

# **SOCIAL MEDIA: A PANACEA FOR COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF BUSINESS EDUCATORS IN NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

Business educators can benefit from collaborative professional development through the use of social media. This is necessary in order to properly prepare students for the world of works. The study focused on the use of social media, social networking sites, and the benefits of using social media in Nigeria. The study identified Face book, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, internet forums, chat rooms and message boards, video and photo sharing sites like YouTube, Flickr and Video, blogs, wikis, and social book marking as social media tools that can be used for collaborative professional development of business educators in Nigeria. It was recommended that Business educators should form collaborative professional development through social media where they can be dedicated to explore and experiment with new approaches and ideas for effective teaching and learning of business subjects.

*Keywords: Social Media, Collaborative Professional Development, Business educators*

## **Introduction**

Business teacher education is that part of vocational and technical education that provides knowledge, skills and competencies for a teaching career in academics, office occupation and for self-reliance. Ekpenyong (2005) stated that business teacher education exist with emphasis geared towards creating or offering employment opportunities covering wide range of training requirements from certain semi-skilled jobs, to teaching, managerial and executive positions. Ezeani (2012) opined that business education as a discipline is expected to expose its recipients to diversity curricula that inculcate attitudes, knowledge, skills, values that are required in the business world. It is a means of producing a healthy, literate, self-reliant citizens that would create wealth for human development and self-employment, resulting to sustainable national development. The need to redesign teacher education according to Agomuo and Enang (2013) especially business educators is increasingly imperative. Business educators should therefore, be vast in using social media for collaborative professional development.

In order for business educators to properly prepare students for the world of work, they should be well informed on the use of social media for collaborative professional development. Baker-Doyle and Yoon (2011) stated that when teachers are given the opportunity to collaborate as part of professional development, they become immersed in the new technology and start to process ways to use the technology to support student learning. Business educators need high-order teaching skills, deeper level of content knowledge, continual collaboration, on the job learning and a greater responsibility over what happens in the classroom. Professional development opportunity according to Arnold and Paulus (2010); Baker-Doyle and Yoon (2011) are beginning to move from traditional setting to online setting. Therefore, there is need for business educators to use the features of social networking sites to connect to other teachers and create an environment where they can request for feedback, gain new ideas and reflect on instructional practices using discussions with their colleagues. With these practices, newly recruited teachers can connect to experienced professionals from other schools or even other parts of the world (Huang, Yang, Yueh-Min, &Hsio, 2010).

## **Collaborative professional development of business educators**

One of the major problems of business educators on the job is the feeling of isolation. The very nature of the job which is always a teacher with so many students as well as the high expectations on the teachers have a tendency to leave the teacher feeling alone on the profession. Collaborative professional development of business educators is a way of alleviating the feeling of isolation. Baker-Doyle and Yoon (2011) stated that collaboration with other teachers allows educators to escape the confines of their classroom, share ideas and solve problems, thus, helping them to develop a sense of belongingness and purpose. Social media tools can be used to acquire the emotional support and appreciation for creative practices that teacher's seldom get behind closed doors (Greenhow, 2009). Collaboration done among business educators using social media can collect discussions about curriculum, content delivery, and classroom management.

Professional development can enhance teacher knowledge and improve instructional practice when it is sustained over time, focuses on enhancing the knowledge and skill needed to teach in specific content areas, employs active learning strategies in which teachers practice new pedagogical skills and receive feedback from others, and creates opportunities for collaborative learning from peers (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002).

Traditional professional development implies face to face providing educators with information, whether it is theories regarding pedagogical practices or updates in subjects matters. This can take form of seminars, lectures or workshops that are supposed to help educators continue to grow in their careers. The danger of many of these forums is that the structure is generally passive. That is to say, teachers can get bored during a long lecture the same way student can (Western Governor University, 2014).

In practice, traditional professional development rarely proves sufficient for making significant changes to individual teachers' practice or to the culture of teaching in schools (Garet, Wayne, Starcavage, Taylor, Eaton, Walter, & Doolittle, 2011). The reason is that teachers have limited access to high quality professional development (Baker-Doyle & Yoon, 2011). The costs of sustained, content-focused professional development are high, and continuous changes to teachers' assignments can render content-focused professional development received as part of a previous assignment relatively useless for teachers in their new assignment (Shear & Penuel, 2010). Furthermore, even when teachers do have access to high quality professional development, organizational conditions in schools can limit teachers' opportunities to experiment with new practices in their classrooms or engage in deep conversations with colleagues about problems they face in implementing new practices (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu & Easton, 2010). Unlike traditional professional development, that is often fleeting in duration, narrow in focus and top-down in its creation and delivery (Barab, MaKinster, Moore, & Cunningham, 2001); social media can be seen as creating informal opportunities for teachers to engage in professional development that is ongoing, collaborative, easily accessible, and free. Professional development has traditionally been viewed as a formal activity that is often hierarchical in nature, where an expert disseminates information to novices (Barab, Makinster, Moore & Cunningham, 2001).

Generally fleeting in duration and narrow in focus, the series of workshops, meeting, and institutes that were often pre-determined have generally not been very successful in enhancing teacher knowledge and improving student achievement (Barab et al., 2001). Where many traditional professional development methods had limited success, newer, more innovative methods that focus on ongoing growth activities may have a greater potential to affect positively teacher development (Hirsh, 2004). The dynamic nature of online professional development efforts through the use of social media may be helpful in addressing many of the shortcomings of

traditional professional development programmes. Furthermore, traditional professional development (where the role of the teacher and learner are static) can be replaced with online teacher knowledge development that is often more dynamic in nature where teachers have the opportunity to take on the role of learner as well as teacher (Warren-Little, 2006).

According to Enang (2015), the following are the areas by which social media can be used for collaborative professional development of business educators in Nigeria. They include:

- Social Networking sites for collaborative professional development of business educators
- Video and photo sharing sites for collaborative professional development of business educators

### **Social Networking Sites for Collaborative Professional Development of Business educators**

Social networking sites can be used effectively for business educators for professional development. Social networking are applications that enable online users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other. These personal profiles according to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) can include any type of information, including photos, video, audio files, and blogs. The opportunities brought about by networking tools are enabling teachers to network and collaborate with other teachers from anywhere, at any time. Social media is a confluence of different online platforms and tools that people use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, and to interact with others. It can simply be referred to as the websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Furthermore, Gupta (2014) stressed that social media includes social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, internet forums, chat rooms and message boards where people meet and discuss topics of interest, video and photo sharing sites like YouTube, Flickr, blogs, wikis, and social book marking. The common platforms in the social networks have become hubs where people can express and share ideas and experiences with the world. The next section in this paper, report on some social networking site that are useful for collaborative professional development of business educators.

**Facebook** was founded by Mark Zuckerberg in year 2003 has grown into a popular gathering space not just for students, but also for professionals who are seeking an opportunity to network with others and exchange ideas and resources. Within Facebook's gathering areas, thousands of business educators can engage in discussions related to teaching and learning. The vast size of these groups, that number in the tens of thousands, and the hundreds of discussion topics that cover the full spectrum of educational issues, highlights the potential of this medium to support collaborative professional development of business educators. Unlike traditional professional development, that is often fleeting in duration, narrow in focus and top-down in its creation and delivery (Barab, MaKinster, Moore, & Cunningham, 2001; Togneri & Anderson, 2003), social network sites like Facebook can be seen as creating informal opportunities for teachers to engage in professional development that is ongoing, collaborative, easily accessible, and free.

Another significant feature of Facebook is the provision for creating groups whereby like-minded individuals or people sharing special interests like the business educators can have the privilege to inform, share, and discuss issues exclusively relevant to them. Active participation in such groups can go a long way in creating a sustainable environment for the professional development of business educators. One of the most popular social networking sites currently in

use is **Twitter**, which was founded in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Biz Stone, and Evan Williams. Twitter is a free online micro blogging tool that allows people to stay in constant contact with each other through short communication. Twitter allows for users to create networks of people. Twitter (2010) stressed that, “every day, millions of people use Twitter to create, discover and share ideas with others.” One of the benefits of Twitter is that the user has control over their personal networks and many professionals are able to connect with a professional community of practice (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009). Twitter helps to interact and respond quickly to issues of great interest. It is one of the tools that business educators can use to keep informed, share, and stay in tune through collaborative professional development with what friends and colleagues are thinking, doing, and learning. McCulloch, McIntosh, and Barrett, (2011) further stated that the essence of Twitter is conversation to ask questions, share links, re-Tweet interesting posts from others, and reply when messages are sent. For collaborative professional development, Twitter can be an effective tool in discussing about lesson planning and preparing for practice teaching and simulated lessons for business educators. Twitter is a unique form of communication because of its brevity on the postings with a limit of 140 characters. The users have no need to be acquaintances with each other before collaborating on a subject matter.

Conversely, **LinkedIn** which was found by Reid Hoffman as a social media is more business oriented and has 85 million members. Users post their professional image to the public, showing their skills, contacting other professionals in the field, and even searching for prospective candidates for their industries. Business educators can use this social media platform to engage in collaborative professional development to enhance teaching and learning in the classroom that will improve educational outcomes.

### **Video and Photo Sharing Sites**

**Voice Threads** are an interactive media albums that are essentially online slide shows of images, documents, or videos that enable viewers to comment on any slide at any point in the video by typing, recording an audio or video comment, or drawing on the image itself (Pillars, 2009). Business educators can use Voice threads for collaborative professional development to comment online, and this technology is easy to use. If a microphone is not available, a webcam or a text can be used for commenting. Group discussion and comments will help to enhance brainstorming sessions. Presentation can be uploaded in a voice thread, videos, images, and audios help to generate real classroom situation.

**Ning** is an online platform for users to create their own social websites and social networks. The unique feature of Ning is that teachers can create their own custom social network for a particular topic or need, catering to specific audience (Wikipedia, 2005). This social networking tool can be used by business educators for collaborative professional development to exchange ideas, update knowledge and increase the potential of teachers in teaching and learning. Ning’s social networking platform include some of the most engaging aspects of the read/write web of social networking which include user profiles, blogging, forums, photo and video sharing, and even RSS (Pillai, 2009).

**Blogs**, which represent the earliest form of Social Media, are special types of websites that usually display date-stamped entries in reverse chronological order (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007). There are the Social Media equivalents of personal web pages and can come in a multitude of different variations, from personal diaries describing the author’s life to summaries of all relevant information in one specific content area. Blogs are usually managed by one person only, but provide the possibility of interaction with others through the

addition of comments. Due to their historical roots, text-based blogs are still by far the most common. Blogging, among the many tools currently available, can offer new avenues for collaborative professional development by providing business educators with new forms of participation and unique learning opportunities. Blogs allow for self-direction of focus, purpose and method of writing within a public forum (Winer, 2003). While self-directed, the published work remains open for public scrutiny and support by offering the benefit of community validation (Efimova & Fielder, 2004).

### **The Benefits of Using Social Media for Collaborative Professional Development of Business educators**

Business educators can use social media in a variety of ways to improve their teaching and learning processes and avail multiple benefits for collaborative professional development (McCulloch, McIntosh & Barrett, 2011; Menon, 2013). Some of the key benefits include peer networking, reflection and sharing of classroom practices, knowledge sharing, locating learning resources, post conference, workshop, and training discussion.

An emerging body of literature supports the idea that peer networks, both within and across schools, can improve teaching and learning (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Social networking sites allow teachers adequate time to learn about and share effective practices. Social media has proved to be an avenue that breaks isolation and initiates collaboration in teacher development. It allows teachers to connect with their peers operating all around the globe in order to share plans and approaches, and for support and motivation. Thus social media has opened up new ways for teachers to engage with the fraternity, and to use the insights they gain to improve the scheme of their teaching-learning context.

Social media provides a platform for the teachers where they can share their reflections on their classroom experience. Gupta (2014) argued stated that teachers can share their moments of success as well as instances when they failed while practicing a novel idea or an innovative lesson plan. Teachers can be encouraged and motivated through appreciation of good work and suggestion and support for improving a failed attempt. Constructive feedback can give the teachers an insight into what is actually taking place in the classroom through an objective external observer. It can bring an array of ideas and things that teachers should know and practice and eventually provide the much needed impetus for collaborative professional development. Sharing of knowledge is as important as its creation. Research and the dissemination of its result through seminars, conferences and journals have become a common practice (McCulloch et al., 2011). This will help the teachers in keeping up-to-date with current research and debates in the field. Gupta added that it will further help them to draw ideas from all around the world and challenge their own perspectives and inspire new ways of thinking. Consequently, teachers will be able to access the thoughts and ideas of educational professionals across the world.

With the availability of education resources in abundance, the process of selecting and using one becomes a herculean task. It is always convenient to use a resource recommended by someone as it comes with the additional label of being 'tried and tested'. Through collaborative professional development, teachers can share links to resources that they have practiced or used in the classroom and found useful Menon, (2013). This will help other teachers to locate useful resources and subsequently use them in their classroom. Furthermore, subject experts and teacher educators can be invited to the groups so that they can recommend the use of resources they deem useful, and thus help, the teachers to locate the right or best of the resources. Gupta (2014) added that this process acts as a filter between the large storehouse of available resources and the teachers

who are often overburdened with classes and administrative works and left with little spare time to do this filtering on their own. In addition, there are numerous pages on social media that can be used to upload and share resources for business educators to share information about seminars, conferences and Webinars, upload videos of seminars, conferences and classroom sessions, initiates discussion and debates and collaborate with other teachers (McCulloch et al., 2011).

There is clear evidence to suggest that teachers do not transfer the knowledge and skills they learn in training sessions to classroom practices without sustained follow-up discussion and peer support, (Joyce & Showers, 2002). A study, echoing this message, concluded that “it is generally accepted that listening to inspiring speakers or attending one-off workshops rarely changes teacher practice sufficiently to impact on student outcomes.” (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). Training and conferences are seldom followed up with feedback and support or continued training which is very crucial to the implementation of innovative and improved classroom practices. There is need to initiate collaborative professional development of business educators for networking beyond the formal training set-up which can be effectively accomplished through the easily accessible social media. Dedicated groups can be created to continue the discussions and debate form conferences and workshops. Trainers and trainees of a particular training programme can come together and provide feedback, support and assistance in practicing the new ways of teaching and learning.

### **Conclusion**

Business educators can benefit from collaborative professional development through the use of social media. This paper highlighted the usefulness of social media in collaborative professional development of business educators. The authors were of opinion that, social networking sites for and video and photo sharing sites are of great benefits for collaborative professional development of business educators.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made from this study:

- Business educators should form collaborative professional development through social media where they can be dedicated to explore and experiment with new approaches and ideas for effective teaching and learning of business subjects; A common, clear and focused objective or purpose is an inevitable prerequisite for effective sharing, collaboration and outcome of educational delivery.
- Business educators should therefore utilize the opportunity of social media for collaborative professional development. It goes without saying that the emergence of a leader is imperative for a group to succeed.
- In line with the creation of collaborative professional development social network group leaders or administrators should be brought on board because it is they who will pioneer the initiative and actively participate to encourage the collaborative professional development of the teachers.
- Subject experts or specialists in the field should be invited so that the participants get access to external and specialist support;

- The discussions and deliberations in these virtual groups can be followed up with some face-to-face meetings, such as seminars, conferences and workshops. This will enable teachers to consolidate their professional relationships, and experts to introduce teachers to research literature and enquiry methods and model, observe and give feedback on best practices through the use of social media for collaborative professional development.
- Business educators should be encouraged to acquire laptops, computer/smartphone/androids gadgets.
- Business educators should be encouraged to make use of e-library facilities (smart boards, ICT or computer labs etc.) where they can use for professional development

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