illustrates that using ICTs in education can contribute to collaboration and a constructivist view of learning, a study conducted by Hughes and Daykin (2002) in West England University, revealed the contrary. Hughes and Daykin (2002) conducted a study in which they observed the conversations that third year nursing students had online between themselves and with their lecturers to determine if using ICTs can improve collaboration and a constructivist view of education. They concluded that while students socialized with each other very easily, their communication was not collaborative in nature as they merely praised each other on their work or used the social networking site as a notice board and did not engage in in-depth discussions about the content knowledge and therefore it did not foster a constructivist view of learning, (Hughes and Daykin ,2002). The nursing

students found it is easy to communicate with one another over social networking, however they tended to use the social networking site for short responses to other learners' queries about where they can find certain resources or queries about how to upload assignments onto the site and they did not engage in actual discussions about content knowledge. Social media often lends itself to short responses and informal language usage and this could have been one of the reasons as to why the learners did not engage in in-depth discussions about content knowledge. This study illustrates that its about the manner in which social networking is utilised and the types of discussions that occur that allows for a social constructivist approach to learning to occur using ICTs and that it is not just merely the use of ICTs that contribute to social constructivism. In my study I aim to understand if the use of social networking contributes to developing understanding of content knowledge and furthering ideas among the community of practice or if learners are merely using social networking as an online notice board for the subject at hand.

Burbules (2012) however, also states that in using social networking for education the distinction between the educator and learner is not always clear and this is often due to the informal dialogue used in social networking. One is merely reading a text and there is no authoritative figure standing in front of them as in a classroom situation and this can easily lead a learner to thinking as if they are conversing with a friend. This idea however can create an environment in which everyone feels free to share their ideas and this links with Hughes and Daykins (2002) notion that socialising becomes easy. This could also allow for learners who are generally shy to speak up in class to have a platform through which they too feel free to share their ideas. If social networking is used effectively in a way that facilitates communication and collaboration rather than as an online notice board, it will allow learners to question ideas and reflect on the content knowledge being discussed and thus construct valuable meanings for themselves. It is also important for members of the group to have an understanding of the nature of the group, that the group is for discussion of content knowledge and for helping others who may have a misunderstanding related to the subject content and that the group is not for sharing of memes or discussions of general topics. If the learners all share the same interest in the group and are committed to improving their practices through discussions and collaboration within the community, then the learners will be more motivated to use these social networking groups to their advantage in terms of improving their understanding of the subject discipline.

Gilakjani et al (2013) noted that learners have taken on a more active role in the learning process as software and hardware have become tools with which learners use to gain information. Learners may even take the initiative to use ICTs in an educational domain as they are so familiar with technology and are becoming increasingly reliant on technology in their everyday lives. In my study I intend finding out whether the learners initiated the chat groups and for what purpose, to ascertain the extent to which the learners are taking control of their learning. Instead of a static environment where learners receive information from a single source, learners are now able to receive information through various sources and share this information with other as well. The learners are often well versed with technology as they encounter it in their everyday lives and are believed to acquire the skills around using technology faster than adults do (Thinyane, 2009). Therefore, in some instances learners may know more about technology than the educators and on numerous accounts in my own teaching practice learners have provided me with assistance on how to use ICTs. For example I have had learners assist me with the use of technology from the setting up of a projector to the simple design of a power point presentation. This allows learners to feel a sense of accomplishment and the willingness to participate in the discussion. Learners are therefore able to break the traditional teacher-student relationship by being able to teach the educator valuable sills in the use of ICT's. This can occur through using social networking as well, since learners could assist educators in uploading content or sharing of resources on the social networking group.

2.8. Limitations in the educational use of social networking.

While it seems that there are many advantageous in using social media such as collaboration, sharing of information and the idea of communicating instantly with others there are also limitations in using social media in an educational setting. Social media is largely unregulated and open to a wide variety and styles of expression, this freedom of expression could lead to nasty comments or snarky criticism which is not tolerated in a classroom setting (Burbules, 2012). If learners are using social media for learning, they will be interacting with their peers more regularly on social networks and this could increase the chances of cyber bullying. Due to the instantaneity of social media it becomes easier for learners to post nasty pictures or comments about their peers or about the information shared by their peers. However, if educators are part of the social networking group this could limit cyber bullying as the teacher is able to monitor all interaction on the group. The social networking group could be a mere extension of the rules that generally apply in a classroom setting.

In my study I will be enquiring from the learners if they have had any experiences of cyber bullying, which could limit their participation on the social group. A community of practice relies on the participation of all group members, and by enquiring about the learners participation it will allow me to possibly make recommendations to increase participation.

In the 21st century it could be argued that schools have an increasing responsibility to educate learners about internet security and precautions when using social networking sites. (Vanderhoven, Schellens, Vanderlinde &Valcke, 2015). If educators are aware of their learners using social networking sites they should guide them and educate them on ways in which social media should be used responsibly. Due to the increase in cyber bullying it is also imperative that schools have a social media policy in their code of conduct. Vanderhoven et al (2015) conducted a study in Belgium regarding the development of educational materials around the dangers of social networking, and they concluded that it is imperative that workshops are arranged for learners regarding responsible social networking and that some of the material regarding responsible social networking be included in the curriculum. In a South African context, responsible social networking is included in the Life Orientation curriculum (Grade 10-12, DoE, 2012) and this section ought to be emphasised based on our increase reliance on social media.

Even though there are advantages around using social media for learning, many educators may be apprehensive since their privacy may be jeopardized (Vanderhoven et al, 2015). When engaging with learners on social media it could give learners access to an educator's personal contact number and private information that they share on social media to a selected group. Educators may also feel as if learners are infringing on their personal time and may not be willing to communicate over social media, as it is educators often feel overwhelmed by their teaching load. However, if learners are forming these social groups on their own and discussing school content, educators should be made aware of it to limit any cyber bullying that might occur.

Another limitation of using social media in an educational setting is that not all learners may have access to ICT's or they may not have a reliable source of data. All learners' socio-economic backgrounds are not the same and one cannot assume that all learners in a classroom have access to mobile phones and data. This could limit their participation in the group or limit their access to the content shared on the group. In my study the school that I have selected comprises of learners from mixed socio-economic backgrounds, however most

learners do have access to mobile phones and in the questionnaires (Appendix B page 65) , I have asked learners about their accessibility to mobile phones

2.9. Educator and learner perceptions on using social media in education

As Cox and Webb (2004) have noted that educator perceptions regarding the use of ICTs in education is important as this often has a correlation to the manner in which they are using ICTs in their teaching practices. A recent study in Taiwan aimed to explore how educators and learners in secondary schools perceive learning through social networking. The study had a significant amount of participants as it comprised of 1239 secondary school learners and 429 educators. All the participants had a one year experience of using mobile networking for educational purposes as the Taiwanese government has put a significant amount of resources in trying to develop the use of mobile phones in the educational domain. This study was conducted by issuing educators and learners with a questionnaire to determine their needs in using social networking for learning (Lai, Hwang, Chong Liang &Chung Tsai, 2016). Lai et al (2016) concluded that educators may often feel challenged in trying to use social networking for learning as this is not how learning was approached in the past. The educators tended to focus more on the technical aspects of using social networking rather than on the educational content. As technology advances educators are faced with more challenges in trying to incorporate these new forms of technology into the learning experience as they are often not trained on how to incorporate these forms of technology into learning. With regards to using social media in education educators may feel overwhelmed as majority of these social networking apps were not designed with learning in mind. However, Lai et al (2016) noted that even though educators may feel overwhelmed in using social networking for learning they still acknowledged the benefits that social networking brings with it in an educational setting.

Lai et al (2016) also noted that learners were keen to use their mobile phones for learning as it made knowledge more easily accessible to them. Using social networking for leaning increases the avenues through which learners can acquire knowledge and it also encourages learners to be more active in the learning process.

This study by Lai et al (2016) is useful to my research as I will be using a similar methodology by issuing both learners and educators with questionnaires regarding their use of social networking for learning, and it would be interesting to see how my findings compare to theirs. I will be looking at a similar factor as Lai et al (2016) regarding whether the

educators or the learners are keen to use social media for learning and what are the possible reasons for the difference.

Recent studies from as early as the 1990's have tried to explain how ICT's can be incorporated into education and whether or not it enhances or hinders learning. My study is no different in that it aims to explore the role of social networking in learning and how learners and educators perceive using social networking for learning. However, majority of the studies regarding the use of social media in education has been conducted in higher education or in countries other than South Africa and it would be interesting to see how my findings in a South African secondary school compares to these previous studies. These studies are useful in my research as it gives me an understanding of the general use of social networking amongst teenagers for learning, and the role educators can play in using social networking to enhance learning.

2.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored various literature on the topics of ICTs and constructivism, ICTs and theories of communities of practice and how educators and learners are using social networking for teaching and learning. I have also explored literature on educator and learner perceptions on using ICTs in the educational domain so that I can conduct research in trying to determine how social networking apps, such as that of WhatsApp, which were not designed for learning, can be beneficial in the educational domain. In the following chapter I will outline my research methodology in detail, highlighting the context in which the research was conducted, and the methods used in interpreting the data.

Chapter 3

Design and Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This is a qualitative, case study that includes mixed methods of data collection and analysis. My research project comprised of a small-scale investigation in which I explored the role social networking plays in learning and teaching. I issued all the learners and educators at a grade 11 level, in a school in the south of Johannesburg questionnaires to determine their practices regarding social networking for learning and teaching and to what extent these practices contribute to learning within a community of practice.

In investigating the ways in which social media chat groups may hinder or improve learning, I used an intensive research paradigm. This paradigm emphasizes the importance of understanding the meaning of experiences, actions and events as they naturally occur in a small group of participants, through the interpretation by a participant or researcher (Christensen, 1994). The intensive research paradigm also focuses on understanding the way in which the social world operates, and this is imperative in my research since I am interested in how educators and learners use social networking for teaching and learning. An intensive paradigm aims to view the world through the eyes of the participant, as it holds the notion that the human world is different from that of the natural world (Scott & Morrison, 2005). I intend gaining a deep understanding of how educators and learners make use of the social network site WhatsApp and by critically analysing the questionnaires issued to both educators and learners, which included a sample of writing I was able to gain insight into their experiences of using social networking for educational purposes. Even though this could have been achieved through interviews, I opted for questionnaires in which I combined Likert Scale questions and open ended questions in order to gain an understanding of the instances of the practices as well as the perceptions that learners and educators may have about using social networking for learning and teaching. Likert scale questions involve a rating scale which is used to measure participants attitudes and opinions and in my study I asked participants to rate items based on frequency of use.

I used a case study approach so as not to artificially create an environment to study but rather to study an environment as it naturally occurs. Therefore, I had no control over the variables as with an experiment. The inability to control variables is one of the factors that denotes a

case study (Scott & Morrison, 2005). A case study is best suited in trying to understand the various roles members play in social networking since I was able to get an in-depth description of these roles as they naturally occur, as reported by the participants in the questionnaires. My participants consisted of 70 grade 11 learners and 9 grade 11 educators from a private school in the south of Johannesburg. I would not have been able to get such an in-depth description through artificially setting up an environment as it would be contrived. I conducted research on a relatively small scale since I only researched one case study, however it consisted of a large sampling of participants. My intention was to understand how social networks are being used in an educational domain and to what extent it creates a community of practice amongst educators and learners.

3.2. Research Instrument

I issued different questionnaires to the learners and the educators, as I required slightly different information from these two groups of participants as the educator's questionnaire concentrated on both teaching and learning aspects of using social networking, while the learners questionnaires only focused on the learning aspects of using social networking. The layout of both questionnaires was the same as they included a combination of Likert Scale questions and open-ended questions. Through these questionnaires issued to both educators and learners I gained an understanding of how and to what extent learners interact with each other and their educators on social networks for educational purposes. Due to privacy of participants I opted for questionnaires instead of interviews or focus groups. Participants will be more likely to share their information through questionnaires which protects their anonymity.

Included in the questionnaires are both open-ended and closed questions. The open-ended questions allow for authenticity and provide the participants with a voice as their personal views can be documented while maintaining anonymity. An example of an open ended question I posed to learners is asking them to provide an example of the types of messages that they send to educators or peers regarding content knowledge. This provides the learners with an opportunity to share how they use social networking for learning, whether they are simply asking for reminders of due dates or if they are engaging in meaningful discussions about the content knowledge. I also posed a question to the learners asking them whether or not they thought communicating with educators over social media is a good idea and why, in order to gain an understanding of their perceptions regarding social networking and learning.

The closed questions posed to learners allow for a better understanding on the frequency and nature of use of social networking amongst learners for educational purposes.

In the educators questionnaires I posed questions about whether or not they have used social networking to communicate with learners and if so, how was it beneficial to the learning process. I also asked educators what their opinions were regarding the learners forming their own social networking groups to discuss subject content without an educator being present on the group. These questions allowed me to gain an understanding of how social networking is being used for teaching and learning from both the educators and learners points of view so that I may draw a comparison between the two, and determine the needs that learners and educators have respectively, regarding the use of social networking for learning and if there is any room for social networking in the educational domain. In appendix A and appendix B I have attached copies of the questionnaires that I issued to both educators and learners.

I have used the studies in my literature review such as that of Lai et al (2016), Bosch (2009), Hughs and Daykin (2002) and Thinyane (2009) as a guide in drawing up the questionnaires as these studies have provided insight into the important trends developing through the use of ICTs for learning and teaching. Lai et al (2016) and Hughes and Daykin (2002) emphasised the importance of both educator and learner perceptions regarding the use of ICTs and therefore I found it imperative to issue both learners and educators with questionnaires, and not only focus on the educators perspective of using social networking for teaching and learning. From the studies conducted by Bosch (2009) and Thinyane (2009) in South African universities, it was evident that there is an increase reliance on mobile phones and social networking amongst the youth and this prompted me to pose questions to learners regarding their accessibility to mobile phones and their frequency of social networking per day. The notion of learners taking control of their learning was an emerging theme in the literature review conducted by Burbules (2012) and therefore I have included questions in the learners' questionnaire regarding who initiated the chat groups and for what purpose. I am also interested in whether or not all learners participate in the group and if it allows them to feel a sense of community and connectedness.

3.3. Sampling

I made use of homogenous sampling which is a non-probability purposive sampling method since I am working with candidates who share similar characteristics specifically learners who are between the ages of 16-18 years old and in the FET phase and educators who teach

in the FET phase. This sample consists of 70 grade 11 leaners and 9 grade 11 educators at a particular school in the south of Johannesburg, whom I know do engage with social media on an ongoing basis. The school has learners from a diverse socio-economic background as the school has a 40% bursary policy, in which 40% of their learners come from less wealthy homes, this will be useful in assessing the accessibility that learners have to mobile phones and social networking.

I opted to issue questionnaires to the all grade 11 learners so that I could get an understanding of whether or not all the learners in the same grade are making use of social networking for learning or if it was only a select group of learners. I chose to issue the questionnaires to grade 11 learners as they are nearing the end of their schooling career and tend to be more focused on learning as they need to achieve good results for university entrance. I issued questionnaires to grade 11 educators from various disciplines so that I can gain an understanding of how educators in the different subject disciplines are making use of social networking for teaching and learning and if all subject disciplines offered at the school lend itself to content discussion over social networking.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

I have obtained ethical clearance from both the Wits School of Education as well as from the GDE to conduct my research in the school. In my study learners and educators are required to share personal information, which could pose a challenge to them, however I have reassured both learners and educators that participation is voluntary and that they are not obliged to answer any questions that they are uncomfortable with. I also acknowledged that majority of the learners are minors, therefore I issued assent forms to the learners and consent forms to their parents so that permission may be granted to participate in the study. I also provided all learners and their parents with letters of information stating that I am studying a Masters in Education at the University of the Witwatersrand and conducting research on how the use of social media in education may enhance or hinder learning, and that I would appreciate it if the learners answer a 20 minute questionnaire to assist me in gaining an understanding of how they use social media for learning. I also informed the parents and learners that it is not compulsory for the learners to participate and that at no point in the study will names of learners or the school appear. All participants were also free to withdraw at any time.

Educators also participated on a voluntary basis and could pull out of the study at any time. I informed the educators that the study forms part of my completion of a Masters degree in Education and that I am interested in their use of social media in a professional setting. Educators were also issued with a consent form and a letter of information.

No names of learners, educators or the school are published and all information will be kept anonymous and confidential. The information obtained in the questionnaire have been kept confidential as I am the only person that would be handling the data. At no point were educators or learners required to provide their names thus maintaining anonymity. During my research all data was stored in a locked cupboard and saved on a password protected laptop. The data was used to determine how educators and learners make use of social media in education and how social networking amongst educators and learners can be viewed as a community of practice. I will delete and destroy all data after 3 years.

3.5. Collection of Data

In collecting my data, I issued questionnaires to 70 grade 11 learners and 9 grade 11 educators. The school in which I conducted my research has a total of 78 learners in grade 11 and out of the 78 learners, 70 learners participated in the study. 3 learners were absent on the day that I issued the questionnaires and 5 learners did not return the consent form from their parent or guardian and therefore could not participate in the study.

In total nine grade 11 educators completed the questionnaire. Each educator specialises in a different subject, thus providing a broader understanding of how different educators in different subject disciplines view the role of social networking in teaching and learning. The subject disciplines included are Geography, Life Sciences, Physical Sciences, Business Studies, Accounting, Mathematical Literacy, Mathematics, English, Afrikaans and History and Life Orientation. This included all the grade 11 educators as some educators teach more than one subject, for example the History educator teachers Life Orientation as well and the Business Studies educator teachers Accounting as well.

The questionnaires took approximately 20minutes for the learners to complete and 30 minutes for the educators to complete. I issued the questionnaires to the learners during a 1 hour Wednesday recreational period so as not to infringe on teaching and learning time. I issued the questionnaires to the educators in the morning so that they may complete it during

their free time, alternatively educators could complete the questionnaire at home and I collected it the next day from the school

3.5. Analysis of Data

After the questionnaires have been collected from both the learners and the educators, I analysed them separately by making use of codes. Through axial coding I was be able to organise my data according to key themes and categories. Axial coding is a qualitative research technique that involves relating data together in order to reveal codes, categories or sub-categories (Allen, 2017). These codes, categories and sub-categories allowed me to compare the learners responses to the educators responses, as well as to the different literatures that I have reviewed. The key themes in my research stem from theories of community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1998) and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory. Some of the key themes that I focused on were, the nature of engagement through social networking groups, sense of belonging to a community, purpose of the social networking groups and the frequency and nature of collaboration in the social networking groups.

Hughes and Daykin's (2002) research regarding the third year nursing students and their engagement over social networking, prompted me to analyse whether or not the learners are using social networking as an online notice board or if they are actually engaging in meaningful discussions about the content knowledge, as Hughes and Daykin's (2002) noted that very little to no meaningful discussions were taking place. In order to draw this comparison I looked through the samples of writing that learners provided regarding how they utilise social networking and analyse whether or not they are engaging in discussions.

The perceptions that the learners and educators have regarding social networking is also important as it influences the manner in which they utilise social networking, as Lai et al (2016) and Burbules(2012) have pointed out, and in order to analyse the educators and learners perceptions I looked for positive words such as efficient, convenient, freedom of expression and motivation, and negative words regarding the use of social networking, such as time wastage, slow data and inaccurate information.

As I perused through the data I included immerging themes into my coding, these themes included the idea that learners want educators to be part of the social networking group, the principal no longer allowing educators to form social networking groups, and the long hours

that learners spend on social media sites per day. Another immerging theme was the social well-being of learners as they felt a sense of community in belonging to these groups.

Chapter 4

Presentation of data and Findings of Educators Questionnaires

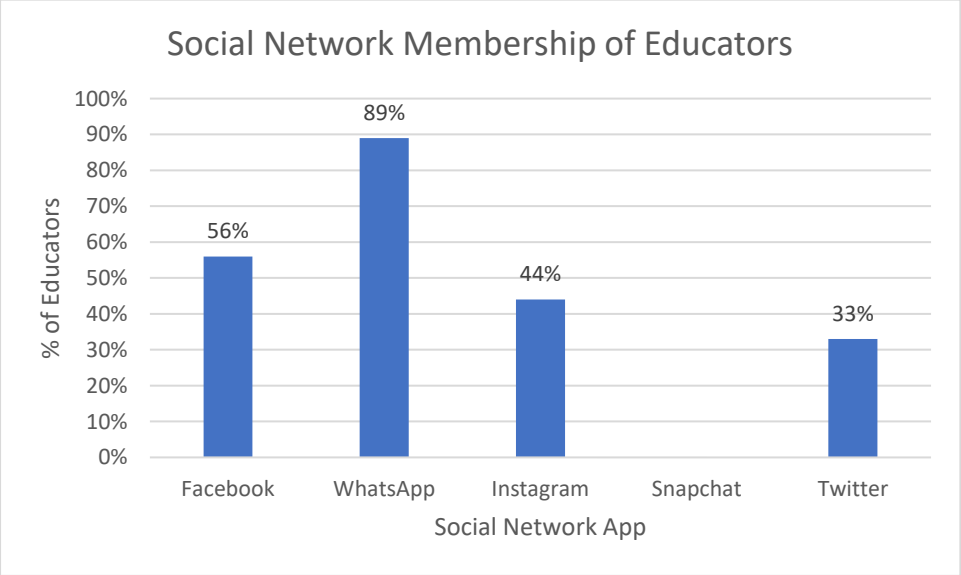
In this chapter I present the data gathered and then reports on the findings of the teachers questionnaires regarding how social networking is used to communicate with learners about subject content and the ways in which WhatsApp creates a community of practice. It particularly foregrounds what educators reported about, regarding their uses of social networking for teaching and learning and if they believe whether there is room for social networking in education.

I start of by analysing the educators general use of social networking and their familiarity with social networks based on their responses to the questions about how often they use social networking, which social networking apps are they members of and how do they rate themselves regarding the use of social networking, Thereafter analyse how the educators are currently using social networking for teaching and learning by analysing their responses to the Likert Scale type questions regarding their frequency of use to communicate and share information with learners through social networking and their frequency of using social networking to create a sense of community and knowledge sharing amongst learners. I have also addressed that pros and cons that educators have experienced in their use of social networking for learning and teaching. Lastly I draw upon the question posed to the educators about whether or not they believe that there is a future for social networking in education, as this could be beneficial for future studies and developments.

4.1. Educators General Use of Social Networking

Below I discuss the general use of social networking sites by educators and their familiarity with social networking. When educators were asked in the questionnaire if they were members of any social networking sites, from the 9 educators only the mathematical literacy teacher noted that he did not belong to any social networking site. All the other educators belonged to one, or many social networking sites. The figure below represents which social networking sites the educators are members of.

Figure 1



It can be noted that 89% of educators have WhatsApp and it is seen as the most popular social network amongst educators as all 8 educators that use social media have a WhatsApp account. The second most popular social networking app is Facebook and then Instagram. Based on the educators responses to question 3 in the questionnaires, regarding the average time spent per day using social networking apps, 6 educators have reported to spend on average 1hour a day using social networking apps and only 2 educators spend 2-3hours a day on social networking sites.

From the 9 educators only 1 educator does not use social networking at all, the other 8 educators all make use of some sort of social networking in their everyday lives by spending at least one hour per day on social media. The educators have thus incorporated social networking into their daily lives and are comfortable in using social networking. 6 educators noted that their skills in using social networking are relatively fair whereas the 2 educators that spend 2-3 hours per day on social networking apps stated that they are experts in using social networking, therefore educators are quite comfortable in their use of social media. From the 8 educators that use social networking apps, 6 of the educators are members of more than 1 social networking site, however WhatsApp seems to be the most popular choice for communication as the educators noted that as a staff they have a work WhatsApp group which includes the principal and deputy principal. It is interesting though that the Mathematics literacy educator does not have WhatsApp and is therefore not a member of the staff WhatsApp group, there is a possibility that he could miss out on valuable information which is being disseminated through this social networking group.

4.2. Ways in which educators use social networking in their professional capacity

The educators have noted that they have a staff WhatsApp group through which more than 50% of them have shared information with other colleagues as well as with the principal. The staff WhatsApp group serves more as an online notice board as reminders or instructions are generally posted on this group.

More than 60 % of the educators have also communicated with learners through WhatsApp either individually or on social groups regarding subject related content. 3 of the educators mentioned in their questionnaires that they would like to communicate with learners more over social networking, however the recent school policy does not favour educators and learners communicating over social networking and this is posing a challenge to the educators. One of the educators stated that "I would use it more often if it was not prohibited by the school where I am currently teaching". Educators are therefore willing to communicate with learners over social networking regarding subject related content and even though the school policy does not favour learners and educators communicating over social networks, many educators are continuing to share information with learners over social networking groups. However, they have limited their discussions with learners over these groups. Due to the recent school policy, there is limited room for collaboration and discussions to occur between educators and learners over these social networking groups and the nature of the educators interaction with the learners, ranges from sharing of past papers or class notes to posting simple reminders of due dates of tasks.

Educators are therefore not opposed to the use of social media to communicate with learners and would like to be able to use it more often as a means of communication and collaboration with learners.

4.3. Pros and Cons of using social media for learning and teaching

Using social networking for learning and teaching has both benefits and disadvantages. In the questionnaires I posed questions to the educators regarding any benefits and disadvantages that they have experienced while using social networking for learning and teaching. The educators provided valuable insight as these advantages and disadvantages are based on the first-hand experiences of the educators.

4.3.1. Advantages of Social media for teaching and learning

In the questionnaires I asked educators if they thought whether there is a future for using social networking in an educational domain and all 9 of educators have acknowledged that there is a future for social media in education as one of the educators stated that "It offers a platform for free expression of opinion and subject matter and is easily accessible at any time of the day especially when a learner has a challenge that needs to be addressed". Therefore, one of the advantages of using social media for teaching and learning as noted by the educator is the ability to address learners queries online at any time of the day, this adds to the notion of instantaneity of social networking. The educator also mentioned the idea of free expression over social networking, which implies that learners might find it easier to communicate through social media rather than in person. This provides the learners with an additional platform for learning to occur especially when the learners are revising over the lesson or completing homework tasks, any misunderstandings can be clarified as the learner is completing the task.

Another educator stated that "Using technology to teach could eradicate the lack of time faced by teachers teaching various subjects". Due to the many time constraints at school many times educators do not have a chance to engage with all learners and educators could use social networking for question and answer sessions which they may not have time to complete in class.

The Life Sciences teacher pointed out that she is able to share videos, colourful diagrams and summaries with the learners and this allows them to have access to the subject content on their phones. Often colourful diagrams cannot be printed out due the high cost involved, however if she sends these through to the learners using social media, they have instant access to it when they are studying or completing homework tasks. These diagrams and videos serve as an additional study tool, which the learners may not have access to if they are only studying from their textbooks or notebooks.

The English educator acknowledged that through social media she is able to share various news articles which encourage learners to keep up to date with current affairs. Learners also have the opportunity to discuss and debate about these news articles over social media and this encourages the learners to read the articles. The educator stated that " I often share interesting articles and current events over social networking and ask the learners what is their opinion regarding the article, this allows for interesting an immediate discussions". The

manner in which the English educator uses social networking is interesting as it allows her to get responses from the learners and encourage debate around events as and when the events occur. Learners can voice their opinions in a secure environment as this discussion is being monitored by the educator and can be viewed as an extension of classroom discussions.

All the educators noted that it is a good idea for learners to form social media groups per subject as it provides learners with more time to interact with each other regarding subject content, however these groups should be monitored so that learners are sharing the correct information and so that no form of cyber bullying occurs. 5 of the educators stated that there should be rules which govern these social networking groups in terms of what content is shared and discussed and when these discussions take place so as not to inconvenience anyone at odd hours.

4.3.2 Disadvantages of social media for teaching and learning

The Mathematical literacy educator pointed out that not all subjects lend itself to communication over social networks as with Mathematics one has to actively explain to the learner the content with the aid of examples which cannot be easily done on social networks. This implies that social networking does not allow for the explanation of all mathematical concepts as this needs to be done face to face with the learners while using examples. If the content is too complex learners could easily be misguided through the informal nature of communication over social networking. He also stated that at times learners may become too reliant on the information disseminated on the groups and rely too heavily on the group as a study tool. This often occurs as with social networking learners have access to the entire conversation on their phones, whereas in class they are required to take down their own notes or mentally recall what the educator has said. Referring to the conversations that occurred over social media often seems as the easier option to gain access to study notes and information, instead of flipping through pages or mentally recalling what was said in class.

Another disadvantage as pointed out by the Business Studies educator is that often the language used on social media is one that is informal in nature, and that this should not give the learners an opportunity to become overly friendly with the educator. The educator stated that " All communication needs to be strictly professional. Learners should not be given the impression that by communicating on social media, they may 'befriend' educators". This is up to the educator to set ground rules and maintain that the group is for discussion of subject

related content only. Educators therefore still need to maintain an authoritative position even when having discussions over social networking groups.

The English educator stated that “Educators private lives could be under scrutiny, thus educators must set up separate accounts to interact with learners”. This implies that educators should have a professional account which they use for work related matters and a private account for their personal social lives. This can also eradicate the notion of learners becoming overly friendly with educators as the learners will be more cautious of the idea that this is a professional account and not meant for mere socialising.

It is evident that the educators are using social networking as a means of disseminating content to the learners and are not using it in manner that allows for group discussions and collaboration about the knowledge. The educators have acknowledged that it is due to the school policy regarding learners and educators conversing over social media that they have limited their discussions with the learners over social media and mainly use social networking to send learners information and subject content.

Chapter 5

Data Presentation and Findings from Learners Questionnaires

The following chapter presents the data and reports on the findings of the learners questioners regarding their use of social networking for educational purposes. The questionnaires focused on how learners are using social networking to communicate with both their peers as well as their educators about subject related content knowledge.

A total of 70 grade 11 learners out of a possible 78 grade 11 learners completed the questionnaires. A 3 learners were absent on the day that the questionnaires were issued, and 5 learners did not obtain consent from their parent or guardian to participate in the study and therefore could not complete the questionnaires. Overall I obtained a good response from the learners.

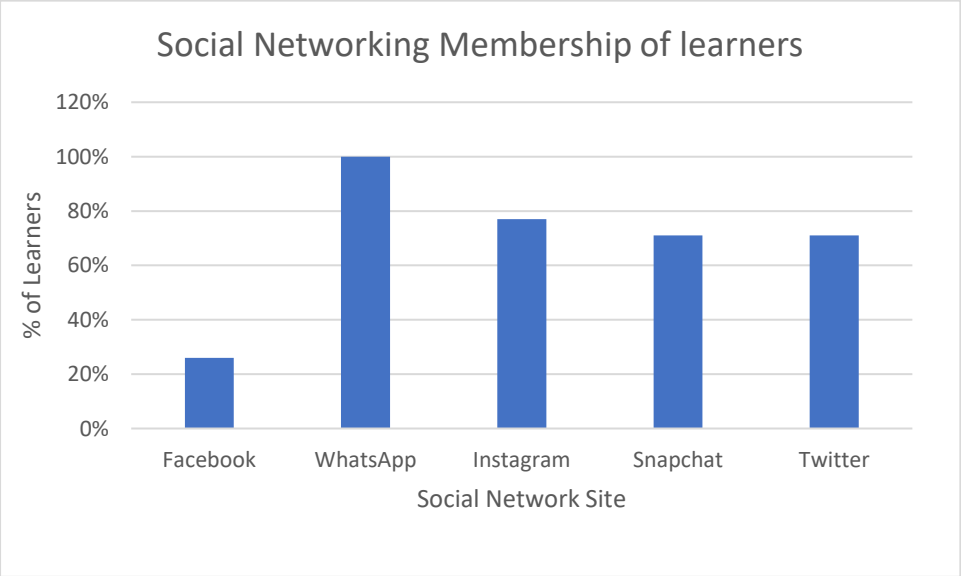
In this chapter I start of by presenting the data of how learners are making use of social networking in their daily lives and their competences in communicating over social networking. Thereafter I look at how learners are making use of social networking for learning, if they are merely sharing notes, videos and reminders or if they are engaging in meaningful discussions about subject content over social networks. The learners examples that they provided regarding how they use social networking for learning will help me gain a better understanding of how they are using social networking groups in an educational domain. I will then analyse learners responses regarding whether or not they believe that communicating with educators over social networking has any advantages for learning and the disadvantages that they have experienced when using social networking for learning. As I discuss the learners responses in this chapter I often make reference to the presentation and findings of the educators responses in Chapter 4 to gain a broader understanding in the similarities and differences of how educators and learners are making use of social networking in the educational domain.

5.1. Learners general use of social media

Learners were asked a series of questions relating to their general use of social media and how familiar they are with social media. When learners were asked if they belong to any social networking sites, they all answered yes, thus 100% of the learners are members of 1 or more social networking site. While some learners belong to only 1 social networking site, more than 50% of the learners were members of 2 or more social networking sites. This

indicates that all learners in the study have access to social media as they all have personal WhatsApp accounts. Below is a graph depicting the most popular social networking sites used by the learners.

Figure 2



Based on the learners responses depicted in figure 2 it is quite evident that the most popular social networking site used is WhatsApp as all learners have WhatsApp accounts. The other popular sites were Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter with at least 70% of learners having accounts on those social networking sites. It is interesting to note that compared to the educators social networking membership depicted in figure 1, 71% of the learners are members of Snapchat while none of the educators made use of Snapchat. The educators also seemed to be more familiar with Facebook than what the learners are, and this possibly shows a shift in the social networking trends amongst teens and adults. However, WhatsApp seems to be the most popular choice of social networking App between both the educators and the learners.

When learners were asked about how much of time, they spend on social networking sites per day, 61 % of learners responded that they spend more than 3hours a day, 13% responded that they spend 2 hours a day, 11% responded that they spend 1 hour a day while 13% responded that they spend less than 1 hour a day. Thus, more than 70% of the learners average more than 2hrs a day on social networking sites. 54% of the learners also rated themselves as having good social networking skills, the remainder 46% all noted that they have fair skills with 0% of the learners having poor skills when using social media. The

learners familiarity and confidence in using social networking could be linked to the number of hours they spend per day on social networking and the number of social networking Apps they are members of, as the learners that spend longer hours and are members of more than one social networking App reported to have good skills when it comes to social networking. When compared to the educators confidence and time spent in using social networking the learners tend to be more confident in their use of social networking and spend longer hours than educators on social networking Apps.

5.2. Ways in which learners use social networking for educational purposes.

All learners stated that they belong to 1 or more social networking group which is either subject related or a general group consisting of learners in that particular class. More than 60% of the learners are members of 2 or more social networking groups which they use for educational purposes. Since all learners are members of at least one social networking group that is used for educational purposes it is evident that all learners have some exposure to using social networking in an educational domain.

53% of the leaners stated that either a tutor or an educator is part of these social networking groups. When learners were asked if they thought having an educator as part of these social networking groups was a good idea, 68 of the learners responded that they would like their educators to be part of these groups as it allows for easy communication. One of the learners stated that “communication is essential for educators and learners and social media plays a great role in this communication”. Another learner stated that “there is no time for educators to explain to all students, social media gives us the opportunity to ask more questions and we learn more, and we learn more with educational videos and extra resources shared.” This echoes the sentiments of the educators that there is often not enough time in class to make justice to a certain topic, however through social networking learners have an added opportunity to ask additional questions, and the learners would like the educators to be part of these groups and engage in further discussions about the content. The learner stated that it gives them an opportunity to gain more knowledge and the videos or extra resources shared are also beneficial. However, it is not enough for learners to merely watch the videos or to look at colourful diagrams, in order for meaningful learning to occur discussions need to take place regarding those additional resources.

18 of the learners noted that if an educator is part of the social networking group it provides them with an added opportunity to ask questions and engage in discussions as they might be

too shy to speak up in a class of 30 learners. This implies that learners may find it easier and have more confidence to voice their opinions over social networking rather than in person. This is interesting as educators could get more learners participating in discussions over social networking than they do in classroom discussions.

When learners were asked about how often they use social networking to share content with their peers, 60% of the learners noted that they share content on a regular basis, while only 40% of the learners have used social networking to have discussions on a regular basis about subject related content. This indicates that learners are using social networking more for the sharing of notes, past papers and additional resources rather than engaging in meaningful discussions about subject related content. One of the learners stated that through social networking they can " share past papers, pictures, revision exercises, notes and memos very quickly and accessibly. You can contact your friends very easily who can help with homework or difficult problems." this implies that through social networking learners do turn to their peers for additional assistance and support, instead of not completing the homework tasks due to not understanding certain concepts, leaners can very easily ask their peers for additional assistance, whether it is through discussions or sharing of additional resources.

Another learner stated that he/she often "takes pictures of difficult math problems and post it on the group asking other learners where did I go wrong in solving the sum, my friends often send voice notes if the explanation is long". This is interesting as the Mathematics literacy educator stated that mathematics is often difficult to discuss over social networking, yet one of the learners has found a way around that and uses communication in the form of pictures and voice notes to try and correct his/her understanding of certain mathematical concepts and problems.

Most of the sharing of subject related information or discussions of subject related content transpired between the learners themselves and not necessarily between educators and learners. It is the learners that have taken the initiative to form these social networking groups so that they may help each other and learn from each other and have noted that through sharing of subject related content and discussing content knowledge on social networking groups it does allow them to feel a sense of relieve and a sense of belonging to a community. One learner stated that "it is comforting knowing that with just a touch of a button someone can assist me if I am really lost with an assignment." Communicating with other learners

through social networking provides learners with a sense of relieve when completing overwhelming tasks.

5.3. Pros and cons of using social media for learning

The learners have acknowledged that in their experience of using social networking for learning there are advantages and disadvantages as well.

5.3.1. Pros of using social media as a tool for learning

Majority of the learners acknowledged that there are advantages of using social networking for learning as 95% of the learners felt as if social media is a good platform for educators to communicate with learners as it allows for the instant exchange of past papers and extra information. Many learners also noted that it provides them with the opportunity to ask additional questions which they did not have time or the courage to ask in class. By communicating over social media with an educator, those learners who are normally shy to ask questions in class now have a platform through which they feel more confident to ask questions and communicate with an educator and with other learners. This provides learners with an additional platform for learning to take place, learning is no longer only reserved for the classroom.

One of the learners noted that social media makes learning more fun and bearable as it is not the conventional way of learning and through simply chatting about subject related content with other learners or with the educator learning can take place. Social media provides a more relaxed environment through which communication and collaboration can occur as the nature of communication is one that is informal. Many learners opt to communicate through social media after school hours about subject related content as it is a convenient method of communication especially during exam time when regular classes have stopped. Social networking therefore, has the potential to be an extension of what occurs in the classroom, it cannot replace the learning taking place in a classroom as learners are using social networking as an additional tool to the conventual modes of teaching and learning.

5.3.2. Disadvantages of using social media for learning

When learners were asked if they thought social networking was a good way for learners and educators to communicate only two learners were opposed to this idea as the one felt that maybe not all learners have access to social media at any given time. A disadvantage of using social networking for learning is that sometimes learners may not have access to data and can

miss out on valuable conversations or resources that are being shared. At least 20% of the learners stated that slow wifi connections can become frustrating especially when they are trying to download content that the educator or other peers have shared. Therefore, connectivity problems can hinder the learning taking place over social networks.

The second learner that was not in favour of educators and learners communicating over social networks stated that “the informal nature of social media doesn’t always allow the correct respect to be showed to teachers”. This echoes the sentiments of the Business Studies educator, that at times learners could become overly friendly with educators and lose respect for the educators. Even when using social networking for learning, it is important for all participants to show the necessary respect not only to the educator but to their peers as well.

Learners also noted that it is very easy to get distracted when using social media for learning as they are often tempted to start conversations which are not linked to the subject content and this can waste valuable time. The learners noted that if an educator is part of the group the educator can guide the conversation and this will deter learners from going off topic. Learners are also concerned that their peers could misguide them over social networking, by providing an incorrect explanation, however if educators are part of the group the educator can correct any misunderstandings or incorrect information.

Cyber bullying is also a major cause for concern when using social media and 64% of learners stated that they were concerned about cyber bullying and felt that if an educator is part of the social networking group used for learning then this could reduce the likelihood of cyber bullying taking place.

From the above it is evident that learners are indeed using social networking in an educational domain, however while there is benefit in using social networking for learning it is not free from disadvantages. Learners have taken the initiative to use social networking in an educational domain and it is not surprising as kids and teens are becoming increasingly reliant on their mobile phones and social media platforms in their everyday lives.

Chapter 6

Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

The purpose of my study was to determine in what ways social networking operates as a community of practice amongst learners and educators and how communicating through an App that was not designed for learning, about subject related content can either enhance or hinder learning. In order to explore the various uses of social media amongst educators and learners for educational purposes, nine grade 11 educators from various subject disciplines completed a questionnaire regarding their use of social media for teaching and learning, and 70 grade 11 learners completed a questionnaire regarding how they use social media for learning.

6.1. Educators and learners use of social media for teaching and learning

The educators and learners that answered the questionnaires have had some exposure to social networking for learning and teaching and therefore used their experiences to guide them in answering the questionnaires.

6.1.1. Educators and Learners general use of social media

As the use of social networking has increased since the early 2000s there is no surprise that social networking has made its way into the educational domain as well. In collaborating with Thinyane's (2009) research which she conducted in two Eastern Cape Universities and noted that 98.1% of first year students had access to mobile phones and some students even owned multiple mobile phones with which 62% of the students were using their mobile phones for social networking, in my study conducted in a private school south of Johannesburg, all 70 of the grade 11 learners that answered the questionnaire has access to a mobile phone and 100% of them were using their mobile phones for social networking. It is important to note that even though this is a private school, the learners in this school come from diverse backgrounds as the school has a policy in which 40% of the learners are bursary students and come from less wealthier homes, yet all learners have access to mobile phones which they could use for social networking. This indicates that the use of social networking is increasing amongst the youth as Thinyanes (2009) study was conducted in 2009 and my study was conducted 9 years later in 2018.

The nine grade 11 educators that completed the questionnaires, also all had access to mobile phones, however only one educator was not using his phone for social networking. This was

interesting as the school had a professional WhatsApp group which they used to communicate about school related matters, yet this educator still opted not to have any form of social media. Most educators stated that they spend on average one hour a day on social media, with the most popular form of social media being WhatsApp, as illustrated in figure 1.

It was alarming that 61% of the learners are spending three or more hours per day on social networking sites and this illustrates the extent to which teenagers are becoming more and more reliant on their mobile phones. The learners at this particular school are not allowed to bring their mobile phones to school so therefore the time that they spend on social networking sites occurs after school hours. More than 60% of the learners are members of more than 2 social networking sites, however all the learners stated that they have a WhatsApp account as this was the most popular means of online communication. It is through these WhatsApp accounts that learners have formed online groups with their peers and even with their educators to discuss and share subject related information. It is important to remember that the learners initiated forming these social networking groups and that it was not the idea of the educators, this echoes Gilikjani et al's (2013) notion, that using social networking for learning provides learners with a sense of autonomy in which they take charge of the conditions in which they learn.

6.1.2. Collaborative use of social networking for teaching and learning

As learning theories have developed over the years, the notion of communication and collaboration has been emphasised in creating an environment for effective learning to occur and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory has been the key contributor to this notion. Communication is one of the key factors in learning as it is through communicating about the subject content with others that one is able to acquire knowledge and construct meaning about this knowledge for themselves. In any school setting communication is important as in a classroom it is through the constant communication between the learner and educator and between the leaners themselves about the knowledge that allows learning to take place.

In this study my focus was not about what transpires in the classroom, but rather on how this notion of communication and collaboration can be extended beyond the classroom through the use of social networking between educators and learners and between learners themselves. Barab and Dodge (2008) acknowledged that with the increase in the use of technology in our daily lives, learners and educators now have an added opportunity to

communicate with each other about subject related content and communication no longer only needs to be limited for face to face contact.

During my study I asked the educators and learners if they believed that social networking had a place in education and why they thought so. All the educators noted that social networking can be beneficial for teaching and learning due to the ease of communication. The Physical science educator further explained that due to the freedom of expression over social media many learners may find it easier to share their opinions and ideas about the content as compared to speaking up in class. This notion was further echoed by many of the learners as the learners felt that by discussing content on social networking groups, those learners who are generally shy to speak up in class now have a platform to share their opinions as well.

Learners in my study noted that when they have difficulty in understanding certain concepts, they often ask for assistance from their peers or educators over social media and in general they receive positive responses which gives them the confidence to then complete homework tasks. Therefore, mediation of learning does not only have to take place on a face to face level but it can be extended on a virtual plane as well and still be beneficial where learners feel confident enough to tackle tasks after having discussed the content with peers or educators.

When educators are part of the social networking group they have the opportunity to offer an expert opinion regarding the questions posed, or direct the learners to a higher cognitive level. In my study 64% of the learners stated that they were part of a social networking group in which an educator was a member of as well, and 97% of the learners felt that it is important for educators to be part of these groups. The learners noted that if an educator is part of the group the conversation tends to stay on track and if the learners are struggling with any concept the educator is able to correct them. Educators also felt that if learners are using social networking for learning it is important for the educators to be part of the group as well, so that they may facilitate the learners discussions and it makes it easier for the educator to send learners videos, past papers and images regarding the content. If the educators are not part of the group there is a risk of one of the learners leading the other astray, in the sense that one of the learners misunderstandings of certain concepts can spread to the other learners. While peers can offer valuable assistance to each other, the educator is still viewed as the

expert in the field and in a community of practice an expert is needed to guide the others to move from being novices to experts as well.

6.1.3. In what ways are social networking groups a community of practice?

In 1991 Lave and Wenger developed the communities of practice theory which has recently been associated with knowledge creation in both work places and in schools. The main focus of the communities of practice theory is how collaboration between members of a group contributes to the creation of knowledge. In a community of practice, the communication and collaboration about specific content is important as it is through this communication and collaboration that a person can learn and become an expert in the field. Therefore, it is important that the communication is meaningful enough to allow learning to occur. In order for a group to be classified as a community of practice three main elements need to be present, and these three elements are; the domain, the community, the practice (Wenger, 1998).

The domain refers to the identity which is defined by the shared interest of the group (Wenger, 1998). This means that not just anyone has excess to the group, but rather it is reserved for use by a few individuals who have a shared interest. In my study I noted that the life Science educator had a WhatsApp group which was exclusively for the grade 11 Life Science learners. Learners who were not part of the grade 11 Life Sciences class at that particular school would not be part of that social networking group as they did not share the common interest of the group which was grade 11 Life Sciences. This notion of exclusivity and having a common interest is what adds to the element of the domain.

When learners or educators are forming WhatsApp groups for educational purposes, they are forming the groups based on a common interest, and this common interest is often governed by the subject content. Therefore, in forming these social networking groups the domain aspect is present as the social networking group is not open to just about anyone and is reserved exclusively for example for grade 11 Life Science learners, or learners in grade 11A as they share a common interest which other leaners in other classes or grades may not share.

The second element in establishing a community of practice is the community aspect, this implies that members of the group should engage in discussions with each other and share resources regarding the content at hand (Wenger, 1998). In my study when learners were

asked how often do, they share resources with their peers, 86% of the learners stated that they frequently share resources with their peers. However, when it comes to discussion of the resources or content only 67% of the learners noted that they frequently engage in discussion about the content. Therefore, learners tend to use the social networking groups more frequently to share resources then to engage in discussions about the resources. The mere sharing of resources is not sufficient for in-depth learning to occur as both Vygotsky (1978) and Wenger (1998) made mention that it is the type of communication that occurs which allows learning to take place. Communication should be in the form of in-depth discussions about the content so that learners may move from being novices to experts in the field. If educators are part of these social networking groups, they can steer discussions about the subject content in the right direction and pose questions to learners to encourage discussion and collaboration. Sharing of content is useful, however it should be accompanied by meaningful discussion about the content as I have noted with the practice of the English educator where she shares articles on current events and encourages discussions and debates about these articles over the social networking group.

In these discussions and sharing of information it is important to note that not all learners, are active members of the groups, as some learners have never shared resources or engaged in discussions about the content. Therefore, it is inconclusive as to whether or not all learners are gaining valuable insight from these social networking groups or are learners merely just bystanders on the group.

However, more than 80% of the learners have noted that being members of these social networking groups has made them feel as if they are part of a community and they get a sense of relieve when discussing difficult content with others through these social networking groups. This allows learners to have more confidence in tackling difficult tasks and cope with the pressures of schooling. Schooling can be stressful for many kids, however knowing that they are not alone in facing these challenges can be beneficial to their overall social well being. While there might be disadvantages of communicating over social networking such as cyber bullying, it is important to note that there are advantages as well, as learners feel a sense of belonging to a group and may be better prepared to cope with the pressures of schooling knowing that they have the assistance of their peers and educators as well.

The third element of a community of practice is the practice itself, this involves the ability to develop a shared repertoire of resources which could include experiences, notes and ways of

solving problems (Wenger, 1998). Based on the responses from both educators and learners, sharing of notes and other resources are fairly easy to do over social networking. Through social media educators and learners are able to share videos, images, pdf files, voice notes and texts regarding the subject content and these resources can be saved and used at a later date. There is a risk of learners becoming overly reliant on these resources and not paying adequate attention to the resources shared in class. However, it is important for both educators and learners to note that social networking in an educational domain should be viewed as an extension of what occurs in the classroom and not as a replacement of classroom practices. Thus, social networking should be used as a tool to compliment teaching and learning and in no way replace the traditional method of teaching.

Wenger (1991) states that learning is fundamentally social in nature, and that the presence of these three elements allows members of the community to move from novices to experts in the field. Based on my research, it is inconclusive as to whether or not the learners in the case study are moving from novices to experts in the particular discipline because of their discussions and communication that is occurring over social networking. Yes, indeed learners and educators are sharing resources and discussing content over social networking groups, however a limitation of my study is that it does not assess to what extent these forms of communication and collaboration are beneficial to all learners.

6.2. Advantages of using social networking groups for teaching and learning

Friesen and Lowe (2012) focused on the history of social networking and how it has made its way into the educational sphere and noted that learners are taking charge of their education and using social media for learning has provided the learners with a sense of autonomy in the learning process. My study echoed the same idea as the learners are making more use of social media for educational purposes than the educators and it is the learners initiatives to start these online groups for sharing and collaboration of subject content. Learners have class or subject groups where educators are not members of and learners are using these groups to discuss and assist each other with homework tasks or preparation for exams.

In my study learners tend to share more resources such as notes, past papers and videos and do not always engage in discussion about these resources. Learners only tend to engage in discussions when a question is posed by another learner about the subject content. Therefore, learners are not always communicating and collaborating over these groups but tend to use it more as a space to share resources. However, this still allows learners to access knowledge on

their own terms and in their own spaces and provides an informal space for knowledge sharing to take place. Even though learners have created their own space for learning to occur, 95% of the learners would still like their educators to be part of these groups so that they may be better guided and reassured that what they are discussing and sharing is indeed correct and useful.

Many learners and educators noted that communication over social media is sometimes easier than communicating in classrooms, especially for learners that are often shy and reserved in class, it provides these learners with an extended opportunity to gain clarity on certain content knowledge which they may be struggling with. Social networking cannot replace the learning that occurs within a classroom, but it can provide additional opportunities for learners to improve their understandings of certain concepts. Hughes and Daykins (2002) conducted a study in West England where they observed the conservations that third year nursing students had over social networking, and they also stated that communication becomes easier due to the informal nature of social networking. It is due to the informal setup of social networking that allows many learners to feel more at ease to share and discuss subject content and to pose questions in trying to solve any misunderstandings that they might have about the subject content.

One of the main advantages of using social media for educational purposes is the instantaneity of social networking, where learners can pose a question and within a few minutes other learners or even the educator can respond to their question. It is also easy to share videos and other supporting material with a large amount of learners at the same time. The English educator stated that it has the potential of reducing printing costs and paper wastage as she can easily share past papers and memos with learners without having to print pages and pages of documents for each learner, especially considering that there are three exam papers which are written during the English examination. This is beneficial not only for education but for the environment as well as it reduces our carbon footprint.

There are advantages in using social networking for teaching and learning and if utilised effectively it could be used as an additional platform where learning can take place as it has the ability to extent the conversation beyond the classroom especially in situations where contact time between the learners and educators are limited. Therefore, in no means will social networking replace teaching that occurs within a classroom but rather it can be used to complement classroom teaching by creating an additional space for learning to occur. Social

networking should not only be used as a platform to share resources, but rather it should be used as a platform to engage in meaningful discussions about these resources and it is the educator has the expert knowledge to guide these discussions in the right direction.

6.3. Limitations of using social networking for teaching and learning

While social networking does have many advantages when used for educational purposes it is not free from limitations. One of the main concerns about teenagers using social media is the idea of cyber bullying. In my study majority of the social network groups that are formed by the learners do not have an educator as part of the group, and therefore these social network groups are not being regulated by an adult. This can easily lend itself to cyber bullying and 64% of the learners stated that they are concerned about cyber bullying. Learners are however aware of the precautionary measures that need to be taken when using social media but this does not always eliminate cyber bullying. Many learners stated that if an educator is part of the group it will eliminate cyber bulling and provide a safe space for sharing and discussion of resources.

While 97% of the learners felt that educators should be part of the social networking groups, many educators felt that this could eat into their personal time as this would require them to engage with learners after school hours. The mathematics educator noted that certain rules should be put in place when using social networks to communicate with learners, these rules could include the idea that no messages should be sent after 9pm or that communication should be limited to the content knowledge and not general discussions. This implies that while social networking creates an informal environment to share and discuss subject content it should still be regulated by certain basic rules so as to protect the rights of others. Educators were also weary that learners may have access to their personal information and contact numbers and the Life Sciences educator stated that she has a separate WhatsApp account which is purely for school matters and communicating with both learners and parents. However, not all educators may have the luxury of creating two WhatsApp accounts.

Another limitation to using social networking for learning and teaching is the access to data or Wi-Fi, learners or educators could miss out on content or discussions because they do not have sufficient data, therefore social networking should not be the primary method of communication between educators and learners, but it should rather be a mere extension of classroom discussions.

Learners also noted that it is very easy to get distracted when using social media for learning as they are often tempted to start conversations which are not linked to the subject content and this can waste valuable time. Learners often require self-discipline or monitoring when using social networking for learning to avoid unnecessary distractions. While social networking could be used to compensate for the lack of class time during school hours, there is still the notion of time wastage if the discussions are not meaningful or learners go off track.

6.4. Implications of using social networking groups for learning and teaching

From my study it is evident that learners are taking the initiative and forming social networking groups for educational purposes. This has provided the learners with a platform to extend learning beyond the classroom as they are using a tool which was not designed for educational purposes to enhance their subject knowledge. As teenagers are spending more and more time on social media it is not surprising that they have resorted to using it for educational purposes as well. As educators we cannot deny that learners are using social networking for learning, but rather we should think of ways in which we can assist learners in gaining the maximum benefit from it. Even though educators are concerned about privacy and the idea of social networking with learners eating into the personal time, we need to find a way around these challenges as learners are becoming more and more reliant on social networking and if educators can channel this reliance on social networking into a means for valuable learning to take place it could be beneficial in the educational sphere.

It is interesting to note that learners want educators to be part of these social networking groups as they feel that it would be more beneficial to have an educator as a member of the group so that the group may stay more focused in achieving their goals. While social networking has been known for the disadvantage of cyber bullying, I was surprised at how many learners stated that being part of these social networking groups allowed them to feel a sense of community and they have more confidence in tackling difficult tasks after communicating about it over social networking groups. Therefore, there is a social well being aspect about using social networking in an educational domain which tends to be side-lined as we mainly focus on learning and the impact it has on achievements.

6.5. Limitations of the study

While I have noted important trends in using social networking for learning my study is not free from limitations. I have no way of telling whether using social networking for learning

makes a difference to the performance of learners, however they do seem to make a difference to personal and social well being as it creates a feeling of being part of a community and a sense of belonging. Another limitation is that it is challenging to fully unpack the nature of conversations occurring over social networking as I only have access to sample pieces of writing that was provided in the questionnaires, I do not have access to full conversations transpiring over these social networking groups. In order to adequately analyse the nature of communication and collaboration taking place on these social networking groups, I would need to observe the actual conversations and sharing of information that takes place.

6.6. Recommendations for future research

There is definitely scope for further research as learners are becoming more and more reliant on their mobile phones in their everyday lives. An emerging theme from my research was that learners want educators to be part of their social networking groups and it would be interesting to see if we adopt this practice as an extension of classroom activities what implications it would have for teaching and learning regarding both learner performances as well as social wellbeing.

6.7. Conclusion

From my study it is evident that both leaners and educators have at some point made use of an App that was not designed for learning, in their educational practices and both educators and learners feel that social networking groups have a place in education provided that it is utilised in an appropriate manner. Educators and learners acknowledged that it is the ease of communication and collaboration of social networking that makes it seem attractive to be used as an extension of classroom activities due to time constraints placed on both learners and educators during school hours. It seems that the use of social networking is being used more as an online notice board by the learners and educators rather than as a space for valuable communication and collaboration about subject content which fosters learning.

However, as learners are becoming more reliant on social networking, we cannot stop them from using social networking in an educational domain, but rather as educators we should guide them in using social media appropriately so that they gain the maximum benefit.

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Appendix A

Educators Questionnaire

Social networking allows users to communicate instantly with one another. Some examples of social networks are WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. This questionnaire is designed to get feedback on ways in which educators use social networking for education.

Questions

1. What is your age?
   Under 30 ☐ 30-39 ☐ 40-49 ☐ 50+ ☐

2. Gender
   Male ☐ Female ☐

3. Are you a member of social networking sites?
   YES ☐ NO ☐

4. If yes, which social networking sites are you a member of?
   Facebook ☐ WhatsApp ☐ Instagram ☐ Snapchat ☐
   Twitter ☐ Other_____

5. On average how many hours do you spend per day on social networking sites?
   Less than an hour ☐ 1 Hour ☐ 2-3 Hours ☐ More than 3 Hours ☐

6. How would you rate your skills in using social media?
   Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor ☐

7. What subject do you teach?
   _____

8. Indicate how often you use social networking to do the following:

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
A) Communicate with the principal on social groups regarding work related issues.					
B). Communicate with colleges on social groups regarding work related issues					
C) Communicate with learners individually regarding subject related content.					
D) Communicate with learners on social groups regarding subject related content.					
E) Share additional information with learners such as notes, past papers and activities.					
F) Enhance learner-to learner interaction and encourage peer instruction or learning.					
G) Use social media to allow learners to reflect on their own work.					
H) Provide a learning experience outside of the classroom by creating networks between learners and professionals					
I)Use social media to create a community of learning amongst learners					

9. Do you think social media has any place in education? Please provide a reason for your answer?

10. Are there any precautions that should be taken when using social media to engage with learners? Please specify.

11. What is your opinion about learners forming social groups to discuss subject content and activities?

Appendix B

Learners Questionnaire

Social networking allows users to communicate instantly with one another. Some examples of social networks are WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. This questionnaire is designed to get feedback on ways in which learners use social networking for education.

Please complete questions 1-14.

Questions

1. Are you a member of social networking sites?
   YES ☐ NO ☐

2. If yes, which social networking sites are you a member of?
   Facebook ☐ WhatsApp ☐ Instagram ☐ Snapchat ☐
   Twitter ☐ Other_____

3. On average how many hours do you spend per day on social networking sites? ☐
   Less than an hour ☐ 1 Hour ☐ 2-3 Hours ☐ More than 3 Hours

4. How would you rate your skills in using social media?
   Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor ☐

5. Have you or your classmates formed class groups or subject specific groups on social media?
   YES ☐ NO ☐

6. If Yes, how many of these groups are you part of?
   ☐

7. If you are not part of any of these groups on social media, please state a reason?

8. For which subjects do you have social networking groups?

9. Are any of your educators or tutors part of any of these groups?

YES ☐ NO ☐

10. Do you think social media is a good way for educators to communicate with learners, and why do you say so?

11. Indicate how often you use social networking to do the following:

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
A)Sharing of information with peers such as notes and past papers on social groups.					
B) Sharing information with educators such as notes and past papers on social groups.					
C) Using social media to discuss difficult concepts learnt in class.					
D) Using social media to connect with your educator when you are having difficulty with the course.					
E) Feel a sense of relieve when discussing challenging content on social groups.					

G) Feel a sense of being part of a community when engaging in discussions on social media groups.					

12. Are you worried about cyber bullying on social media?

    YES ☐ NO ☐

13. How do you think we can overcome the obstacle of cyber bullying when using social media?

14. Discuss the most useful aspect of using social media for learning. Provide any example of the types of messages you could send through social networks to your educator or peers. (optional).

15. Discuss any challenges you experienced when using social media for learning. (optional)

Annexure C

Wits School of Education

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

27 St Andrews Road, Parktown, Johannesburg, 2193 • Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa
Tel: +27 11 717-3221 • Fax: +27 11 717-3709 • Email: enquiries@educ.wits.ac.za • Website: www.wits.ac.za

23 July 2018

Student Number: 0605977X

Protocol Number: 2018ECE022M

Dear Safiyya Seedat

Application for Ethics Clearance: Master of Education

Thank you very much for your ethics application. The Ethics Committee in Education of the Faculty of Humanities, acting on behalf of the Senate, has considered your application for ethics clearance for your proposal entitled:

Using Social Media for Learning in the FET Phase

The committee recently met and I am pleased to inform you that **clearance was granted**. Please use the above protocol number in all correspondence to the relevant research parties (schools, parents, learners etc.) and include it in your research report or project on the title page.

The Protocol Number above should be submitted to the Graduate Studies in Education Committee upon submission of your final research report.

All the best with your research project.

Yours sincerely.

MMaseko

Wits School of Education
011 717-3416

cc Supervisor – Dr Alison Kearney

Annexure D

GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/112

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	22 June 2018
Validity of Research Approval:	05 February 2018 - 28 September 2018 20181132
Name of Researcher:	Seedat S.
Address of Researcher:	659 Wardha street
	Lenasia
	Johannesburg, 1827
Telephone Number:	060 525 7375
Email address:	seedatsafiyya2@gmail.com
Research Topic:	Using social media for learning in the FET phase
Type of qualification	Masters
Number and type of schools:	One Secondary School
District/s/HO	Johannesburg South.

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalafa@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

1. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
2. The DistrjcVHead Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.
3. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
4. A letter/ document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and Distrjct/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.
5. The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penaljsed in any way.
6. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may cany out their research at the sites that they manage.
7. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.
8. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.
9. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.
10. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
11. The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.
12. On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.
13. The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.
14. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

Mr Gumani Mukatuni

Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: . 8.7...oG.2018.....

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Annexure E

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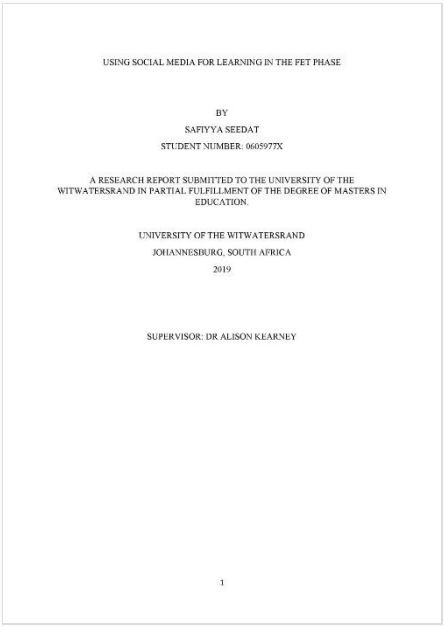

USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR LEARNING IN THE FET PHASE

BY

SAFIYYA SEEDAT

STUDENT NUMBER: 0605977X

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF MASTERS IN EDUCATION.

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

2019

SUPERVISOR: DR ALISON KEARNEY

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