

# Nursing Educators' Experiences in a Social Learning Network: A Phenomenological Study

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**Abstract:** The social learning networks are online networks that support the teacher in pursuing their objectives on the teaching and learning process to meet the needs of a curriculum-based education. Traditionally, instead of teaching and learning in the classroom that sometimes tedious and unsuited for the students' availability, putting the positive effects of their learning to the social learning networks is beneficial for the digital natives. Making learning in a formal education be found within the central of social networks. With this, this paper focuses on the experiences of the nursing educators who are presently graduate students on their usage of a social learning network provided by their subject instructor. This phenomenological study was conducted in Saudi Arabia where participants are enrolled in an online education using social learning networks. The participants' interviews, recorded voice and analysis of personal texts were transcribed into codes and key themes. As a result, the nursing educators reported their views and expectations on the online networks.

**Keywords:** Nursing educators' experience, Online education, Phenomenological, Social Learning Networks.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of information technology, the educational institution emerged to adopt simultaneously to create solutions through learning innovation appropriate with the current generation. The integration of this learning innovation can impact education to redesign methods of teacher on their learner styles and needs. Undoubtedly, the e-learning in the context of education became easy, accessible and available through the internet with the social learning network, a learning system platform specifically design for distance learning education.

The social learning network (SLN), collectively popularized as the Learning Management System (LMS) is becoming prevalent among higher education. This online network helps facilitate the teaching and learning process. Brinton & Mung (2014) described social learning network as the type of social network that promote interaction between learner, teacher and learning modules consisting of actors to takes place the learning process. Huang (2010) explained that the formation of SLN seen collaborative learning as a critical part so that actors can work together. Yet, Techcrunch defined LMS as cited by Mansfield (2017) as it is used to "plan, implement and assess a specific learning process". Boyd and Ellison (2007) delineated social networking sites (SNS) are those sites with different technical features allowing users to form interactions through sharing, linked by their interest and constitute a social structure while interlinked with relationships.

Interestingly, PBworks, Facebook and other online networks are ubiquitous in most educational environment like what the participants were enrolled. PBworks offers a free online learning network that provides set of collaboration to help firms and educational work be done effectively and efficiently. Also, these strongly incorporate learning tools and supplement with discussion handouts, lecture aids, homework and exercises through attachments. Landry et.al.,(2006) pointed out that LMS is not purposely to replace the usual classroom setting but to supplement the usual lecture with course content accessible from school or the internet. Although the instructors and course teachers can substantially monitor their student participation embed by their submissions and responses but how about the expectations on their part. Since they shared variety of helpful educational features adjunctly, but do the instructors greatly find ways to determine the impacts of those

sites as a form of learning management and know the state of learning they experience to inculcate the necessary knowledge and skills.

While the learner acknowledges the exchanges and collaborative experiences using a network with similar learning objectives, students seemingly carry certain dissatisfaction, dislike or even feel challenging to the teaching methods. Though the SLN can mix all type of activities to something useful such as blogs, forums and chats but the problems and tensions arise when linked to formal learning. Bull et.al., (2008) explained that we must have careful attention on the increasing tensions such as between formal and non-formal learning, structured and non-structured learning spaces, open and closed contacts with social networks and privacy and security issues in the social network. Espuny et.al., (2011) added that university leaders are still on track on what the teachers can do to start changing their instructional practices to take the benefits of the new opportunities generated by online network, thereby the students can participate and expect the best learning.

The aim of the study was to examine the experiences of enrolled graduate students who are nursing educators working in the member countries of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The experience of these educators on using social learning network as provided by their instructors is of the essence in this study. Such experiences become significant to the new users and the teachers' integration to the future learning system.

## II. METHODS

Qualitative research focuses on taking accounts of people that reports behavior in a natural setting or experiences which are usually cannot expressed numerically. As a form of qualitative research design, this study is a phenomenological research because it describe structure of experiences (relating to their use of social learning networks) and uses peoples' accounts (personal descriptions and interpretation of experiences) as data resulting to deeper understanding of those experiences in the real world context (on social learning network) and develop a new concepts (themes).

### A. Sample Information:

The sample of this study are the nurse educators who are graduate students currently enrolled on their post-graduate program under online education and a new user of SLN (social learning network) where their instructor utilized as a platform, a criteria which directed the researcher to select his participant purposively. Aside from the participants are living the experiences where the researcher studies, they are working in the member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), any age, of both sexes and living the experiences where the researcher studies. This was conducted from November 2017 to January 2018.

**TABLE I. STUDY SAMPLE OVERVIEW**

Participants	Age	Gender	Dept./Work	Course enrolled	Location
A (Anna)	36	Female	Nursing	PhDNed	KSA
B (Bryan)	32	Male	Nursing	PhDNed	KSA
C (Carlo)	35	Male	Nursing	Ph.D.N	Bahrain
D (Dom)	37	Male	Nursing	PhDNed	UAE
E (Elisa)	34	Female	Nursing	PhDNed	Oman
F (Fernan)	32	Male	Nursing	DNS	Kuwait
G (Greg)	31	Male	Nursing	PhDNed	KSA
H (Harry)	31	Male	Nursing	DNS	KSA
I ( Inigo)	33	Male	Nursing	PhDNed	Oman

(Note: All participant's name are pseudonym).

### B. Measures:

This phenomenological study gathered data related to the experiences of nursing educators who are using social learning network as a learning tool provided by their instructor in an online education. It is a phenomenological research because as defined by Giorgi (2012), the "phenomenology thematizes the phenomenon of consciousness, and, in its most comprehensive sense, it refers to the totality of lived experiences that belong to a single person" (p.2).

In this study, the researcher uncover the lived experiences of a sample of graduate students through interview to understand their perspectives on their impression on learning using the social learning network (SLN) as a learning tool to support the teaching of their instructor. Before the actual data collection, a pre survey was done to identify what SLN they had used. PBworks was the common learning network from which the participants have focused. A semi-structured interviews, direct-email responses and follow-up questions were used to gain deeper understanding of their experiences. Facebook messenger was used to record the interviews with participant’s knowledge. The interview questions are as follows:

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the said social learning network?
- What are your impressions on the teaching methods used by your instructor?
- How do the said social learning networks affect your learning as a student?
- How do the said social learning networks satisfy your expectation as a student? For the subject?
- What are the factors that can facilitate or inhibit your learning using social learning network? Explain
- How do you perceive what your instructor’s do to enable the best learning possible for you as their student?

The necessary data that was obtained from this study was systematically outlined and documented. All the interviews were transcribed, and the researcher reviewed the interviews several times to ensure accuracy. The researcher also coded manually, and established themes based on the multiple perspectives of the participants and the themes and coded were finally concurred accurate.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part present and discuss the analysis of data. The results of the study which was in the themes are detailed for each interview questions to arrive on the lived experiences on a social learning network. All of those are illustrated in table form and explained with participants’ responses.

**TABLE II. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE SOCIAL LEARNING NETWORK (PBWORKS) IN AN ONLINE EDUCATION**

Themes	Sub-themes
<b>Advantages</b>	
Collaboration	a. sharing information b. social connection c. creates interaction d. information communication
Flexibility	a. deadline completion b. motivates on learning task
Gaining feedback	a. giving feedback between students and instructors b. on time notifications
Convenience	a. freely accessible b. self-pacing
Active learning	a. student engagement b. task involvement c. independent learning
<b>Disadvantages</b>	
Selective learning	a. lack of concentration b. copy paste submission
Ineffective communication	a. poor communication b. less personal contact c. inappropriate reasoning d. creates alibi e. non-existent access to instructor
Navigation Issues	a. internet connectivity b. unfamiliar application
File size	a. limited file attachment b. character limits c. time consuming

The advantages and disadvantages of the explored social learning network using in an online education where themes and sub-themes are summarized are in table 2. Analysis has been made on each of the participants' responses. Elisa said that: "PBworks as a social learning network is a helpful way to my study because the syllabus and learning activities are available online. Downloading the lecture in word, ppt, pdf and video can be access easily anytime anywhere with ease on my timetable."

Since it is obviously useful on the learning of the participants, Anna explained her view on this way: "The PBworks provided by the instructor is beneficial to us. Every detail of the requirement is posted on each folder of the network which makes us easily meet the deadlines. It is organized in the sense that the output on every activity can be easily uploaded to the submissions folder. Although I need to manage my time properly, a self-study is needed and linked social media to my classmate to be updated."

Despite the benefits given by the social learning network used. Harry complaint that:

"Bad connection, low signal made me difficult to traverse the instructor's provided website."

In addition, the participant's responses indicate that exerting effort on PBworks seems to directly receive feedback and collaborate information. Even though they finish completely, as for students, sometimes inappropriate reasoning is commented due to work schedule.

**TABLE III. STUDENTS' IMPRESSION ON THE TEACHING METHOD PROVIDED BY THEIR INSTRUCTOR USING SOCIAL LEARNING NETWORK (PBWORKS)**

Themes	Sub-themes
Accessibility	a. easy to use
Interactivity	a. social presence b. learning ties
Satisfying	a. better task management
Distraction	a. real time notifications

The efforts of the instructor to used PBworks as a learning platform correspond to the current generation. The user interface feature of the website provides an interaction between the students and the instructor. Bryan elaborated that he likes the online network provided by the instructor because of its easy to use and availability of the discussion and he is satisfied with the results of his output. He added that they regularly check for additional instruction.

Although many of the participants state that the PBworks impressed them (6 out of 9 educators) with its presence online and its positive effects. Greg complains that with my busy schedule in the hospital sometimes it made me difficult to meet the deadlines and linked email to the network instead. In his words: "PBworks is easy to use. I don't spend a lot of time to navigate the site. I consider linking my email to my android phone to be updated. However, the automatic notification distracts to my busy schedule."

He added that the social presence of the students especially the teacher on the on the website promote interaction to each of the students.

**TABLE IV. IMPACT OF THE SOCIAL LEARNING NETWORK (PBWORKS) ON THEIR LEARNING AS A STUDENT**

Themes	Sub-themes
Enhance Learning Engagement	a. connects self to others b. increased participation c. better discussion platform d. promotes professional learning network
Develop ICT skills	a. promote media creation
Develop creativity	a. creative work sharing b. follows certain format
Widens One's Knowledge	a. rich source of resources b. open for diverse views c. supplement learning material
Positive self- image	a. manages self-better b. presentation of self
Privacy	a. activity folder intrusion
Feel isolated	

The impact of the social learning network PBworks garnered the biggest response by the nursing educators on how it affects their learning as a student. Fortunately, the PBworks as a learning platform improve the learning of the students. Carlo, Anna and Dom agreed that the social learning network utilized enhances learning but Dom being the eldest, for example, said that “I see to it that I always involved myself in PBworks and connect with my classmate and teacher.”

Many of them stated that the discussion widens knowledge on the topics where everything will be studied. Similarly, Carlo mentioned that the discussions affect his learning and ability. He clarified that “Due to this social learning network, I enable myself to follow the APA format, create a video presentation and be open with the different views as with regards to the reflection is concern.” Anna elaborated that “This makes me more creative and have the know-how on doing media resources and know what ICT are needed.” Opposite to that, Inigo stated that “Even if I meet the deadline, I felt isolated and cheated because I knew that my submission folder can be open by my other classmate that may set as their pattern, hint or gives idea. Oh, invading my folder made me disappointed!”

Additionally, the results of the interview indicated that if the instructor acknowledged their output, and a comment has been made on the threads feature of the website, more students appeal to be willing on their educational task. It has been observed that their participation directly affect their better self-image as a graduate student.

**TABLE V. EXPECTATION AS A STUDENT AND FOR THE SUBJECT THROUGH SOCIAL LEARNING NETWORK (PBWORKS)**

Themes	Sub-themes
<b>As a student</b>	
Meet Expectation	a. learning outcome
Unmet Expectations	a. limited learning activities
<b>For the subject</b>	
Learner Satisfaction	a. personal time management b. comfort on technology use c. less paper consumption

The used social learning network was not appealing to three nursing educators (Greg, Inigo and Fernan). Surprisingly, despite the unmet expectations of participants of the study, the remaining learners are satisfied to the flow of learning on their subjects. This is probably due to the outcome of their objectives. Bryan, for example said, “Oh! I am happy with the way discussion are given and as long as I can provide the necessary assignments. Unlike my college years where I need to go to computer shop for printing but now I can do both.”

Also, the social learning network PBworks can upload several learning resources with the use of technology. As what Elisa remarked that “There are several resources can be found in the internet but using time properly is a must.”

Moreover, the participants responses showed that the learning network provide the necessary material for the subject. They were satisfied with the outcome of their studies.

**TABLE VI. FACTORS THAT FACILITATE OR INHIBIT LEARNING USING SOCIAL LEARNING NETWORK (PBWORKS)**

Themes	Sub-themes
Presence	
Technology Availability	
Support	

Another important to the social learning network is the factors that facilitate or inhibit learning on the part of the student using it. Harry and Greg are the youngest in the group of participants which made them stay longer online. They were active in most social media which they think that the presence of both teachers and students can facilitate learning. The fact that their instructor of the subject was not usually answered or respond to queries, continuing efforts to deal with the topic can be delay.

Both expressed that the instructor should be active on the social learning network like PBworks to better assist them on their studies since it is not the traditional classroom where there is personal contact.

**TABLE VII. PERCEIVE ON WHAT THE INSTRUCTORS' DO TO ENABLE THE BEST LEARNING POSSIBLE USING THE SOCIAL LEARNING NETWORK (PBWORKS)**

Themes	Sub-themes
Sensitivity	
Modification	
Accessibility	

The reason behind this on how they perceive their instructors do to enable learning is the realization of their learning objectives and established better course system implementation. Dom, for example, said that "With the integration of SLN to my course, I understand the instructor if he/she is not also familiar with the application, maybe he/she is a baby boomers but one thing for sure is needed, that she/she must know the needs of their students." With the large student registered on certain subjects, the instructor being sensitive is important. On the contrary, Bryan said "I appreciate my instructor to use this kind of learning network even if I encounter difficulties, she satisfy my coursework's and follow-ups."

Bearing in mind the aforementioned statements of the nursing educators, it is clear that learning interaction, technological support and students/instructors presence on the Social Learning Network (SLN) to a certain extent is significant to the expectation of the students and achieve the learning outcome as well.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the lived experiences of the nine nursing educators who are enrolled in postgraduate studies and a first-time user of SLN (Social Learning Network) specifically the PBworks as their instructor platform on their teaching methods. Overall, this study revealed the six major themes emerged from the analysis of data. To labeled them as follows: (1) nursing educators appreciate flexibility of schedule to finish educational tasks, (2) the navigation issues encountered by the nursing educators in using the learning network, (3) in the context of SLN, it affords to widen one's knowledge to facilitate learning of the students, (4) the learner satisfaction was experience by the participants, (5) perceived lack of instructor's presence online delayed the activities, and (6) the nursing educators perceived sensitivity to the coursework, follow-ups and responses are needed to provide better learning to students. All of those emergent themes were identified as they were important and prominent in the responses of the participants.

As for the future work, the same studies can be carried out involving experiences of post-graduate students which are old users of the social learning network in an online education. Furthermore, individuals' expectation as related to performance of the students can be established to form a better approach to the teaching tool utilizing social learning network. This can be another basis for future qualitative phenomenological studies.

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