

. The Role of Social Media in Enhancing Professional Competence among Special Education Teachers in Palestine

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the role of social media in enhancing the professional competence of special education teachers in Palestine. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, collecting quantitative data through a survey of 66 teachers and qualitative data from interviews with 8 teachers with more than 10 years of experience. The results indicated that social media significantly contributes to improving professional competence by enhancing communication, resource sharing, and educational skill development. However, the study also highlighted challenges related to privacy and credibility. Based on the findings, the study provided recommendations to enhance the use of social media in professional development, including organizing training programs, establishing dedicated platforms, and improving digital infrastructure.

Keywords

Social media, professional competence, special education teachers, professional development, Palestine.

Introduction

Social media plays an increasingly significant role in enhancing the professional competence of educators across various fields, including special education teachers. Studies indicate that using social media significantly contributes to teachers' professional development by providing platforms for communication, collaboration, and resource sharing. In the Palestinian context, special education teachers face numerous challenges, including limited resources and imbalanced teacher-to-student ratios, making social media a valuable tool to overcome these obstacles. According to Abu Naser et al. (2014), platforms such as Facebook can be utilized to support e-learning by fostering instant interaction and offering innovative channels for sharing educational materials.

Moreover, Al Sabi et al. (2024) highlight the positive impact of social media on improving teachers' psychological well-being, suggesting that the balanced use of these platforms can enhance their professional experience and help them adapt to increasing challenges. However, excessive use may lead to negative effects, such as reduced psychological compatibility.

In the context of special education, social media can serve as an effective tool for improving professional competence by fostering collaboration among teachers, students, and their families.

Pi et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of perceived social support as a factor in enhancing teachers' professional development, which can be achieved through the creation of support networks via social media. However, concerns about privacy and misinformation remain, necessitating the establishment of guidelines and frameworks to ensure the responsible use of these tools.

This study addresses critical gaps in the literature by examining the role of social media networks in enhancing the professional competence of special education teachers, particularly in the Palestinian context. It contributes to academic knowledge by bridging cultural and educational gaps while offering a novel framework linking social media usage with demographic factors. Additionally, the study provides evidence-based recommendations for integrating social media into professional development strategies, supporting resource sharing, collaborative learning, and fostering innovative, ethical practices to improve the quality of education for students with disabilities. These efforts aim to address pressing challenges and ensure sustainable professional growth for teachers.

Professional identity is a critical element in special education, playing a pivotal role in fostering the professional growth of teachers who work with students with disabilities. Research such as Pi et al. (2024) underscores the importance of professional identity in enabling teachers to navigate the unique challenges of delivering appropriate education to students with disabilities and managing the complexities of diverse classrooms. Special education teachers are expected to adhere to stringent professional standards, such as those established in China's professional standards for special education teachers and the United States' special educator preparation standards (Almehmadi, 2018).

Theoretical perspectives suggest that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between professional identity and professional development among special education teachers. A robust professional identity strengthens self-efficacy, which, in turn, enhances professional development outcomes. Pi et al. (2024) highlight that teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to engage in continuous professional growth and adopt innovative teaching strategies tailored to their students' diverse needs.

Perceived social support also plays a significant role in the interaction between professional identity and professional development. According to Pi et al. (2024), external support networks—including colleagues, administrators, and the broader educational community—shape teachers' professional experiences and growth. This support facilitates the synergy between professional identity and self-efficacy, fostering an environment conducive to continuous skill development and ultimately benefiting students.

Benefits of Social Media in Special Education

Social media has become an essential tool for supporting special education teachers in various facets of their professional duties. Platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp facilitate instant communication between teachers, students, and their families, which helps build stronger

relationships and enables faster problem-solving. According to Abu Naser et al. (2014) and Abu al-Khair (2019), these platforms allow teachers to provide timely updates on student progress, address concerns efficiently, and foster a supportive community that promotes parental involvement and student engagement in the learning process.

Additionally, social media plays a key role in resource sharing and collaboration. It enables educators to share lesson plans, teaching strategies, and educational materials with one another. This is particularly valuable in resource-limited environments, where teachers can access diverse methodologies to improve their instructional effectiveness. As highlighted by Al Sabi et al. (2024), such platforms encourage collaboration among teachers, providing them with valuable insights that enhance their teaching practices and contribute to the professional growth of the educators involved.

In terms of professional development, social media offers continuous learning opportunities by connecting teachers to a global network of peers and experts. Teachers can follow thought leaders in the field, engage in online discussions, and participate in virtual workshops to stay informed about the latest trends and best practices in special education (Zyoud, 2021; Gul F, 2021). This access to a broader knowledge base helps teachers develop new strategies and refine existing practices to better serve their students.

Moreover, social media serves as a powerful platform for raising awareness and advocating for the rights and needs of students with disabilities. Teachers can share success stories and challenges, which can inspire greater community support and resources for special education. Muhtaseb et al. (2023) demonstrate how these online efforts contribute to increasing visibility for special education needs and garnering the necessary resources to support both teachers and students.

Finally, social media provides educators with the opportunity to connect with colleagues from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds. This exposure helps deepen teachers' understanding of the unique challenges faced by students with disabilities in various contexts. As Abu Naser et al. (2014) suggest, these interactions foster the development of inclusive teaching strategies that cater to a wide range of student needs, thereby enriching the overall educational experience for all involved.

Challenges Facing Special Education Teachers

Special education teachers face numerous challenges, from the demands of their profession to the constraints of available resources. The high professional expectations placed on these teachers include delivering personalized education to children with disabilities, conducting accurate assessments, and implementing effective interventions. These responsibilities are compounded by the competitive nature of acquiring professional titles, which are often evaluated using criteria similar to those for general education teachers, adding further pressure (Zhu N et al., 2021).

Another significant challenge is the chronic shortage of special education staff, which exacerbates teacher workloads and leads to burnout and decreased job satisfaction. For example, Hadijah and Shalawati (2017) reported a major gap between the number of teachers and students with disabilities in China, negatively impacting both teacher well-being and the quality of education provided to students.

Furthermore, a lack of specialized professional development opportunities and certifications hampers teachers' ability to effectively address the unique needs of their students. Inexperienced teachers often rely on informal support from colleagues or family, which, though helpful, cannot replace structured professional development programs necessary for career advancement (Majdi & Hinnawi, 2019).

The emotional and social challenges of working with students with disabilities also play a significant role in the stress experienced by teachers. While educating students with disabilities can be emotionally rewarding, it is often accompanied by considerable stress. Teachers frequently find it difficult to balance the emotional demands of their roles with the satisfaction of witnessing their students' progress, which impacts both their personal well-being and the overall quality of the education they provide (Byukusenge & Munene, 2017).

Social media can offer innovative solutions to these challenges. By enhancing communication, facilitating resource sharing, and providing avenues for professional development, social media can equip special education teachers with the tools and support needed to navigate these challenges effectively. However, to maximize the potential benefits, it is essential that teachers engage with these platforms thoughtfully, integrating them into their work while undergoing continuous training and adhering to ethical standards to ensure positive impacts on both teacher competence and student outcomes.

Several studies have explored different dimensions of professional identity, social media usage, and the challenges faced by educators, particularly within the fields of special education and e-learning.

Pi et al. (2024) conducted research examining the connection between professional identity and professional development among special education teachers, with a particular focus on the role of self-efficacy as a mediator and perceived social support as a moderator. The study revealed a significant positive relationship between professional identity and professional development. It also found that self-efficacy played a partial mediating role in this relationship, while perceived social support moderated the indirect effects of professional identity on professional development through self-efficacy.

In a study by Abu Naser, Abu Ghosh, and Atallah (2014), the use of social media in higher education was examined, with a focus on universities. The study found that students spent significantly more time on social media platforms, such as Facebook, than on e-learning programs. The findings highlighted the potential for social media to support e-learning, as 54% of participants reported using Facebook daily, compared to only 9% who used Moodle.

Al Sabi et al. (2024) explored the relationship between Facebook usage and psychological compatibility among special education teachers. The results showed that the most frequent duration of Facebook use was less than two hours per day. Additionally, the study found a negative relationship between the time spent on Facebook and the level of psychological compatibility among the teachers.

Zyoud (2021) investigated the practices of three female English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges they faced. The study revealed that despite issues such as financial constraints and poor internet connectivity, the teachers successfully adapted to using online tools like Facebook, YouTube, and Microsoft Teams. The study emphasized the teachers' flexibility and resourcefulness during the transition to online teaching.

Sabbah (2021) identified the challenges faced by Palestinian teachers during the implementation of e-learning. The study highlighted key obstacles such as poor educational infrastructure, lack of technical support, and unpreparedness among stakeholders. The research suggested strategies to enhance digital literacy and provide continuous professional development for teachers.

Finally, Nassar (2022) analyzed the challenges Palestinian teachers encountered during the transition to online education amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The study emphasized the importance of learning from these challenges to improve educational strategies in the future. It underscored the potential to use these challenges as an opportunity to enhance the resilience of the Palestinian education system and improve the overall educational process.

These studies collectively offer valuable insights into the role of social media in education, the impact of professional identity on teacher development, and the challenges educators face in adapting to technological changes, particularly in special education and e-learning contexts.

The previous studies underscore the importance of integrating technology and social media into education to support teachers' professional development, particularly in resource-limited contexts such as Palestine. These studies highlight the positive impact of social media on teachers' psychological and professional well-being, the role of social support, and the necessity of professional training. They also address the challenges associated with infrastructure, unpreparedness, and ethical considerations.

The findings align with the objectives of the current study, which seeks to explore the role of social media in enhancing the professional competence of special education teachers in Palestine. The current study builds on these insights by focusing on leveraging social media to promote professional development and improve teaching performance for special education teachers, addressing the increasing challenges within the Palestinian educational context.

Research Problem

Improving the professional competence of special education teachers in Palestine faces numerous challenges that hinder their professional growth and performance. Among the most significant challenges are limited resources and infrastructure, as well as restricted opportunities for professional development tailored to the requirements of special education. With the rapid advancement of technology and social media, these platforms have emerged as potential tools for bridging professional gaps and providing innovative training and communication opportunities. However, utilizing these tools encounters obstacles such as a lack of sufficient knowledge on how to effectively integrate them into education, as well as concerns about privacy and the spread of misinformation.

The current study addresses this issue by focusing on investigating the role of social media in improving the professional competence of special education teachers in Palestine, considering the opportunities these tools offer and the challenges they may entail.

Study Questions

1. What role do social media networks play in enhancing the professional competence of special education teachers in Palestine?
2. Are there statistically significant differences at the level of significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the perceptions of special education teachers regarding the use of social media networks to improve professional competence based on gender?
3. Are there statistically significant differences at the level of significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the perceptions of special education teachers regarding the use of social media networks to improve professional competence based on educational qualifications?
4. Are there statistically significant differences at the level of significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the perceptions of special education teachers regarding the use of social media networks to improve professional competence based on years of experience?

Study Objectives

1. To identify the role of social media networks in improving the professional competence of special education teachers in Palestine.
2. To analyze the differences in the perceptions of special education teachers regarding the use of social media networks to enhance professional competence based on gender.
3. To analyze the differences in the perceptions of special education teachers regarding the use of social media networks to enhance professional competence based on educational qualifications.
4. To analyze the differences in the perceptions of special education teachers regarding the use of social media networks to enhance professional competence based on years of experience.
5. To provide recommendations and proposals to optimize the use of social media networks in supporting the professional development of special education teachers in Palestine.

Methodology and Procedures

This section outlines the research context and procedures adopted in this study, including the methodology, studied variables, study population and sample, data collection tools, and the steps taken to ensure validity and reliability. Additionally, the statistical methods used to test the research hypotheses are described, concluding with recommendations based on the findings (Alawneh, 2023).

Methodology

This study utilized a **mixed-methods approach**, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media networks in enhancing the professional competence of special education teachers in Palestine

Quantitative data were collected through structured surveys designed to measure the impact of social media on professional competence and to analyze differences based on demographic variables (gender, educational qualifications, and years of experience).

Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with a selected group of special education teachers to explore their perspectives, experiences, and challenges in using social media for professional purposes.

Study Population and Sample

The study population and sample were divided into quantitative and qualitative groups to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in enhancing the professional competence of special education teachers in Palestine during the 2023-2024 academic year.

The quantitative population included all special education teachers working in educational institutions across Palestine. A random sample of 70 teachers was selected for the study; however, 66 valid questionnaires were retrieved and used for analysis. This ensured a representative sample that reflected the demographic diversity of the population.

The qualitative population targeted teachers with extensive experience in special education. To gain deeper insights, a purposeful sample of 8 teachers with more than 10 years of experience in the field was selected. These participants provided detailed perspectives on the challenges and opportunities associated with using social media for professional development.

The demographic characteristics of the quantitative sample are presented in Table 1, showcasing the distribution by gender, years of experience, and educational qualifications. This combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods allowed for a robust exploration of the study's objectives.

Table 1. Distribution of the Study Sample by Professional Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	37	56.2
	Female	29	43.8
	Total	66	100.0
Years of Experience	Less than 5 years	17	26.0
	5–10 years	30	43.8
	More than 10 years	19	30.1
	Total	66	100.0
Educational Qualification	Bachelor's or lower	45	67.8
	Graduate studies	21	33.2
	Total	66	100.0

Study tools

A **special questionnaire** was developed to collect data on the role of social media networks in enhancing the professional competence of special education teachers in Palestine. The questionnaire consisted of **45 items**, divided into three main sections covering the study dimensions. The first section focused on the **technological dimension** (15 items), the second section addressed the **professional dimension** (15 items), and the third section covered the **cultural dimension** (15 items).

The items were designed using a **five-point Likert scale** to measure the level of agreement with each statement, with the following scoring system:

- Strongly Agree: 5 points
- Agree: 4 points
- Neutral: 3 points
- Disagree: 2 points
- Strongly Disagree: 1 point

This tool was meticulously designed to ensure comprehensive coverage of the study's aspects and to gather accurate and reliable data that align with the research objectives.

In addition to the questionnaire, **semi-structured interview questions** were developed to collect qualitative data. These interview questions were designed to explore the experiences and perspectives of special education teachers regarding the use of social media in improving their professional performance. The interviews focused on identifying challenges faced by the teachers and opportunities provided by these platforms. The open-ended nature of the questions encouraged participants to share detailed insights and in-depth information, contributing to a thorough understanding of the role of social media networks in enhancing teachers' professional competence.

Psychometric Properties of the Instrument

Validity Testing: Face and Content Validity

The instrument was subjected to two primary validity tests: face validity and content validity. For face validity, the tool was reviewed by a panel of experts specializing in special education and management to ensure its alignment with the concepts being measured. Regarding content validity, the instrument was presented to a sample of the study population, and their feedback and comments on the relevance of the content to the targeted concepts were collected. The results of the validity test were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods, revealing an agreement rate exceeding 60% among experts and reviewers. The analysis confirmed that the items were clear and appropriate for use in the study and for the target population.

Reliability Testing

The stability and reliability of the instrument were assessed using Cronbach's Alpha for internal consistency. The results demonstrated satisfactory and high reliability across all sections of the questionnaire, indicating the instrument's stability in measuring the intended concepts. The Cronbach's Alpha values for each section were as follows:

- **Technological Dimension: 0.87**
- **Professional Dimension: 0.76**
- **Cultural Dimension: 0.89**
- **Overall Instrument: 0.93**

These values indicate a high level of reliability, with the overall Cronbach's Alpha of 0.93 reflecting excellent internal consistency. These results provide confidence in the tool's ability to effectively measure the constructs under study and to test the proposed hypotheses.

Interview Reliability

The reliability of the semi-structured interview was assessed using Holsti's coefficient of reliability. The results showed a strong agreement among coders, ensuring the reliability of qualitative data collection. This further supports the robustness of the research tool in capturing accurate and consistent data to achieve the study's objectives.

Study Variables:

The study includes two types of variables:

1. Independent Variables:

- **Gender:** Comprising two categories: (Male, Female).
- **Educational Qualification:** Comprising two levels: (Bachelor's degree or lower, Graduate studies).
- **Years of Experience:** Comprising three levels:
 - Less than 5 years
 - 5–10 years
 - More than 10 years

2. Dependent Variables:

The dependent variable in this study represents the **responses of the study participants** regarding the role of social media networks in enhancing the **professional competence** of special education teachers. The responses are measured across the three dimensions included in the study instrument: **(Technological Dimension- Professional Dimension-Cultural Dimension)**

Statistical Procedures:

After collecting the data, the researcher utilized the **Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)** for analysis. The following statistical methods were employed:

- **Means and Standard Deviations:** To describe and summarize data.
- **Percentages:** For categorical data representation.
- **Cronbach's Alpha:** To test the reliability and internal consistency of the instrument.
- **Independent Samples t-Test:** To examine differences between two groups.
- **One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA):** To analyze differences across three or more groups.

Study Results:

Results were derived from the responses of the study participants to the research questions. Data were analyzed to identify the role of social media networks in enhancing the professional competence of special education teachers. The analysis relied on the following scale to interpret the results (Abu Shkheedim, 2022):

- **Greater than 3.5:** High
- **Between 2.5 and 3.49:** Moderate
- **Less than 2.5:** Low

This framework provided a clear and structured approach to evaluate the role of social media in the context of professional development.

Results and Discussion Aligned with the Study Questions

Question 1: What is the role of social media networks in improving the professional competence of special education teachers in Palestine?

To answer this question, means and standard deviations were calculated for each dimension of the study instrument, which included 45 items distributed across three axes:

1. **Technological Dimension (15 items)**
2. **Professional Dimension (15 items)**
3. **Cultural Dimension (15 items)**

The results are summarized in **Table 2**, which shows the calculated means and standard deviations.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations for the Role of Social Media Networks in Enhancing Professional Competence of Special Education Teachers

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Technological Dimension	3.95	0.504	High
Professional Dimension	3.92	0.508	High
Cultural Dimension	3.90	0.527	High
Overall	3.96	0.318	High

The results indicate that the role of social media networks in enhancing professional competence was perceived as **high** across all dimensions, with overall mean values ranging from 3.90 to 3.95. The **Technological Dimension** ranked first, followed by the **Professional Dimension**, and then the **Cultural Dimension**. The overall mean score was 3.96, reflecting a high level of agreement among respondents about the positive impact of social media on professional competence.

The findings highlight that social media plays a significant role in enhancing teachers' abilities by providing technological support, professional development opportunities, and fostering cultural and social engagement. These results demonstrate the potential of social media as a tool for improving teaching practices and professional growth in the special education sector.

The results of this study align with previous research, particularly Pi et al. (2024) and Abu Naser et al. (2014). Similar to Pi et al.'s findings, this study highlights how external factors such as social media support enhance professional development through collaboration and self-efficacy. Furthermore, the emphasis on the technological and professional benefits of social media in this

study resonates with Abu Naser et al.'s conclusion that platforms like Facebook significantly contribute to resource-sharing and interactive learning, thereby enhancing professional competence.

Question 2: Are there statistically significant differences at the ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) level in the use of social media to enhance professional competence based on gender?

To address this question, an independent samples t-test was used to examine differences between male and female teachers' responses. **Table 3** presents the results.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-Test for Differences in Perceptions of Social Media’s Role in Enhancing Professional Competence Based on Gender

Dimension	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Sig. (p-value)
Technological Dimension	Male	37	3.97	0.419	1.787	0.080
	Female	29	3.92	0.379		
Professional Dimension	Male	37	3.94	0.415	0.198	0.882
	Female	29	3.90	0.412		
Cultural Dimension	Male	37	3.92	0.532	-0.108	0.920
	Female	29	3.88	0.470		
Overall	Male	37	3.97	0.366	0.897	0.590
	Female	29	3.94	0.359		

The results indicate no statistically significant differences in teachers' perceptions based on gender for any dimension or the overall score, as all p-values were greater than 0.05. This suggests that male and female teachers share similar views on the role of social media in enhancing professional competence. This finding may reflect uniform exposure to social media tools and consistent professional development opportunities provided across genders.

The findings of this study align with the results of Al Sabi et al. (2024), which also reported no significant differences based on gender in perceptions related to the use of social media among teachers. Both studies suggest that gender does not significantly influence how social media tools are perceived or utilized for professional purposes, reflecting a level of equality in access and usage patterns. Additionally, this consistency could be attributed to the cultural and professional environments that promote similar experiences and opportunities for male and female educators, as highlighted by Abu Naser et al. (2014).

Question 3: Are there statistically significant differences at the ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) level in the use of social media to enhance professional competence based on educational qualification?

To explore this, an independent samples t-test was conducted for teachers with different educational qualifications (bachelor’s degree or lower vs. postgraduate degrees). **Table 4** summarizes the findings.

Table 4: Independent Samples t-Test for Differences in Perceptions Based on Educational Qualification

Dimension	Qualification	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Sig. (p-value)
Technological Dimension	Bachelor's or Lower	45	4.00	0.418	-0.018	0.488
	Postgraduate	21	3.96	0.422		
Professional Dimension	Bachelor's or Lower	45	3.95	0.488	0.684	0.524
	Postgraduate	21	3.91	0.390		
Cultural Dimension	Bachelor's or Lower	45	3.91	0.602	-0.520	0.714
	Postgraduate	21	3.87	0.521		
Overall	Bachelor's or Lower	45	3.98	0.377	0.035	0.962
	Postgraduate	21	3.94	0.350		

No statistically significant differences were found based on educational qualification ($p > 0.05$), indicating that both bachelor’s and postgraduate degree holders perceive the role of social media similarly in terms of enhancing professional competence.

The findings indicate no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of teachers based on their educational qualifications regarding the role of social media in enhancing professional competence. This suggests that both groups—teachers with a bachelor's degree or lower and those with postgraduate degrees—view social media as equally beneficial for their professional development.

This result aligns with Zyoud (2021), who found that teachers across varying educational levels successfully adapted to using online platforms, highlighting that professional competence in utilizing social media is not necessarily dependent on higher academic qualifications. Similarly, Abu Naser et al. (2014) emphasized the universal applicability of social media tools for teaching and learning, irrespective of the users' academic background, due to their user-friendly nature and accessibility. These findings reinforce the idea that the effectiveness of social media for professional growth is shaped more by practical exposure and training rather than by formal academic qualifications.

Question 4: Are there statistically significant differences at the ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) level in the use of social media to enhance professional competence based on years of experience?

To address this, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted. The results are presented in **Table 5**.

Table 5: One-Way ANOVA for Differences in Perceptions Based on Years of Experience

Dimension	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Sig. (p-value)
Technological Dimension	Between Groups	0.244	2	0.116	0.611	0.588
	Within Groups	15.373	63	0.166		
Professional Dimension	Between Groups	0.746	2	0.222	1.616	0.231
	Within Groups	12.135	63	0.160		
Cultural Dimension	Between Groups	1.784	2	0.455	2.147	0.441
	Within Groups	14.332	63	0.118		
Overall	Between Groups	0.584	2	0.188	1.402	0.265
	Within Groups	7.547	63	0.137		

The analysis revealed no statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$) in teachers' perceptions based on years of experience. This suggests that novice and experienced teachers alike recognize the role of social media in enhancing professional competence similarly, possibly due to uniform access and exposure to social media tools across experience levels.

The results indicate no statistically significant differences in perceptions of the role of social media in enhancing professional competence based on years of teaching experience. This suggests that teachers, regardless of whether they are novice or experienced, have similar views about the benefits and applications of social media for professional development.

These findings are consistent with **Zyoud (2021)**, which highlighted that teachers of varying experience levels adapted to the use of digital tools during the pandemic, reflecting a shared reliance on technology for professional tasks. Similarly, **Nassar (2022)** emphasized the universal challenges and opportunities presented by online platforms, suggesting that the effective use of social media transcends experience levels due to its accessibility and intuitive nature. The lack of

significant differences underscores the idea that social media has become an equally valuable resource for professional growth among educators, irrespective of their tenure in the field.

Interview Questions and Analysis

Introduction

To gain deeper insights into the role of social media in enhancing the professional competence of special education teachers, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 8 teachers with more than 10 years of experience. The aim was to explore their perspectives, experiences, and challenges related to utilizing social media platforms for professional development.

Interview Questions

1. How do you perceive the role of social media in improving your professional skills and teaching strategies?
2. What social media platforms do you find most useful for your professional development, and why?
3. Can you share an example of how social media helped you address a specific challenge in your teaching practice?
4. What challenges or barriers do you face when using social media for professional purposes?
5. How do you think social media could be better utilized to support your professional growth as a special education teacher?
6. How does the use of social media affect your relationships with students, parents, and colleagues?

Analysis of Interview Results

Question 1: How do you perceive the role of social media in improving your professional skills and teaching strategies? The interview results indicated that all participants unanimously agreed on the significant role of social media in enhancing their professional competence. Teachers highlighted that platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn provide access to a wealth of resources, including teaching materials, webinars, and professional discussions. One teacher stated: *"Social media keeps me updated with the latest strategies in special education, especially those shared by international experts."* This suggests that social media acts as an essential tool for acquiring new knowledge and refining teaching methods.

Question 2: What social media platforms do you find most useful for your professional development, and why? The majority of teachers identified Facebook, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn as the most effective platforms. Facebook was preferred for its groups and forums focused on special education, while WhatsApp was valued for quick communication with colleagues and parents. LinkedIn, on the other hand, was seen as a professional platform that facilitated connections with educators globally. One respondent noted: *"In Facebook groups, I find strategies and ideas tailored specifically to special education, which I can apply directly in my classroom."* This highlights the platform-specific advantages in meeting diverse professional needs.

Question 3: Can you share an example of how social media helped you address a specific challenge in your teaching practice? Most participants shared practical examples of how social media resolved classroom challenges. For instance, one teacher explained how they discovered visual aids for autistic students through a Facebook group, which significantly improved student engagement. Another participant shared: *"I reached out to a colleague via WhatsApp to discuss a behavioral issue and received valuable suggestions that worked effectively."* This underscores the collaborative potential of social media in problem-solving.

Question 4: What challenges or barriers do you face when using social media for professional purposes? Participants highlighted several challenges, including privacy concerns, information overload, and the time-consuming nature of managing multiple platforms. One teacher expressed: *"It's difficult to verify the credibility of the resources shared on social media, which sometimes leads to confusion."* Another concern was the lack of formal training on using social media effectively for professional purposes. These findings indicate a need for structured guidance and support to maximize the benefits of social media.

Question 5: How do you think social media could be better utilized to support your professional growth as a special education teacher? The respondents suggested several improvements, such as creating specialized groups for special education in Palestine, hosting webinars by experienced educators, and providing access to certified training programs through social media. One teacher recommended: *"Schools could collaborate with social media platforms to offer curated content specifically for special education teachers."* These insights emphasize the importance of targeted efforts to enhance the usability and relevance of social media for professional development.

Question 6: How does the use of social media affect your relationships with students, parents, and colleagues? Participants reported that social media strengthened communication with parents and students, particularly during remote learning. However, they also noted the need for clear boundaries to maintain professionalism. One teacher shared: *"Through WhatsApp, I can quickly share updates with parents, but it's important to set communication hours to avoid intrusions."* This highlights the dual impact of social media in fostering relationships while requiring mindful management.

Summary of Interview Findings

The interview results underscore the transformative potential of social media in enhancing professional competence among special education teachers. While the platforms provide access to resources, collaborative opportunities, and improved communication channels, challenges such as privacy concerns and information credibility persist. Teachers emphasized the need for structured support, such as curated content and professional training, to maximize the benefits of social media for their professional growth.

The findings from the interviews align with previous studies that highlight the role of social media in professional development for educators. The emphasis on access to resources and collaborative opportunities resonates with **Abu Naser et al. (2014)**, which demonstrated how platforms like Facebook provide immediate access to educational content and peer interaction. Similarly, the challenges of privacy and credibility are consistent with concerns identified by **Al Sabi et al. (2024)**, which noted the potential negative effects of excessive or unstructured social media use.

Moreover, the call for structured support through curated content and training aligns with **Zyoud (2021)**, which underscored the importance of providing teachers with proper guidance and tools to navigate digital platforms effectively. These findings reinforce the necessity of targeted interventions and strategic use of social media to bridge the gap between its potential benefits and the challenges faced by educators.

Recommendations

1. The study recommends organizing workshops and training programs for teachers on how to effectively use social media to enhance their professional competence and improve teaching methods.
2. Dedicated platforms should be provided for special education teachers to share experiences, resources, and advanced educational strategies, supporting sustainable professional collaboration.
3. Educational institutions are advised to adopt strategies to integrate social media into professional development programs for teachers and facilitate its use as an interactive educational tool.
4. Clear guidelines should be provided to teachers on managing privacy and credibility when using social media to avoid risks associated with misinformation.
5. The study recommends incorporating concepts of digital literacy into teacher preparation programs to ensure the safe and effective use of technology.

6. The study suggests improving digital infrastructure in schools to provide an educational environment that supports the effective use of social media and digital technologies.

Study Limitations

Subject Matter The study focuses on the role of social media networks in enhancing the professional competence of special education teachers in Palestine, analyzing differences in perceptions based on gender, educational qualifications, and years of experience.

Geographical Scope The study is conducted in Palestine, encompassing special education teachers working in various educational institutions across different regions.

Timeframe The study covers the period in **2024**, during which data collection and analysis were conducted.

Population The study targets **special education teachers** employed in Palestinian schools who use social media networks partially or regularly for professional purposes.

Methodology The study adopts a **descriptive-analytical methodology**, utilizing surveys to gather and analyze data to understand the perceptions of special education teachers regarding the use of social media networks.

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