

Using Social Media as a Platform of Communication Between School Administration and the Local Communities to Promote Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs

Maryam Ahmed Abualrish¹, Mohamad Ahmad Saleem Khasawneh²

¹ Assistant Professor College of Education, Humanities & Social Sciences, Al Ain University, United Arab Emirates. ORCID: <https://orcid.0000-0002-9715-4748>

² Assistant Professor, Special Education Department, King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1390-3765>

Correspondence: Mohamad Ahmad Saleem Khasawneh, Assistant Professor, Special Education Department, King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1390-3765>

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the level of using social media as a platform of communication between school administration and the local communities in Saudi Arabia schools from the parents' perspectives. The descriptive method was used as a methodology to achieve the study objectives. The study involved 265 parents of students from different academic stages and different cities in Saudi Arabia to take part in an online questionnaire of ten items, which was sent to the participants online. The results showed that the best practices of school administration in electronic communication included creating WhatsApp groups with parents for informal communication and employing Twitter and Instagram accounts as a media interface for the school. These results reveal that male parents think more slightly that school administration uses social media to communicate with the local community. The findings also indicated that the age of the parents did not affect their views because the school uses similar platforms and parents are familiar with using the social media websites regardless of their age.

Keywords: social media, communication, school administration, local community, parents

1. Introduction

Electronic communication constitutes one of the modern practices that seeks to bridge the gap between school and family to reach an effective partnership that achieves the goals of education, especially those that seek to improve its outcomes. The development of school management practices also works to provide a physical and human educational environment characterized by quality, which is reflected in the quality of education (Turnbull et al., 2020). The level of educational outcomes and the effectiveness of communication with the family and society are very important to achieving the building of a mutual partnership between them in areas that vary according to the different stages of school education. Success in linking the community and school contexts requires the presence of communication channels, which are among the basic requirements for leadership in school administration (Singh, 2017). Communication is the essence of community partnership, and the fundamental goal is mutual interaction.

Anyone who contemplates the developments that have affected social life as a result of modern communication technology must notice the great change in social relations in our societies. There is no doubt that social relations have been affected, and instead of face-to-face communication, mediated communication has entered the line that has penetrated every aspect of the world (Yost et al., 2019). Life turns a person into a virtual individual interacting within a virtual community, and this type of communication has become an effective role, as it has facilitated issues around the abolition of some of the languages of confrontational communication, such as facial expressions, gestures, and other methods of communication that humanity has (Ridwan, 2021). Intermediate communication has become an important turning point in the field of social communication.

The psychologist Vygotsky is the pioneer of the social constructivism theory, which calls for not neglecting the social (non-cognitive) factors in learning. It also called for the activation of technology as an important mediator in achieving

the integration of the roles of school, family, and society (Agustina & Cheng, 2020). The social context with which the student interacts daily outside the school generates meaningful knowledge of what is received in school education. The results of several studies showed that the school administration that employs social media networks achieved positive results in converging viewpoints and managing effective dialogue with different segments of parents and contributed to motivating administrative and teaching bodies to communicate and cooperate with parents (Bati & Workneh, 2021; Khasawneh, 2022). With the developments taking place on the Internet, many theories of influence have not been able to keep up with these changes. This is what made the uses and gratifications theory take the lead in many types of research that study the use of the Internet, the forefront of which is the use of digital communication, given that accessing the network is one of the alternatives that an individual chooses from to meet his needs (Bradley, 2021).

It is the concept of virtual social networking sites that have become popular in recent years, and this is what we notice through the dramatic increase in the number of its users day after day since its first appearance on the network. Scientific studies have not been able to keep pace with it, and this is what we see from the phenomenon of the rapid development of these sites, which have a clear difference in setting the basic conceptual determinants of the subject of social networking sites (Brunetti et al., 2020). Social networking sites on the Internet have witnessed widespread proliferation in recent years and have become numerous and diversified, trying to provide many services and achieving various satisfactions, the first of these websites are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Myspace.

1.1 Problem Statement

Although schools and families in Saudi Arabia are better prepared for the digital transformation in school education, electronic communication with parents and school administration using electronic communication is still below the expected level. There is a fluctuating level of achievement among students due to several factors, the most important of which is the lack of family follow-up resulting from weak communication with the school, and the low awareness of the parents about the requirements of the home learning environment. The recommendations of the report from the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education indicated the importance of communicating with parents electronically to enhance community partnership and activate the role of guardianship councils. The Ministry also recommends spreading the culture of employing information and communications technology in the educational process among all segments of the school community. The literature reveals a scarcity of studies that addressed the reality of partnership in the field of electronic communication between school administration and parents, which raises interest in knowing the reality of the efforts made by school administrations in social media communication tools with the parents.

1.1. Questions of the study

- 1- What is the level of using social media as a platform of communication between school administration and the local communities in Saudi Arabian schools from the parents' perspectives?
- 2- Are there apparent differences in the opinions of school principals on the use of social media as a platform of communication between school administration and the local communities due to the variables of gender and age of the parent?

1.2 Significance of the Study

The importance of this study stems from the importance of the role of social media and electronic communication between the community and the school in improving the academic achievement of students and strengthening the relationship between both. It is hoped that it will contribute to determining the reality of the practices and tools of this communication, identify the best successful practices in activating it, and draw the attention of officials to the challenges facing the school administration and the family to achieve partnership in the field of electronic communication between them. The results might help to set priorities for training and technical improvement for administrators, technicians, teachers, and parents. The study may also benefit the target group of the study themselves and contribute to submitting proposals to develop an electronic communication mechanism between the school administration and the community.

1.3 Study Limitations

Spatial limits: public education schools in the various cities in Saudi Arabia.

Time limits: The study was implemented in the 2021–2022 academic year.

Objective limits: the practice of school management in the field of electronic communication between the school and parents and community partnership.

Human limits: The study included parents of students in public education schools in various cities in Saudi Arabia.

2. Literature Review

Electronic communication is defined as communication that uses electronic media to transmit data such as pictures, graphs,

sound files, maps, software, or messages, using computers, telephones, e-mail, voice and video calls, or a fax machine (Meneses & Mominó, 2012). Many definitions of social networking sites differ from one researcher to another. Some scholars define social networking sites as places where people meet specific goals, which are directed by policies that include several rules and standards proposed by the program. Social media networks are known for allowing users to introduce themselves. Participation in social networks through which they create social relationships (Morris et al., 2020). These networks consist of a group of actors who communicate with each other within specific relationships, such as friendships, joint work, the exchange of information, etc., and the existence of these networks is maintained through the continued interaction of members.

Social networking sites have witnessed widespread use since their first appearance, and these sites have succeeded in gaining more users through the diversity of services they provide. This use began to bring with it many issues that affect the user, and the impact varies depending on the hours of use, gender, nature of the environment, use, and its reasons, as well as according to the site (Szymkowiak et al., 2021). There are many uses of social networking sites depending on the nature of the user and the satisfaction he seeks to achieve, whether cognitive, psychological, social, cultural, etc. Due to the multiple services provided by social networking sites and their strong embodiment of the concept of virtual society, individuals began to exercise various roles through them, which led them to integrate greatly into this virtual society and thus withdraw from physical society (Vlasova et al., 2019). Social networks on the Internet had a major role in forming virtual communities and thus the emergence of virtual social relationships that differ from their counterparts in reality, starting with the nature and type of communication and ending with the environment in which these relationships arise and the society within whose entity they interact.

Modernizing school administration practices in electronic communication with the external community is very important because of the role of school administration in activating the electronic partnership between schools and the local community (Kuzbor, 2019). There is a strong need to employ modern technology in community partnerships for future practices of school administration in developing the school-community partnership, which concluded that traditional administrative practices are no longer sufficient to keep pace with the rapid changes in community partnership requirements (Khasawneh, 2021). Modern community partnerships require administrative methods linked to the requirements of the knowledge economy era. The literature pointed out the necessity of adopting educational policies to develop school leaders so that they can communicate modernly and effectively with the external community in a way that ensures benefiting from the material and human resources available in both the school and society (Alqahtani & Rajkhan, 2020). It is important to pay attention to preparing and qualifying administrative and supervisory staff to raise their skills in employing modern technology. Possessing communication skills is one of the basic characteristics of leadership in school administration.

Electronic communication between the school administration and parents occupies a wide area of community partnership through the development of the skills of dialogue, communication, negotiation, and consultation with a high degree of transparency, rapid dissemination of information, ease of use, and non-adherence to time and place limits (Bawaneh, 2021). On the other hand, the success of electronic communication between the school and parents faces the challenge of raising the students' achievement levels. Several studies indicate that poor communication between the school and the parent often leads to weak family monitoring of the student's academic progress, as there is a relationship between student absence, poor academic achievement, and the level of communication between the school and the community (Karasneh et al., 2021). Effective electronic communication between the school administration and parents contributes to running discussion circles and joint meetings between the school administration and a large number of parents, simultaneously or asynchronously. The purpose of these meetings is to encourage parents to contribute intellectually, culturally, and materially to the success of academic projects. It also contributes to overcoming the obstacle of the age difference between children when the school administration and the parents discuss issues. Finally, the presence of the group messaging feature for parents saves the time and effort of the school administration in communicating with the guardian of each student.

It is the responsibility of the school administration to manage electronic communication with the guardian in a systematic manner that helps parents plan communication and organize their work times (Turnbull et al., 2020). The success of the impact of electronic communication between the school administration and parents depends on developing the elements of a good and thoughtful plan for communication that begins by identifying the staff responsible for implementation and follow-up, assessing the actual need to employ this communication or not, determining the type of social networking or technology available, and studying its characteristics that allow parents to feel that they are the most informed about their children's academic level (Singh, 2017). This may include employing more than one type of means of communication, taking into account the philosophy of existing education and its requirements, defining standards and controls for employing technology, and also providing knowledge and skill in employing technology and providing technical support in facing technology challenges, especially about privacy, cybersecurity, and disinformation (Ridwan, 2021).

Previous studies

Arco (2023) explored, from the viewpoint of instructors, the potential and constraints of social media as the sole medium of communication in students' educational and socialization processes. The data-gathering technique relies on distributing a questionnaire to secondary education facilities in the autonomous regions of Navarra and the Basque Country. To preserve the privacy of the teaching personnel and the practice facility, the questionnaire was sent online. The findings demonstrate the potential and constraints of digital media in the educational process, indicating which ones can be overcome and which ones cannot.

Miller et al. (2023) demonstrated how school administrators may utilize Reddit, a social media network, to find colleagues who can offer immediate assistance when problems emerge. This study examined whether school leaders' online collective efficacy when discussing work-related and sociocultural issues led to higher technology acceptance and principal efficacy. It did this by using hierarchical regressions, linguistic analysis of online discussions, and qualitative analysis of focus group interviews. The results showed that, in comparison to their less experienced peers, school leaders are more likely to interact openly with colleagues in online discussions and to foster a sense of collective efficacy among their peers. They are also more willing to participate freely in online communities and embrace technology if given the opportunity.

Drouin et al. (2020) investigated how parents ($n = 260$) in the early phases of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) related penalties (e.g., social distance) in the United States perceived their own and their children's usage of social media and other forms of communication technology. We also looked at relationships between technology use, social media, and anxiety. The majority of parents stated that since social distance started, both they and their kids—particularly the teens between the ages of 13 and 18—have used technology and social media more often. Furthermore, structural equation models demonstrated that parents and kids with greater anxiety levels (as reported by parents) were more likely to use technology and communicate with others through social media and phones, even after adjusting for demographic variables.

Haro-de-Rosario et al. (2018) examined the several social media platforms that individuals use, such as Facebook and Twitter, to communicate with the local government in Spain to ascertain which one garners the most level of dedication. The study also examined the impact of different factors on this degree of dedication. The findings indicate that Facebook is the more favored platform for engaging with local government matters compared to Twitter. The degree of online openness, the atmosphere, the amount of activity on social media, and the level of interactivity provided by the local government website are additional variables that are pertinent to public involvement. The results of this study provide a substantial contribution to our knowledge of how the kind of social media used affects citizen involvement.

Moghavvemi et al. (2018) examined how students use YouTube for educational purposes, as well as the factors that influence their usage habits and motivations. After conducting 30 student interviews, we created a scale to measure academic learning as a factor in YouTube consumption, which the students themselves verified. To test the created construct, information was gathered from 321 students in the University of Malaya's Faculty of Business and Accountancy. The findings verified that the primary reasons people use YouTube are for amusement, information seeking, and intellectual purposes. If the video is truly pertinent to the topic at hand, the study believes YouTube to be a useful tool that may improve learning.

3. Methodology

The descriptive method is the method that is appropriate to the nature of the research and its requirements, in its aspect related to the method of survey studies, which has proven its efficiency in studying people's attitudes, trends, and opinions on various issues and the topics and phenomena that people live today.

3.1 Sampling

The study invited 265 parents of students from different academic stages to participate in the study. The participants were from three different cities in Saudi Arabia and were selected randomly by sending an online questionnaire to parents of students in different schools. The parents were asked to provide their approval to participate in the project. The following table presents the data on the parents participating in this survey.

Table 1. Information on the participants of the study

Variable	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	153	57.73%
Female	112	42.26%
Age		
From 25-35	124	46.79%
36-45	100	37.73%
More than 46	41	15.47%
Total	265	100%

3.2 Instrumentation

The study developed a questionnaire to collect information from the participants on the use of social media as a platform for communication between the school administrations and parents. The questionnaire contained 10 items focused on the use of social media. The validity of the questionnaire was verified using face validity by presenting it to ten academic faculty members from universities in Saudi Arabia. Structural consistency was also verified by using the statistical program to calculate the Pearson Correlation Coefficient between the scores of each statement from the questionnaire, and the total score for the field, as demonstrated in the following table.

Table 2. Correlation Coefficients for the statements of the questionnaire

NO.	Statement	Correlation Coefficient
1	The school administration sends continuous electronic notifications to parents	0.811**
2	School administration uses social media networks and the Internet to communicate with parents	0.689**
3	School administration conducts an electronic survey to find out parents' suggestions	0.797**
4	School administration uses technology to hold individual or group meetings with parents	0.817**
5	School administration provides parents with electronic information about curricula, assessment tools and standards, and school results	0.842**
6	School administration communicates electronically with parents of students who suffer from academic or behavioral problems	0.810**
7	School administration provides electronic information to parents about the safe use of technology by their children	0.822**
8	School administration encourages teachers to communicate electronically with parents.	0.777**
9	School administration allows parents to follow the students' continuous evaluation form electronically during the academic year	0.585**
10	School administration allows electronic registration and remote participation in the school's parents' council	0.659**

** Significant at 0.01

After the arbitrators made amendments to the questionnaire, it was published on an electronic link to a pilot study sample consisting of 63 individuals from outside the study sample. Then the reliability coefficient was calculated using the Cronbach Alpha method, which was (0.919), which was higher than (0.70) and an acceptable value.

3.3 Data Analysis

The statistical analysis was used after collecting the data from the participants, where the mean scores, standard deviations, and levels were calculated. The one-way-ANOVA analysis was used to find the differences according to the variables of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The First Question

To find the levels of use of social media in communication between the school administration and the local community, the mean scores and standard deviations were extracted for all the statements of the questionnaire. The following table presents the results.

Table 3. The mean scores and standard deviations for the statements of the questionnaire

Rank	NO.	Statement	Mean score	St. dev	Level
1	8	School administration encourages teachers to communicate electronically with parents.	3.61	0.96	High
2	9	School administration allows parents to follow the students' continuous evaluation form electronically during the academic year	3.58	1.01	High
3	2	School administration uses social media networks and the Internet to communicate with parents	3.53	0.93	High
4	6	School administration communicates electronically with parents of students who suffer from academic or behavioral problems	3.44	1.00	High
5	1	The school administration sends continuous electronic notifications to parents	3.23	1.05	High
6	5	School administration provides parents with electronic information about curricula, assessment tools and standards, and school results	3.07	1.02	Medium
7	7	School administration provides electronic information to parents about the safe use of technology by their children	3.01	1.05	Medium
8	3	School administration conducts an electronic survey to find out parents' suggestions	2.86	1.03	Medium
9	4	School administration uses technology to hold individual or group meetings with parents	2.75	1.10	Medium
10	10	School administration allows electronic registration and remote participation in the school's parents' council	2.70	1.10	Medium
Total			3.18	0.70	Medium

Table 3 reveals that the field of communication in general received an average rating with a mean score of 3.18 and a standard deviation of 0.70. The arithmetic means for the domain phrases ranged between 3.61 and 2.70 and between 0.96 - 1.10. The fourth phrase obtained the first and highest ratings, and the phrase “school administration allows electronic registration and remote participation in parents’ councils at school” received (M: 2.70, P: 1.10) came in the tenth and last rank, with medium rating. The results revealed that the practices of school administrations in employing electronic communication in partnership with parents from the point of view of the sample came with a moderate rating. This result is less than the hoped-for level to which the philosophy of education in Saudi Arabia, aspires to bring about a qualitative shift in employing technology in community partnerships. The results showed that the statements that received high ratings in the field of communication partnerships focused on school administration practices in employing social media networks to monitor both student learning and behavior in cooperation with parents, which may be attributed to the school administration’s awareness of the educational role. The school administration is aware of the role social media platforms can play in their diversity and effectiveness in strengthening continuous communication between the school and parents.

The results showed that the best practices of school administration in electronic communication included creating WhatsApp groups with parents for informal communication and employing Twitter and Instagram accounts as a media interface for the school. The dominance of social media networks may be attributed to their prevalence and enjoyment of features that serve the objectives of electronic administration in the areas of community partnership with their educational, technical, and social nature. These networks are also characterized by the multiplicity of social platforms, which provides greater opportunities for disseminating partnership programs and activities and highlighting the media aspect of them in various ways.

4.2 The Second Question

The t-test analysis was used to find the differences between the effect of the gender of the parent on their attitude towards using social media as a platform of communication between the school administration and the local community. The following table presents the results.

Table 4. The t-test analysis was used to find the differences between the effect of the gender

Dimension	Gender	Number	Mean score	Standard deviation	T value	Sig.
The levels of use of social media in communication between the school administration and the local community	Male	153	3.99	0.400	1.086	0.279
	Female	112	3.93	0.433		

The table above shows that male parents received a mean score of 3.99 and a standard deviation of 0.400. on the other

hand, the female participants had a mean score of 3.93 and a standard deviation of 0.433. The result revealed the absence of statistical differences between the opinions of parents from both genders on the levels of using social media by school administration to communicate with them. These results reveal that male parents think more slightly that school administration uses social media to communicate with the local community.

The differences between the parents' views on the use of social media by school administration according to the age variable were also measured as shown in the following table.

Table 5. The one-way-ANOVA analysis for the difference according to the age variable

Source	Variance	Sum of squares	Freedom Value	Mean square	F value	Sig.
Age variable	Between groups	0.213	2	0.106	0.605	0.547
	Within groups	46.983	267	0.176		
	Total	47.196	269			

Table 5 reveals that the f value was 0.605 for the views of the parents on the use of social media in communication between school administrations and the local community, which is not statistically significant. This result indicates that the age of the parents did not affect their views because the school uses similar platforms and parents are familiar with using the social media websites regardless of their age. The current generations, aged from 25-more than 50, are familiar with the recent technologies and use of the internet for communication. The result also indicates that the school administrations use sufficient methods of electronic communication to keep parents and the local communities aware of the educational situation in schools.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the level of using social media as a platform of communication between school administration and the local communities in Saudi Arabia schools from the parents' perspectives. The results showed that the best practices of school administration in electronic communication included creating WhatsApp groups with parents for informal communication and employing Twitter and Instagram accounts as a media interface for the school. These results reveal that male parents think more slightly that school administration uses social media to communicate with the local community. The findings also indicated that the age of the parents did not affect their views because the school uses similar platforms and parents are familiar with using the social media websites regardless of their age. The study concluded that the school administration uses social media for communication with parents and the local community to a medium level according to the parents' opinions. The school administrations also use various social media groups to stay connected with parents, which is a good advantage in promoting the partnership between the school and the local community.

6. Recommendations

The study recommends strengthening the technology infrastructure in schools and society to enable the use of multiple types of technology in partnerships in the field of communication. It is also recommended to establish technical controls that guide the use and use of social media to protect privacy and information in the school environment and hold training courses for school leaders to acquire skills in managing electronic communication in community partnerships, such as digital design, content management, electronic media, large data and information management, and creating electronic databases and linking them with government institutions. The study also recommends using communication via video chat, which is a type of electronic communication that can be conducted via the webcam of a video chat application, and communication through social networking sites, including applications that people use for public interests. Therefore, there are Facebook and Twitter applications, which enable the school administration to know the desires of parents and thus work to satisfy them and enable them to write mini-blogs.

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Authors contributions

Dr. Maryam responsible for the study design and revising. Prof. Dr. khasawneh was responsible for data collection. Dr. Maryam drafted the manuscript and Dr. khasawneh revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. In this paragraph, also explain any special agreements concerning authorship, such as if authors contributed equally to the study.

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Competing interests

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Obtained.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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