

Reflective Assessment of a Facebook Mediated Course of Instructional Technology: A Case from a Women University

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Abstract



With the increasing number of media used for online education in the recent two years, 2019-2021, Facebook has proved itself the most powerful (Ang, 2021), popular, and accepted media used for discussion, peer assessment and content delivery. It holds the important pedagogical tools and traditional LMS characteristics suitable for the delivery of a well-structured course with concrete learning outcomes. Facebook is adventitious in terms of increased teacher-student and student-student interaction, direct sharing of illustrative content, convenience of learning, and a greater engagement of learners. The research in hand is a case study for the reflective assessment of a Facebook mediated basic course on 'Instructional Technology' at a women university in Punjab. This six-month course was taught to 86 mix ability women students affiliated to a women university in Punjab through a Facebook page. A reflective assessment was conducted to refine and modify the course content, course delivery and assessment procedure at the end of the course. Six steps of Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988) were used for reflective assessment. Sixty seven out of 86 students recorded their narrative reflections electronically. These narrative reflections were analysed thematically, meeting the criteria espoused by Lorelli et.al. (2017). The study found that students remained engaged during their course and learned about instructional tools and computer applications as per their convenience and interest and that Facebook provided them ample opportunity to interact with friends and discuss course content without anxiety and pressure. Students shared their assignments, projects and readings freely without time constraints and commented each other's work rigorously. Almost all of the female students strongly suggested that Facebook should be used as a medium for online teaching-learning because they could openly discuss and post their concerns while learning techniques of instructional technology. It was recommended that female universities need to construct and deliver such short and long courses at all levels to ensure the inclusion of those female students who are away from campus.

Keywords: Reflective Assessment, Facebook Mediated Course, Instructional Technology, Female Students

Introduction

Facebook, as the most popular social networking site has gained the topmost position after its advent in 2003 till 2022 (Niu, 2019; Farsi, 2021). Originally it was called 'FaceMash' and was initiated by students of Harvard University for their fellow students (Jaroenkitboworn, 2021). By the time its scope and functions increased to provide access to every person in the world who could use social networks. Though it was not espoused for knowledge sharing, however, it gradually engaged thousands of viewers and commenters to put their opinions on it to get speedy feedback and counter opinions of the members (Burkholder, Ellingsen, Evans & Turnbull, 2021). This social network which only needed a valid email, penetrated to the accounts of billions of network users by dint of its user-friendly interface, privacy policies, immediate message sharing which can be of range of nature like pictures, audio, video, illustrations, flowcharts. It can be linked to all types of media provided on other software or sites. It keeps record of the conversations for longer periods and apparently has great limit of material. It is informal and open to all (Hussain et al. 2021). One can get response for her business,

education, propagation, creativity, plans, activities, and personal opinions immediately to a number of interested people (Eger, Egerová, Tomczyk, Krystoň, & Czeglédi, 2021).

The catastrophe of COVID 19, has led the world to change the lifestyle and compelled the institutions to think for online alternatives of education (Zhao & Watterston, 2021). The universities using Learning Management systems (LMS) were not enough to cater all students. Several challenges were faced by the institutions for shifting to online and virtual education specially to the developing countries who had not enough setup to engage all students in their country (Asabere, Agyiri, Tenkorang, & Darkwah, 2021). Learning Management Systems had their constraints to enrol, manage and provide a wide range of content and learning activities. The technological skill scarcity also hampered many to maintain the education system smoothly and efficiently. However, the shift was inevitable to sustain the educational activities (Cavus, Mohammed, & Yakubu, 2021).

Facebook contains less or more all qualities of a an LMS system like; registration facility, content delivery, resource showcasing, whether they are pictures, audio, video, illustrations, PDFs or Word files etc. and can be linked to other software or any other media (Sancar, Duvenci, & Odabasi, 2021). It has been used for teaching short or long courses in many studies to find its effectiveness. However, to what extent these courses were successful and what type of challenges could be faced to maintain the effectiveness of the course, a limited number of studies provide empirical data. The qualitative data exploring the experiences of learners and their educators are still scares in the literature. Thus, research for the effectiveness of Facebook as course delivery media is needed in the field (Hamadi, El-Den, Narumon, Sriratanaviriyakul, & Azam, 2021; Barrot, 2021).

Reflective assessment is to ask students to describe about factual situation, their feelings; positive or negative, thinking for the rationale of the phenomenon, analysing and synthesizing the experience and concluding about what is learnt from the situation (Tong, & Chan, 2021). This is a narrative for the in-depth study of a phenomenon where details are looked upon carefully and considering the logical points a meaningful conclusion is drawn. Such techniques help to bring to light the strengths and weaknesses of the activity in hand. Gibbs et al. (1988) have provided six steps for conducting this cyclic reflection for making the experience meaningful. Though reflection is generally looking back and involving metathinking process, the reflective assessment is 'Reflection on Action' in the words of Schon (Van den, Bossche & Baktiran, 2021; Cattaneo, & Motta, 2021). The Gibbs' six steps involve, describing, feeling, evaluating, analysing, and drawing a conclusion. Finally, the way forward is decided in the light of logical and analytical conclusion (Gibbs et al. 1988). The researchers intended to use such reflective assessment for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of a Facebook Mediated course.

Problem Statement

In order to find new, cheap, and accessible learning resources for course delivery in Pakistan, where there only two institutions; Allama Iqbal Open University and Virtual University, Pakistan, are mainly dealing with online education and handling learning management systems, it is essential to determine the usefulness of a Facebook mediated course. A qualitative reflective assessment of such course was designed to highlight the experiences of students involved for reflecting on the course content, its delivery and assessment procedures. The study may be suggestive for other institutions to offer Facebook mediated courses because it is free of cost and the most popular social media to attract people in general and students in specific. Such reflective assessment was needed to find the pro and cons of Facebook mediated course delivery and to exploit its full potentials for teaching and learning purpose. Thus, the researchers conducted a case study for evaluating a Facebook mediated course taught at a women university to explore the experiences of students.

Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to explore the reflective narratives of the students taught by a six-month Facebook mediated course on 'Instructional Technology' at a women university for its course content, course delivery and course assessment.

Study Questions

1. What were the experiences of women students taught by a Facebook mediated course?
2. How did women students feel about the course content, course delivery and assessment procedure?
3. How do they see the social and emotional support during the course?
4. What challenges did they face during the course for their effective learning?

5. How it was different from other online courses if they have attended any?
6. What do they suggest for improving the Facebook mediated course?

Review of Literature

Many quantitative studies have provided evidence for the effectiveness of Facebook mediated courses like Hamadi, El-Den, Narumon, Sriratanaviriyakul, & Azam, (2021) and Barrot, (2021). The Facebook was used to teach English subject students within a closed group at university level in Thailand. The students were interviewed to comment on the usefulness of the content they shared with each other. The students were found very happy with the connectivity of the course. They suggested that Facebook could be used for teaching at higher education level. Habes, Alghizzawi, Salloum, and Mhamdi, (2021) conducted a quantitative study in university of Yarmouk and University of Amman with 415 university students to find the Facebook course delivery's impact on social connectivity and self-esteem of students through personal sharing and knowledge dissemination. However still there is a scarcity of literature in identifying what features could be in a Facebook course and how it is accepted by the learners as compared to other online courses. Todorovic, Coyne, Gopalan, Oh, Landowski, and Barton, (2021) provided twelve tips for using Facebook as a learning platform which were specific to the course delivery process. These tips include developing a Facebook 'closed group' instead of a 'page', opting; create rules' options for class discipline, using live Facebook option for synchronous teaching, daily presence of the educator and regular corrective feedback, developing a place for sharing files, providing diverse activities, like discussions, MCQs, and small projects to submit at the group.

A previous study of Giannikas (2020) used a Sample Facebook rubric (Texas Education Agency 2006) for identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the Facebook mediated course with four levels. It was a rigorous study to find the difference of MOOCs and Facebook mediated courses. The study had important implications because it found that students faced many difficulties while dealing with MOOCs whereas they were quite comfortable with Facebook. They received more responses on Facebook as compared to MOOCs. Participants opined that Facebook was convenient, informal, easy to use, quicker, more interactive, can be used on smart phones and thus was more practical. However, they said that MOOCs are more university like and formal. They could study at both media. The study provides many features of Facebook which prove it a preferable media for developing countries. Moreover, the atmosphere of Facebook interface is much more attractive than MOOCs. However, some participants considered Facebook 'Messy' due to lot of input from the group members.

One step ahead, Sancar, Duvenci, and Odabasi (2021) studied the potential of Facebook mediated courses at higher education recently. The study focused on review of research for evaluating Facebook as LMS as compared to other social media. The procedure of Meta synthesis was used to analyse 30 articles in-depth from SCI-Expanded and SSCI indexes. The major themes were learning, transition, interaction, and adaptation. It was found that no study before 2009 was conducted on the topic. These studies were conducted in 16 different countries including major part in USA. The result of reviewing all studies proved that among the Social Networking Sites (SNS), Facebook was the best tool in place of LMS at higher education. This study has again strong implication for introducing Facebook Mediated courses in our country.

Alwreikat, Zaid, and Shehata (2021) used a quantitative study to assess Facebook use for collaborative learning and affective impact of the use of this social site. It found that students were engaged in collaborative learning, and it boosted their personality and affect. It was a pleasant experience for them. They had sense of community, sharedness, group ownership and belongingness. They had diverse circles of acquaintance from the university i.e. from science and arts. The study was conducted in Jordan. This study reveals the affective or socio-emotional effect of Facebook mediated courses which reduce online education stress and anxiety.

Research Method and Procedures

The current study is a qualitative case study which revolved round a six-month 'Instructional Technology' course taught to 86 mix ability students (BS, MS, B.Ed, PhD), conveniently selected, from an accessible population of students who were affiliated to a women university at Lahore. Only those students were registered who were willing to complete the free course. A Facebook Mediated course was designed following 5Cs for online courses which are collaboration, communication, convergence, community, and creativity (Friedman, 2010) to make the course parallel with other

online courses. The researchers prepared course description, course objectives and outcomes, outline and weekly curriculum plan including activities inline with 5Cs i.e. two way interaction with students and teacher, collaborative projects, discussion sessions, assignment sharing and inviting comments from classmates, floating ideas and shared problem solving, creative individual projects where students were allowed to comment each other positively. All activities were assessed formatively by the teacher or the peers. There were sufficient practice sessions and gallery walls for students to display their work for comments. A drop box was shared to help readings; books, slides and notes. Audio and video lectures, in addition to teacher’s regular session were available. Finally, a comprehensive assessment was conducted online for grading.

At the end of the course, the students were invited to write their narrative reflections about the given questions. These questions followed Gibbs six steps of narration and asked students about the description of the course, i.e., what happened during the course? How did they feel about the course content, course delivery and course assessment procedure? They were asked ‘what were the strengths of the course and what challenges they faced during the course’. They were encouraged to highlight the activities they liked and to comment the logic behind the given tasks. The students were stimulated to comment on their social and emotional experiences as well. They were asked to identify the salient features of the course as compared to any other online course. Finally, the question was launched to provide their recommendations for improving the Facebook mediated course.

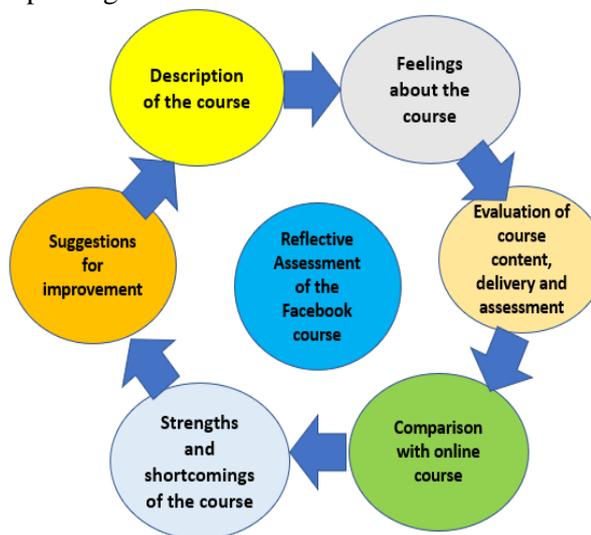


Figure No 1. Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988)

Figure No. 2. Researchers process of Reflective assessment

Data Analysis

The researchers obtained 76 reflective narrations out of 86 students. These narrations were electronically recorded. Some of them were audios and some were written. The students were allowed to reflect anyway they feel convenient. The audios were transcribed for analysis as well. The thematic analysis procedure of Lorelli et.al. (2017) ‘six steps’ was opted: knowing the data, generating initial codes, drawing themes, reviewing themes, naming or categorising these themes and finally writing the report. These themes were discussed with a cumulative approach to summarize their comments under each thematic table. The frequencies of the responses are given in each table against the major and minor themes. The number shows how many respondents mentioned the given theme. The respondents were coded as P1, P2, P76, by assigning numbers.

Results

Students’ narrations were analysed for deriving themes. The themes obtained have been presented in the tables below:

Table No. 1 *What were your experiences about this Facebook mediated course?*

Sr. No	Major Themes	Code	Minor Themes	Frequencies
1	Engaging	A1	A1a. On time classes	70
			A1b. Busy on task	45
			A1c. Demanding	66
			A1d. Novel and interesting	34

2	Pleasant	A2	A2a. The pleasant experience	45
			A2b. A sense of community	56
			A2c. Encouragement by teacher	67
			A2e. encouragement by peers	55
			A2f. diverse activities	23
			3	Interesting
			A3b. Interesting tasks to do	43
			A3c. Relevant presentations, lectures and videos	72
			A3d. Gallery walls were interesting	68
4	Interactive	A3	A4a. Interactive with peers and teacher	46
			A4b. On time problem solving	43
			A4c. Timely feedback	42
			A4d. Question answer sessions and discussions	65

The table presents opinions of participants of the course. Majority of the respondents appreciated the time management of the course. They regarded it engaging and immersing as they were always kept on tasks. They said that it was a demanding course and they had to prepare many projects and assignments to fulfil the need of the course. However, these tasks were interesting and not difficult ones. Participants P2, P3, P4 and several others told that the activities were novel and interesting. They completed them eagerly. Many skills like using Word properly and using short keys facilitated them a lot.

Many of the respondents narrated that it was a very pleasant experience to study through Facebook. Earlier they were using it regularly for discussion with friends and family. They had a feeling of community because they were already familiar with group discussion on Facebook. They enjoyed different activities on the page when the teacher and their peers were discussing instructional tools. Their teacher and classmates encouraged them, and they collectively decided not to leave the course till completion.

The students found diverse reading material on the page, and they could download relevant material. There were PDF files, Word files, videos and recorded lectures. However, some of the participants did not like recorded lectures due to their extra length. They found the tasks interesting and easy also. They loved one command tasks the most. They appreciated the provision of relevant presentations, and videos which helped them to understand the concept. They found ‘gallery walk’ named activity where all students uploaded their tasks, and everybody had an opportunity to see and comment others’ work. They were making interesting comments and were learning from each other.

The students told that initially they thought that it would be a boring course like other online courses where there a casual interaction exists with instructors, but it was unexpectedly very interactive. They felt that they were in the classroom and seeing a flowchart together and discussing it was a good experience. Whenever they had a problem, the whole class was ready to solve it. Peers immediately commented and told how to do the things. Likewise, the teacher also immediately provided feedback and answered their queries. Similarly, many participants opined that they mostly had question answer sessions with the teacher as well as with peers. It resolved many problems. As there were students of multiple abilities, they helped each other to solve their problems.

Table.2 How do you feel about the course content, course delivery and assessment procedure?

Sr. No	Major Themes	Code	Minor Themes	Frequencies
1	Content Selection	B1	B1a. Relevant to objectives	56
			B1b. Appropriate	45
			B1c. Useful	67
			B1d. Diverse	33
2	Course Delivery	B2	B2a. Smooth and sequenced	56
			B2b. Teachers explained everything	67
			B2c. Relevant tasks were assigned	66
			B2d. Lectures were comprehensive	22
			B2e. Activites were well planned	54
			B2f. Teacher was encouraging	39
3	Assessment Procedure	B3	B3a. Tasks were commented by the teacher during lecture	63
			B3b. Tasks were relevant and easy to perform	68
			B3c. Teacher’s and peer feed back	55

The table No. 2 reveals that majority of the participants were satisfied with the relevance of the course content with the objectives. They added that the content was appropriate for a basic course on ‘Instructional Technology’ which included, key concepts of instructional technology, skills used for MS Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Access, Publisher, using web tools, writing etc. All tasks were related to the topic. They learned preparing different documents including resume, reports, using formula, and working with Access. These skills were useful for them. They attained a good typing speed, learned to prepare and send messages with pictures, audio, video and using Hyperlinks. The tasks were diverse and interesting including real life activities like sending mails, completing scheme of studies and results, making brochures and preparing website. Tasks were easy and doable.

The participants explained that the content was delivered smoothly. It was sequenced from easy to complex. Units were sufficient to elaborate all relevant information. In addition, the teacher was very polite, and she explained everything in detail. All tasks were given after sufficient explanation. They were relevant to the topic and needed sufficient skills to practice. They commented that activities were well planned and related to real life situations. The teacher was encouraging, and she helped to complete the task if they were in trouble at times.

The students were very satisfied with the assessment procedure because it was timely and all teacher and students were ready to help them. Most of the assessment was formative and there was corrective feedback from teacher’s side. Senior students were also helpful. Whereas the tasks were not so difficult. Most of the activities were completed individually. If anything went wrong, all were ready to help. They did not feel isolated or dejected. It was fun. They did not feel any pressure or anxiety for doing things because all activities were meant for correction and not for grading. Collaborative assignments were easy to do and they enjoyed working together. Students helped each other after class and still talked on the page when the class was over.

Table No. 3 *How do they see the social and emotional support during the course?*

Sr. No	Major Themes	Code	Minor Themes	Frequencies
1	Social Support	C1	C1a. Collaborative tasks	68
			C1b. Discussions	53
			C1c. Peer Encouragement	66
			C1d. Friendly atmosphere	61
			C1e. Teacher’s question-answer session	54
2	Emotional Support	C2	C2a. Teacher was soft and encouraging	64
			C2b. Peers encouraged to continue the course	13
			C2c. No isolation	64
			C2d. Sense of Community	42
			C2e. Peer help in problem solving	45
			C2f. Immediate responses	61

Majority of the students found great social support in the class. They said that they already had been using Facebook, so they took it as informal as it was. However, they never posted their works on it which was an exclusive experiment for them. They went on for discussion for long times on the newly learnt concepts. Their peers were helping and encouraging. They commented and helped willingly. The collaborative tasks did not let them feel isolated. Most of the assignments were collaborative but they tried to complete their individual part as well. Their questions were answered immediately as soon as another learner found time to see it. The class environment was very friendly, and they had question answer sessions with the teacher and their peers.

Majority of students appreciated the emotional support they found during course. They said that the teacher was very encouraging, and she did not put pressure for completion of the tasks rather she guided and made them interesting and easy to encourage students to be eager to complete their tasks. She answered the queries immediately. They felt a sense of community because everyone was answering the question of a confused learner. Students helped each other willingly and encouragingly. P67, P27 and P68 commented that they never felt so engaged and accepted in any online course as they felt in the Facebook course. Additionally, they received so many suggestions to correct their work that they were obliged and grateful for their peers.

Table No. 4 *What challenges did they face during the course for their effective learning?*

Sr. No	Themes	Code	Minor Themes	Frequencies
3	Challenges	D1	D1a. Connectivity issue	19
			D1b. Equipment out of order	04
			D1c. Long videos to watch	45
			D1d. Time constraints	26
	Unpleasant events	D2	D2a. Extra reading material was assigned	15
			D2b. Some tasks could not be completed	06

Some of the students mentioned challenges they faced during the course. These challenges were not exclusive to the Facebook course because they talked about loadshedding issue, internet interruption, poor equipment, less time to attend the course etc. However, some problems were related to the course for example, P1, P5, P34, P35 and P60 commented that the videos uploaded in the course were long which needed much time to watch. They were working and studying at other places so could not find time to complete some tasks. Some participants were of the opinions that the reading material was excessive and much more to cover. These students were engaged in other activities and could not dedicatedly attend the course.

Table No. 5 *How it was different from other online courses if you have attended any?*

Sr. No	Major Themes	Code	Minor Themes	Frequencies
1	Interactive	E1	E1a. Facebook course was more interactive	e56
			E1b. No feeling of isolation	48
			E1c. Peer Encouragement	71
			E1d. Tasks were easy and appropriate	58
			E1e. Teacher’s question-answer session	53
			E 1f. After class discussion with peers	46
2	Supportive	E2	E2a. Teacher was soft and encouraging	57
			E2b. It seemed all are present in the class	26
			E2c. Collaborative problem solving	45
			E2d. Humor and chatting	34
			E2e. No complicated procedures	28
			E2f. Free	47

Table No. 5 shows participants’ views about interactivity and support provided in the course as compared to any other online course they attended earlier. The participants liked the interactive sessions of the course when the teacher and the peers were discussing concepts, problems, and strategies of how to complete the tasks. Participants showed presence in the class through comments. Almost full attendance was shown in the class, and everybody was happy to see all in the class. They developed a sense of community and friendship. They had fun and displayed their assignments proudly. Students commented that tasks were interesting and easy to perform. The question answer session with the teacher was the most helpful part of the course. Students prefer to discuss and solve their misconceptions collaboratively. In addition, they were asked by the teacher to seek help form their peers to complete their tasks. So, they remained busy in discussing even after the class.

Participants obtained full support by the teacher and the peers during the Facebook course. They had fun by commenting humorously on their peers’ work and suggestions. It created a lighter atmosphere. They loved to join class and talk to others. They learnt all skills in a lighter environment. No one was harsh and discouraging in the class. The Facebook interface was familiar to them and uploading and downloading the material was not a problem. The course was free and they accessed it on their phones or laptops as per convenience.

Table No. 6 *What do you suggest for improving the Facebook mediated course?*

Sr. No	Major Themes	Code	Minor Themes	Frequencies
1	Suggestions	F1	F1a. Short sized videos are needed	23
			F1b. Tasks should be more easy	55
			F1c. Competitions	30
			F1d. Encouragement for early accomplisners	13
			F1e. More objective type questions	43
2	Resources needed	F2	F2a. More videos for conceptual clarity	16
			F2b. Teacher should record her lecture and upload	45

F2c. Course material should be uploaded before time	12
F2d. Free access to digital library	37

When participants of the Facebook were asked to suggest some strategies for the improvement of the course, they said that the selection of videos could be more precise. However, video part was their favourite one and more short videos could be added to the course. Some of the participants believed that the tasks could be easier and shorter so that all participants with less skills could perform them. As there were presentations of all participants, they loved competitions and suggested for team and individual contests for creative tasks. Some of the participants like P13, 16, 34, 37, 42, 44, 48 and some other said that they used to complete their task first and the others followed their designs and techniques. Some had the opportunity to improve their work so there should be preference for those who submit first. They should be given extra score for being first commers. The participants suggested for objective type assessment during the course because some participants were week in English language.

Participants were of the view that the level of selected videos could be higher than the presented ones for relevance and length. They said that effective videos helped them a lot so more videos should be uploaded which are short up to 5 minutes and exactly for what they are presented. Majority of the participants suggested that if the teacher herself recorded her lectures it was the best resource for them. They could be able to watch her lecture whenever they found time. They recommended earlier uploading of the reading material so that they could find sufficient time to read it. Sometimes the material was uploaded one or two hours before the class, and they had not time to read. Some of the participants suggested that they should have access of digital library at their places supported by the institution for convenient reading.

Discussion and Conclusion

The current case study provided elaborated views of the Facebook course attendants. The current study supported the previous researches (Sancar, Duvenci, & Odabasi, 2021; Giannikas, 2020; Hamadi, El-Den, Narumon Sriratanaviriyakul, & Azam, 2021) which claimed that Facebook courses are equally effective for online teaching as other LMS are effective (Alwreikat, Zaid, & Shehata, 2021). However, the present study disclosed that the Facebook courses are more friendly interactive, outcome based that other online courses(ibid). Though universities are using Facebook for their program advertisement, showcasing their activities, it may be used confidently for delivering formal short and ling courses (Giannikas, 2020). Facebook is now safe for privacy matters so students can be enrolled and registered with more precision as suggested by (Todorovic, Coyne, Gopalan, Oh, Landowski, & Barton, 2021). The current study has brought to light all positive features of Facebook mediated course as being; cheap, accessible, friendly, informal, collaborate, quick and immediate, disciplined, possible for sharing all media and engaging students all the time actively which have provided evidence that it can be suitable for being used as LMS for many short and long courses or as a helping site for group activities. Facebook mediated courses are more suitable for female students because they are comfortable with sharing in a closed group and had an opportunity to learn without traveling from long distances.

The way forward

Universities may replace Facebook for paid LMS and should start course groups for required courses. Full time instructors need to cater students’ problems and queries. A well structed course following the protocols of online course standards should be prepared, pilot tested and then introduced with continuous feedback from students. The reflective assessment helps instructors to modify the course intime. Teachers can overcome their performance lapses and students feel linked and affiliated to the course. The activities should be framed keeping all types of clientele. Assessment should be of moderate level. The teachers should develop a trust in students as the current study showed that participants felt that their teacher was immediate, helpful, and encouraging. The more the course will be interactive, the students will be more engaged, and the course will gain desirable outcomes.

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