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SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PEDAGOGICAL RESOURCE IN MUSIC TEACHER EDUCATION: PRACTICES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CHALLENGES IN A GHANAIAN COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

GAYHEART MAWULI MESIOTSO
Department of Social Science and Creative Arts,
Evangelical Presbyterian College of Education, Amedzofe, Ghana
ORCID: 0009-0005-7631-2224
gmesiotso@epcea.edu.gh

PROSPER KOFI AGBOGA
Department of Creative Arts, Peki College of Education, Peki, Ghana
ORCID: 0000-0002-9226-1608
prosper.agbogah@pekicoe.edu.gh

SAMUEL ABLOMETI
Department of Social Science, Peki Senior High School, Peki
ORCID: 0009-0006-9515-0301
samuelablometi@gmail.com

Abstract
Digital technologies are transforming teaching and learning across disciplines, including music education. Social media platforms, once used mainly for communication and entertainment, are increasingly adopted as pedagogical tools that foster collaboration, creativity, and learner engagement. Yet, despite this global trend, little research has examined their pedagogical role in music teacher education in sub-Saharan Africa. This study investigates the use of social media as pedagogical tools in music instruction at a College of Education in Ghana. Guided by Media Ecology Theory and Social Presence Theory, it explores music lecturers' digital literacy, the ways platforms are integrated into instruction, and students' perceptions of social media-supported learning. A qualitative case study design was employed within an interpretivist paradigm. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with music lecturers, focus group discussions with students, and classroom observations, and were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns. Findings show that lecturers possess moderate levels of digital literacy and use WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook to communicate, distribute instructional resources, support collaborative learning, and give feedback. Students reported that social media enhanced their motivation, creativity, confidence, and engagement in music learning. However, infrastructural constraints, unequal access to technology, distractions, and privacy concerns limited the effectiveness of integration. The study concludes that social media can serve as a valuable pedagogical resource in music teacher education when supported by purposeful instructional design, institutional support, and ongoing professional development, which together help music lecturers and students use digital platforms more effectively and equitably within resource-constrained teacher education settings across Ghana and beyond.

Keywords: music education, social media, digital pedagogy, teacher education, digital literacy, Ghana

Introduction

Digital technologies have reshaped how music learners access information, engage with musical content, collaborate, and develop creative skills, and smartphones and internet-enabled devices now make learning possible beyond the traditional classroom. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have evolved from social networking tools into spaces for learning and knowledge exchange (Kietzmann et al., 2011). When educators use them deliberately, they offer ways to share materials, encourage peer interaction, and give timely feedback (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). In music education, they can support video tutorials, collaborative performances, online communities, and digital production (Dammers, 2015), and studies report associations with learners' motivation, creativity, collaboration, and engagement (Crawford, 2017). These benefits are not automatic, however: concerns remain about distraction, unequal access, privacy, and educators' preparedness (Tess, 2013).

In this study, social media as a pedagogical tool refers to the intentional use of platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook by lecturers and students for instructional purposes, including content delivery, demonstration, collaboration, feedback, performance sharing, and independent learning, as distinct from incidental or purely social use. Accessible, low-cost innovations tend to spread through institutions faster than specialised, resource-intensive ones (Rogers, 2003), which makes widely used platforms a plausible starting point in resource-constrained settings. In Ghana, however, music education still relies largely on face-to-face methods, and access to a smartphone does not guarantee reliable connectivity or affordable data (Kwaah, 2024), so the pedagogical potential of social media remains uncertain. Research on technology integration in Ghana has largely addressed general classroom contexts (Kwaah, 2024), and evidence on music teacher education, on music lecturers, and on students in Ghanaian Colleges of Education is limited. This study addresses that gap through a qualitative case study at Peki College of Education, guided by three research questions: (1) how do music lecturers use social media in instruction; (2) how do students perceive its use for music learning; and (3) what opportunities and challenges emerge?

As an institution that prepares future educators, Peki College of Education is a relevant site for understanding how digital technologies enter music instruction. The findings can inform efforts to strengthen music teaching and learning through digital innovation, and they contribute to wider discussions of digital pedagogy, music teacher education, and technology-enhanced learning, with evidence from a setting that is underrepresented in music education scholarship.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in two primary theories, Media Ecology Theory (McLuhan, 1964) and Social Presence Theory (Short et al., 1976), with self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) used as a supporting concept. Media Ecology holds that communication media do more than carry content: they reshape the environments, relationships, and practices through which people communicate and learn. McLuhan's (1964) dictum that the medium is the message is relevant because it directs attention to how a platform changes the conditions of teaching, not only what is taught. Here it invites comparison between social media-supported instruction and conventional face-to-face music instruction: how WhatsApp groups, YouTube videos, and Facebook pages alter when and where students meet demonstrations, how feedback circulates, and how lecturers and students relate to one another (Bower, 2017). Social Presence Theory concerns the degree to which people perceive one another as present in mediated communication (Short et al., 1976). It helps explain how the perceived presence of others may influence interaction, participation, communication, and learning experiences (Hrastinski, 2009).

Both perspectives suit music, where learning depends on performance demonstration, listening, rehearsal, peer critique, collaboration, and creative production, activities that mediated environments can extend, constrain, or transform, and that rely on a sense of connection among participants. Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), the belief in one's capability that develops through mastery experiences and social encouragement, is used narrowly to interpret students' reports of confidence and willingness to participate. Other sociocultural and experiential perspectives were not used in the coding or interpretation and are therefore not part of the framework.

The theories are linked to the research questions as follows. For the first question, on how lecturers use social media, Media Ecology guides interpretation of how platforms reshape instructional practice relative to face-to-face teaching. For the second, on students' perceptions, Social Presence Theory guides interpretation of experiences of interaction, community, and participation, with self-efficacy used for reports of confidence. For the third, on opportunities and challenges, Media Ecology guides interpretation of how the media environment, including connectivity and platform norms, enables and constrains learning, while Social Presence Theory helps explain how access and distraction affect interaction. Together, the theories allow examination of both the technological affordances of social media and the social relationships built through it.

Literature Review

Social media is widely recognised as an educational resource that supports communication, collaboration, and engagement (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008). Unlike traditional learning management systems, it offers familiar environments for active knowledge construction, which Siemens (2005) frames through connectivism as learning distributed across networks of people, resources, and technologies. Studies in higher education show that it improves student-instructor communication, encourages peer collaboration, and extends access to resources (Tess, 2013), and that purposeful integration can raise motivation, participation, and performance (West et al., 2019). Professional learning networks on social media similarly support educators beyond formal training (Trust et al., 2017).

In music education, social media is associated with collaborative music-making, peer feedback, creative expression, and self-directed learning (Crawford, 2017; Dammers, 2015). Weatherly et al.'s (2024) scoping review shows that digitally mediated informal learning, including video tutorials, is among the most

actively researched areas of music education, and Vaizman and Harpaz (2023) found that amateur musicians who used online tutorials reported gains in music self-efficacy. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated online and blended approaches (Váradi et al., 2023). The literature also identifies challenges: distraction, privacy and professionalism concerns, unequal access, and uneven educator digital literacy (Bennett, 2014). Such gaps appear even in well-resourced systems, as Jisc's (2023) United Kingdom survey shows. Effective integration therefore depends on pedagogical competence and institutional support, as Cuervo et al. (2023) found when service-learning-based training strengthened pre-service music teachers' confidence with digital tools, and Campanini (2023) argues that technological fluency is too often assumed rather than cultivated in teacher preparation.

Research in African contexts remains limited and mostly concerns general technology adoption. Kwaah's (2024) survey of Ghanaian basic school teachers found Facebook and WhatsApp dominant for communication and resource sharing, but data costs, poor connectivity, and the absence of institutional guidelines constrained purposeful pedagogical use. Yeboah and Nyagorme (2022) found that distance students' acceptance of WhatsApp rested on its accessibility and compatibility with existing habits rather than deliberate pedagogical design, and Ndibalema's (2025) review places these patterns within persistent digital literacy gaps across sub-Saharan African higher education. Empirical evidence on music teacher education specifically is therefore still needed. This study responds by examining, within a single Ghanaian College of Education, how music lecturers use social media, how students experience it, and what limits its usefulness.

Taken together, the literature suggests that social media offers accessible, familiar, and low-cost environments for communication and collaboration, yet its educational value depends on how deliberately it is used. The recurring emphasis on educator competence, institutional support, and infrastructure provides the lens through which the present findings are interpreted.

Methodology

The study adopted an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018), suited to in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). It was conducted at Peki College of Education in Ghana's Volta Region, chosen for its active music programme and growing use of digital technologies. Music lecturers and students were selected through purposive sampling for their relevant experience with social media in music instruction. Data came from semi-structured interviews with lecturers (covering digital literacy, usage practices, instructional strategies, and challenges), focus group discussions with students (experiences, perceptions, and attitudes), and classroom observations showing how social media and related tools were actually used. The multiple methods enabled triangulation and strengthened credibility. Interview transcripts, focus group discussions, and observation notes were coded systematically using thematic analysis (Miles et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2021): familiarisation, initial coding, development of thematic categories, and interpretation against the theoretical framework and research questions. Ethical approval was obtained beforehand, and participants gave voluntary consent and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity.The interview schedule asked lecturers about their digital literacy, the platforms they used, how they integrated them into lessons, and the difficulties they met. Focus groups explored how students experienced and felt about learning supported by social media, allowing participants to build on one another's accounts. Observations provided direct evidence of practice, so that what lecturers and students reported could be compared with what occurred in class. Together, the three sources offered complementary perspectives on a single institutional case.

Results

Analysis produced four interconnected themes: digital literacy among music lecturers, pedagogical uses of social media, students' experiences of social media-supported learning, and challenges of integration.

Digital Literacy among Music Lecturers

Lecturers showed moderate digital literacy and regularly used smartphones, laptops, internet communication tools, and social media for personal and educational purposes, with most familiar with WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Google applications. Competence varied with technological complexity: lecturers were proficient with communication and content-sharing tools, but fewer reported advanced skills in digital audio workstations, notation software, or collaborative production tools. Lecturers acknowledged that their knowledge of educational technologies came largely from self-directed learning rather than structured professional development, consistent with Bennett's (2014) account of the early adopter who learns informally. Lecturers saw digital literacy as essential to teacher preparation and called for continuous professional development. They viewed technology as an integral part of preparing future teachers, and expressed a clear wish for training that would strengthen the pedagogical, rather than merely the technical, use of digital tools.

Pedagogical uses of social media

WhatsApp was the most used platform because of its accessibility, familiarity, and low data requirements; lecturers used groups to distribute materials, announce, discuss, and give feedback on assignments. YouTube served as a supplementary resource for performance demonstrations, instrumental tutorials, recordings, and music theory examples, letting students revisit content and learn at their own pace. Facebook was used less, mainly for sharing educational content, promoting music-related events, and broader student interaction. Some participants also used digital audio applications and collaborative production tools to support practical music activities. Students reported that access to video-based resources allowed them to revisit instructional content outside formal class hours. Overall, social media extended learning beyond contact hours and gave greater continuity between classroom instruction and independent study. Lecturers described it as a way of staying in touch with students, encouraging participation, and fostering collaborative learning communities.

Students' Experiences

Students were generally positive. They valued flexible access to materials, especially for practical music learning, where repeated exposure to demonstrations supported skill development. Group discussion, peer feedback, and shared learning experiences were seen as important to academic development, and online interaction encouraged students less confident in face-to-face sessions. Students used platforms to explore musical ideas, share performances, experiment with production tools, and engage with diverse traditions, which broadened their perspectives and encouraged independent learning. Immediate feedback and peer interaction increased motivation and confidence, consistent with Bandura's (1986) account of self-efficacy as a product of mastery experience and social encouragement. The availability of feedback and peer interaction created supportive environments that encouraged active participation in music-related activities.

Challenges

Unreliable internet connectivity was the most frequently identified barrier; students and lecturers struggled to reach online resources because of unstable networks and patchy coverage. Financial constraints also limited participation: many students owned smartphones but could not always afford enough data, creating unequal opportunities. Participants cited distractions from entertainment content and notifications, and lecturers were uncertain about boundaries between professional and personal communication, with further concerns about misinformation, inappropriate content, and digital security. Distractions sometimes reduced concentration and diverted attention from educational tasks. Finally, participants noted the absence of formal institutional policies on educational social media use and wanted clearer guidelines, echoing Kwaah's (2024) call for explicit policy guidance.

Discussion of Findings

The findings show social media functioning as a pedagogical tool in Ghanaian music teacher education, and they address each of the three research questions: how lecturers use it, how students perceive it, and

what opportunities and challenges it brings. Consistent with Media Ecology Theory, these technologies reshape the learning environment by expanding communication, collaboration, and access, rather than merely delivering content. WhatsApp's prominence reflects trends across African higher education, where its accessibility and affordability make it practical for extending learning (Kwaah, 2024; Yeboah & Nyagorme, 2022); in effect, it serves as an informal learning management system for sharing resources, discussion, and feedback. YouTube supports the observation, imitation, and repetition central to music learning and encourages self-regulated learning, a conclusion supported by Weatherly et al. (2024) and Vaizman and Harpaz (2023).

The findings are also consistent with Social Presence Theory: students described platforms that enabled interaction and community beyond class hours, aligning with Hrastinski's (2009) view of online learning as sustained participation. Although lecturers were competent with common applications, their limited specialised technological knowledge constrained the digital pedagogies they used, in line with evidence that integration depends on pedagogical and technological competence (Cuervo et al., 2023), so professional development remains essential, particularly since fluency is often assumed rather than taught (Campanini, 2023). The challenges reflect broader structural inequalities in access, affordability, and infrastructure (Ndibalema, 2025), meaning the benefits of social media integration cannot be fully realised without parallel investment in infrastructure and equitable access to digital resources. Finally, the study adds contextually grounded evidence from Ghanaian music teacher education to a literature dominated by technologically advanced regions (UNESCO, 2023). By examining social media use in a Ghanaian College of Education, the study expands international understandings of technology-enhanced music learning and shows that accessible, low-cost platforms can carry real pedagogical weight where specialised resources are scarce.

Conclusion

Social media has become an increasingly important part of music teaching and learning at Peki College of Education, offering communication, collaboration, creativity, and flexible access to resources. Lecturers used WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook to support instruction, and students associated these platforms with engagement, motivation, confidence, and collaborative learning. Significant challenges remain, including unreliable connectivity, financial barriers, digital inequality, distraction, and privacy and professionalism concerns. These challenges underline the need for institutional support and strategic planning so that social media contributes effectively to educational goals. Social media therefore holds considerable pedagogical potential, but its effectiveness depends on purposeful instructional design, adequate infrastructure, digital literacy development, and supportive institutional policies. Where these conditions are met, social media can extend learning beyond classroom boundaries and support more learner-centred approaches to music teacher education.

Implications and Future Research

Several implications follow. Teacher education institutions should build digital pedagogy and social media literacy into music teacher preparation, and invest in professional development for lecturers, including specialised music technologies, online collaborative environments, and digital content creation. Policymakers should prioritise infrastructure and affordable internet access, and institutions should adopt clear policies governing educational social media use to support professional practice, protect privacy, and encourage responsible engagement. Future educators need not only technical competence but also pedagogical knowledge of how digital technologies can be used well. Such policies matter because, while lecturers were generally supportive of technology integration, they believed clearer guidance would strengthen implementation. Future studies should compare multiple Colleges of Education and universities, use quantitative and mixed-methods designs to examine links between social media use, engagement, and achievement, and investigate emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual learning environments, and digital music production platforms in African music teacher education.

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