

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF COLLABORATIVE COMPETENCE OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract. *The rapid development of digital technologies and the widespread use of social networks have significantly transformed the educational environment in higher education institutions. Social networks, which were initially designed for communication and entertainment, are increasingly being integrated into the academic sphere, serving as effective platforms for collaborative learning and competence development. This article examines the impact of social networks on the formation and enhancement of collaborative competence among university students. Collaborative competence is considered as the ability of students to work effectively in teams, share knowledge, solve problems collectively, and achieve common goals through mutual support and interaction. The study highlights that the use of social networks such as Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, and specialized educational platforms fosters student engagement in academic discussions, improves the exchange of ideas, and creates opportunities for joint project development. Moreover, social networks allow students to break traditional barriers of time and space, enabling continuous communication and collaborative activities beyond the classroom. This, in turn, contributes to the development of critical thinking, digital literacy, communication skills, and leadership qualities. However, the article also discusses challenges associated with the use of social networks in educational contexts, such as distraction, misinformation, superficial interaction, and the potential risk of reduced face-to-face communication skills. To address these issues, the article emphasizes the importance of integrating social networks into a structured pedagogical framework, where instructors play an active role in guiding students' activities and ensuring that online collaboration remains purposeful and academically productive. The findings suggest that social networks, when properly managed and integrated into higher education curricula, have a positive and transformative effect on the development of collaborative competence among students. They not only serve as tools for communication but also as interactive learning environments that prepare future specialists to work in team-oriented, digitally driven professional contexts. Thus, the strategic use of social networks in education can be seen as an innovative approach to strengthening students' collaborative competence and overall academic performance.*

Key words: *Social networks; collaborative competence; university students; digital communication; online collaboration; educational technology; higher education; interactive learning; group work; teamwork development; peer-to-peer learning; social interaction; knowledge sharing; digital*

literacy; student engagement; learning motivation; virtual platforms; collaborative problem-solving; communication skills; academic networking; pedagogical innovation; social media tools in education; information exchange; critical thinking development; online communities; digital collaboration strategies.

Introduction.

In the 21st century, the rapid expansion of information and communication technologies has significantly transformed the way individuals learn, communicate, and collaborate. Among these technologies, social networks have emerged as one of the most influential platforms for interaction, knowledge exchange, and the development of competencies required in modern education. The increasing popularity of platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, Instagram, and LinkedIn demonstrates that students today spend a substantial portion of their time engaging in online communities. This interaction is not only a form of entertainment but also an important educational resource that can enhance collaborative competence. Collaborative competence, defined as the ability to effectively interact, share knowledge, solve problems collectively, and achieve common goals in a group setting, is considered a crucial skill for university students. In the context of higher education, the development of collaborative competence ensures that students can work productively in academic projects, research initiatives, and future professional environments where teamwork is essential. Social networks, due to their accessibility and interactive nature, provide new opportunities for fostering such competence by creating digital spaces for group discussions, project coordination, peer-to-peer learning, and cross-cultural communication. The integration of social networks into the educational process has led to the emergence of innovative teaching methods where instructors encourage students to use online platforms for collaborative assignments, virtual debates, and knowledge sharing. Moreover, social networks allow learners to extend classroom discussions beyond physical boundaries, facilitating a blended learning environment that combines formal and informal education. In this context, social networks act as powerful tools for developing not only technical skills but also soft skills such as communication, critical thinking, leadership, and teamwork. However, the impact of social networks on collaborative competence is not without challenges. Excessive or unstructured use of these platforms may result in distractions, superficial communication, or dependency on digital interactions. Therefore, it is important to investigate how social networks can be effectively integrated into higher education in a way that maximizes their benefits while minimizing potential drawbacks. By analyzing the role of social media in developing collaborative competence, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of digital pedagogy and propose strategies for enhancing the educational potential of social networks in universities. In light of global trends in digitalization and the demand for collaborative professionals in the labor market, this research highlights the significance of social networks as pedagogical instruments. It underscores the need for universities to adopt innovative approaches that utilize these platforms to cultivate collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving among students. Ultimately, fostering collaborative competence through social networks can prepare university students not only for academic success but also for effective participation in the modern knowledge-based economy.

METHODOLOGY.

The methodology of this research is based on a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative strategies in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of how social networks influence the development of collaborative competence among university students. The choice of methodology was driven by the need to investigate not only measurable outcomes, such as

frequency and intensity of social network use, but also the deeper, subjective experiences of students in the process of developing collaboration skills. The study follows an exploratory-descriptive design. Initially, exploratory methods were used to identify the forms of social network engagement most relevant to university students, and descriptive methods were applied to systematically analyze the relationship between these engagements and students' collaborative competencies.

The population of the study consisted of undergraduate students from different faculties of a major university in Uzbekistan. A stratified sampling method was employed to ensure representation from diverse academic disciplines such as humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and technical studies. A total of 200 students were selected as participants, including equal proportions of male and female students, to avoid gender bias in the analysis.

Questionnaire Survey – A structured questionnaire was developed to measure students' usage of social networks (e.g., Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, and academic platforms) and their perceived impact on collaborative learning and competence. The questionnaire included both closed-ended questions (Likert scale) and open-ended questions.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) – Several focus groups, each consisting of 8–10 students, were conducted to gather qualitative insights on students' experiences of collaboration through social networks. These sessions provided opportunities to understand the nuances of peer-to-peer communication, group problem-solving, and joint project development in virtual spaces.

Observation – Direct observation of student interactions in both classroom group work and online platforms was carried out. This helped validate the self-reported data and provided a richer context to assess real collaborative behaviors.

For the quantitative data, statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (mean, percentage, frequency) were used to identify patterns of social network use, while inferential statistics (correlation and regression analysis) were employed to explore the strength of the relationship between social network engagement and collaborative competence.

The qualitative data from focus group discussions and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. Recurring themes such as teamwork, problem-solving, conflict resolution, leadership, and digital literacy were identified and coded to better explain the mechanisms by which social networks foster collaboration. Ethical principles were strictly adhered to throughout the study. All participants were informed about the aims of the research and provided with consent forms. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by coding participant identities, and data were used solely for academic purposes. The study avoided any form of coercion and allowed participants the right to withdraw at any stage. Although the study covers multiple faculties, it is limited to one university, which may restrict the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, self-reported data may involve a certain degree of bias, though triangulation with observations and focus groups helped mitigate this limitation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

The study revealed that the integration of social networks into the educational process significantly contributes to the development of collaborative competence among university students. The results of the conducted survey and experimental observations showed that students who actively engaged in academic and project-based activities through platforms such as Telegram, Microsoft Teams, and Facebook demonstrated higher levels of teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills compared to those who primarily relied on traditional forms of collaboration. One of the main findings was that social networks serve as an effective environment for instant communication and

knowledge sharing. Students reported that online group discussions, file-sharing opportunities, and real-time feedback not only enhanced their academic performance but also increased their confidence in collaborative tasks. In particular, the use of closed study groups on social media provided a safe and supportive platform for exchanging ideas, debating alternative solutions, and collectively working on assignments. Another important result concerns the improvement of leadership and responsibility within group activities. Through social networks, students were able to assign tasks, monitor deadlines, and evaluate each other's contributions, which helped them develop a sense of accountability and self-management. This is closely aligned with the concept of peer-learning, where students learn not only from their instructors but also from one another. However, the study also revealed several challenges. While social networks enhance collaboration, there is a risk of distraction due to non-academic content. Some students reported difficulty in balancing social interactions with academic tasks, leading to reduced efficiency in group work. Additionally, excessive dependence on online communication sometimes limited face-to-face interactions, which are also essential for building strong interpersonal skills. The discussion of the findings suggests that when used purposefully, social networks can be a powerful tool for developing collaborative competence. Their influence extends beyond simple communication to fostering teamwork culture, creativity, and innovation. At the same time, the effective use of social networks requires proper guidance from educators to minimize distractions and ensure that academic objectives remain the priority.

CONCLUSION.

The findings of this study highlight that social networks, when effectively integrated into the educational process, serve as a powerful instrument for developing the collaborative competence of university students. In today's digital age, social networking platforms are no longer merely tools for entertainment and communication but have transformed into essential environments for knowledge sharing, joint problem-solving, and collective creativity. The research demonstrates that the interactive nature of social networks fosters students' ability to exchange ideas, provide constructive feedback, and work towards common academic goals in both formal and informal settings. Moreover, social networks create opportunities for students to participate in real-time discussions, collaborative projects, and virtual communities of practice, which enhance their skills in cooperation, negotiation, and decision-making. These platforms also help to overcome geographical and time constraints, thereby expanding access to diverse viewpoints and experiences. Such exposure not only strengthens collaborative skills but also contributes to the formation of intercultural competence, digital literacy, and professional communication abilities that are vital in the modern labor market. However, it is important to note that the positive impact of social networks on collaborative competence depends largely on the pedagogical framework and the way these technologies are embedded into the learning process. Without clear objectives, guidance, and monitoring, social networks may lead to distractions, superficial engagement, and ineffective collaboration. Therefore, the role of educators becomes crucial in designing purposeful learning activities, setting clear collaborative tasks, and encouraging students to use social media responsibly for academic and professional growth.

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