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Innovative Technology in English Language Teaching: The Utility of Mobile Social Network Sites to Improve Teacher Education

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Abstract

Mobile Social Network Sites have boomed in recent years. Over the past twenty years, reams of articles and books have been written on the subject of using *Mobile Social Network Sites* (MSNSs) in people's daily lives and also in different fields of study. However, in the area of applied linguistics, in general, and second language teacher education (SLTE), in particular, the utility of MSNSs seems to have been an untouched area of exploration. In this connection, in this paper, an attempt is made to enrich our understanding regarding the implementation of innovative technologies such as MSNSs in second language teacher education (SLTE). This understanding could open up a room for further investigation of the issue at stake, which has been widely neglected in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). The issue could represent a significant challenge not only for developing countries including Iran, but also for many different countries around the world. To put it differently, using Mobile Social Network Sites could be of paramount importance in improving second language teacher education programs of both developing and developed countries.

Keywords: Mobile social network sites (MSNSs); innovative technology; second language teacher education (SLTE)

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1. Introduction

Recently, there has been a growing interest in the application of technology to address challenges in second language teaching and learning. Inextricably interwoven with the application of technology is the implementation of social

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media in English language teaching (ELT). The utility of *Mobile Social Network Sites* (MSNSs) lies at the very heart of using social media in this area. According to a straightforward definition of the term by Boyd and Ellison (2008), *Social Network Sites* are defined as

> Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. (p. 211)

It is worth mentioning that implicit in much of the discussion with respect to the *Social Network Sites* is the assumption that they are valuable communication environments with powerful impacts on language teaching and learning (Aydin, 2012), but this is often taken for granted rather than made explicit. Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of Social Networking technologies to support Teacher Professional Development (e.g., Luehmann & Tinelli, 2008; Shohel & Banks, 2010; Shohel & Power, 2010; Walsh, Shrestha & Hedges, 2011), as learning tools (e.g., Gammon & McGranahan, 2015; Greenhow, 2009; Pimmer, Linxen & Gröhbiel, 2012) and as innovative pedagogical tools (e.g., Aydin, 2012; Wang & Du, 2014). It seems that the ubiquitous role of MSNSs in this field cannot be denied.

However, there remains a relative dearth of research regarding the instructors' experiences of using social media in their teaching. Furthermore, little detailed attention seems to have been paid to the role of *Mobile Social Network Sites* (henceforward MSNSs) in second language teacher education programs in developing countries, including Iran. With this lacuna to fill in and this situation to account for, in this paper, an attempt is made to shed

light on the use of *Mobile Social Network Sites* in Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE).

In what follows, readers are provided with some issues pertaining to the use of MSNSs in teacher education and ELT, *Mobile Social Network Sites* for Teacher Professional Development, the utility of innovative uses of MSNSs in teacher education (e.g., blogging, messaging, podcasting, videoconferencing, vodcasting, etc.), skills teachers need to implement MSNSs, and some technical considerations in using MSNSs.

2. Implementing MSNSs in Teacher Education and ELT

In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on ELT in Iran. This incremental attention is much reminiscent of different controversial and problematic aspects of English language teaching and learning in an Iranian context. One of the problems is the lack of English language teachers to teach English with a learner-centered approach in combination with effective teaching practices. Needless to say, "it is essential to train English language teachers without teaching qualifications, and to develop their level of English language proficiency and communicative language teaching (CLT) skills to improve their classroom practice" (Shohel & Power, 2010, p. 202).

As a partial consequence of this, second language teacher education gained momentum in developing countries. Especially noteworthy in this regard is harnessing the new technologies to improve the quality of teacher education and teacher training courses. More simply put,

> New technologies are transforming the ways in which businesses operate and people work, boosting demand for new knowledge and new types of skills. They are providing new alternatives of learning, offering a potential solution to meet challenges such as demand for more flexibility in delivery of

> education in terms of time, location, content, and form (Watabe, Collins, Devries & Vozelzay, 1995, p. 141).

In this connection, an issue that has invited some controversy recently is the implementation of mobile technology to provide teachers with easy access to 'authentic teaching and learning materials' (Shohel & Power, 2010, p. 202) which can be used by them conveniently while they are going to their workplace or preparing their lesson plans (Shohel & Banks, 2010; Shohel & Shrestha, 2010). It may go unchallenged to argue that these authentic materials delivered via mobile technologies including MSNSs play a significant role in enhancing teachers' learning and improving their teaching practices (Power, Deane, & Hedges, 2009).

However, in spite of such significance, it is important to reiterate that there have been little published research studies on the use of MSNSs in teacher education programs and field of ELT, particularly in Iran. Elsewhere, the situation is much rosier because of the emergence of a number of studies in some developing countries including Bangladesh (e.g., Shohel & Banks, 2010; Shohel & Power, 2010). Therefore, more work in this area would be welcome. Fisher, Higgins, and Loveless (2006) succinctly state the issue:

> We have found that, though there is research-based literature that deals with teacher learning, and a literature base for thinking about learning with digital technologies, there is little that deals directly with our specific focus of 'teachers as learners with digital technologies'. There is very little fundamental research that investigates how teachers might learn with digital technologies. Rather, there seems to be a pervasive assumption that teachers will learn with digital technologies. (p. 2)

Intricately linked to utilizing MSNSs in teacher education and training is the construct of Teacher Professional Development, which is identified by many a researcher as one of the important ways to improve education (Justi & van Driel, 2006) and is elaborated on in the coming section.

The foregoing discussion unavoidably leads us into listing a number of advantages associated with MSNSs:

1. Encouraging collective intelligence by creating social networks around academic topics;
2. Providing faculty and students with convenient ways to keep up with their professional connections;
3. Supplementing and reinforcing classroom teaching using formative assessment strategies, such as rubrics, portfolios, and reflections (Chen & Bryer, 2012).

By the same token, Harrison and Thomas (2009, p. 117) identified some main features of *Social Networking Sits (SNS)* providing the members with opportunities to obtain educational benefits:

1. *Audio comments*: Members can record voice messages and practice pronunciation;
2. *Peer review*: Users can choose to allow other members to read, review and leave comments for other learners;
3. *Group chat sessions*: Weekly meetings with tutors from SNS to ask questions about language learning;
4. *Audio podcasts*: Members receive audio lessons related to the language they are studying;
5. *Leaderboard feature*: Members of the SNS can see their position vis-à-vis other students based on their performance on test scores, thus adding an increased motivational and competitive factor to the online community.

Reflecting on the above-mentioned points could pave the ground to discuss the significance of MSNSs to enhance Teacher Professional

Development by providing some compelling arguments with respect to the construct of Technology-enhanced Teacher Professional Development, Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth (IMTPG), delivering professional development course materials via MSNSs, and so forth.

3. MSNSs for Teacher Professional Development

3.1 Technology-enhanced Teacher Professional Development

As Kukulska-Hulme and Sharples (2009) state, "teachers need to have a good understanding of what mobile and contextual learning can offer. What [are] better way[s] to achieve such understanding than to use mobile technologies for one's own professional development?" (p. 160).

According to Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002),

> Teacher growth becomes a process of the construction of a variety of knowledge types (content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge) by individual teachers in response to their participation in the experiences provided by the professional development program and through their participation in the classroom. (p. 955)

Further, they propose a model for teacher professional growth, called *the Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth* (IMTPG) consisting of four domains as follows: 1) personal domain (knowledge, beliefs, and attitude); 2) practice domain (professional experimentation); 3) consequence domain (silent outcomes); and 4) external domain (external source of information or stimulus). According to this model, the mediating processes of 'reflection' and 'enactment' trigger the change in Teacher Professional Development. Moreover, the complexity of the construct of teachers' professional development is manifested by the multiplicity of several pathways between different domains (Coutinho & Lisbôa, 2013). The model is represented in Figure 1:

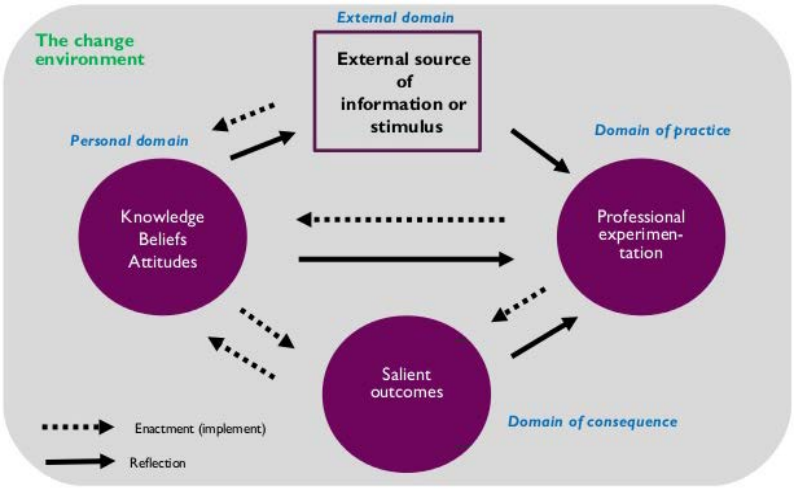

Figure 1. The Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002, p. 951)

Regarding the significance of Teacher Professional Development, on the one hand, and the potential of MSNSs to effectively support professional development, on the other, it could be argued that "emergent technologies, interactive and multimedia" could provide different opportunities "to revolutionize both access to and the quality of professional learning" (Moon & Leach, 2003, p. 24).

In this connection, Walsh et al. (2011) substantiate the key role played by mobile technologies in providing "effective teacher professional development" (p. 154) programs in developing countries leading towards "communicative English language teaching practices" (p. 154), which in turn lead to having more fluent English language teachers and more proficient language learners. Additionally, they go on to suggest that these innovative technologies provide teachers with opportunities to acquire higher levels of

English language, enabling them to take part in different social and even economic communities.

Moreover, they maintain that in such teacher professional development programs, teachers could be provided with the so-called "mobile technology toolkits" (Walsh et al., 2011, p. 154) consisting of a variety of Teacher Professional Development materials and different kinds of classroom resources (e.g., print, audio, & visual) delivered via MSNSs facilitating teachers' professional development and language acquisition process by creating interactivity and necessary pedagogical knowledge to teach communicatively.

In spite of the above-mentioned significance of the issue, the field of Teacher Professional Development (TPD) via mobile technologies and particularly MSNSs still seems to be in its infancy in developing countries like Iran; that is to say, Technology-enhanced Teacher Professional Development is a burgeoning field of investigation warranting further exploration.

3.2 Mobile-enhanced Materials

Allied with the focus on Technology-enhanced TPD is a concern to develop materials delivered via MSNSs. In this regard, the main TPD materials delivered through mobile technologies could be categorized into twelve modules (Walsh et al, 2011, p. 159). Table 1 shows the main TPD materials.

Table 1
The Main TPD Materials Delivered Through Mobile Technologies

Module	Key points
1.Active listening	•Elicitation techniques •Stages of a listening lesson
2. Choral dialogues	•Scaffolding students •Setting up pair-work
3.Listening and responding	•Active involvement •Different learning styles
4. Information gaps	•Creating an information gap •Authenticity
5. Pronunciation practice	•Sounds, stress and rhythm •Pronunciation models
6. Predictive listening	•Elicitation techniques •Creativity
7.Roleplay	•Using dialogues •Pair-work and group-work
8. Songs for language practice	•Automatization •Grammar integration
9.Using visuals	•Classroom interaction •Skills integration
10.Creative writing	•Personalization and creativity •Stages of a writing lesson
11.Listening to the world	•Real-life purposes •Listening for gist/key points
12.Grammar games	•Grammar integration •Motivation

In accordance with these issues, here is a brief look at some of the benefits associated with delivering professional development course materials via mobile technologies (e.g., iPods, MSNSs, etc.) based on the findings of a study by Shohel and Power (2010):

1. Developing teachers' pedagogic knowledge;
2. Supporting teachers' own learning of English language and pronunciation;
3. Improving teachers' use of English language in their classes;

4.Working collaboratively with their peers;

5. Having access to materials at different times and places;

6. Creating new opportunities for professional learning;

7. Enhancing teachers' determination and engagement in mastering the language, pronunciation and the classroom practices;

8. Increasing confidence in using English language;

9.Introducing more active learning practices;

10.Facilitating access to learning;

11.Improving the quality of teacher education and training. (pp. 212-213)

In the light of the foregoing theoretical discussions with respect to the implementation of mobile technologies, MSNSs, innovative tools and materials in Teacher Professional Development programs, one might safely argue that "teachers will achieve most of their professional development, not in face-to-face training workshops [contexts], but back at home and at school; by working with new tools and materials, on their own and with their project partner" (Shohel & Power, 2010, p. 212).

In much the same way, Manca and Ranieri (2015) argue that *Social Network Sites* are regarded as one of the most effective ways to expand teachers' digital competence by enhancing their professional development and providing teachers and educators with opportunities "to share teaching practices, to build a repository of activities and to develop a common identity" (p. 12). To put it differently, Social Networking has incrementally become an essential aspect in developing professional identity and enhancing professional development of pre-service and in-service teachers (Bodell & Hook, 2011; Kimmons & Veletsianos, 2014).

In the same vein, Coutinho and Lisbôa (2013) aptly introduce SNS as powerful didactic tools providing teachers with opportunities to "develop

their knowledge and competences, contributing to lifelong learning and professional development" (p. 199).

By the same token, the value of MSNSs for Teacher Professional Development and growth is corroborated by the fact that

> Social networks have gained much attention from researchers trying to understand and identify these spaces within the logic of 'learning ecologies', where the teacher can independently seek their professional growth and development. A space that takes into account their experiences, expectations, allowing a collaborative learning, where support, solidarity, teamwork and interaction constitute the differential that may encourage you to experiment, try cases and, who knows, change their practices and attitudes towards the new. (Coutinho & Lisbôa, 2013, p. 203)

Yet another important insight to be applied to the understanding of Teacher Professional Development via mobile technologies lies in the necessity of initial training for teachers in terms of new theories and the potential of mobile technology in their classrooms enabling them "to design good learning strategies for learners" (Ally, Grimus, & Ebner, 2014, p. 47) and providing them with opportunities to understand how to create the best learning experiences in different categories of:

- Social learning and collaboration. How can they most effectively use mobile devices to interact with other learners and systems (online communication)? How might the use of these devices change the process of interaction between their learning community and the schools? How can they embed social learning into lessons?

- New generation learning. Given the information explosion, how can young people become more independent in navigating through and filtering information? How can they recognize, evaluate, and process information?
- Just in time. How can teachers provide just-in-time content in manageable, 'bite-sized' packages (micro-content) for flexible delivery? How can they make it more personalized when needed?
- Contextual learning. How can they create more authentic learning experiences using a problem-based learning approach where students solve specific real-world problems in their own context? (Ally et al., 2014, p. 48).

4. The Implementation of Innovative Uses of MSNSs in Teacher Education

Broadly speaking, according to an oft-cited definition of social media, "social media are technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberation across stakeholders. These technologies include blogs, wikis, media (audio, photo, video, text) sharing tools, networking platforms (including Facebook), and virtual worlds" (Bryer & Zavatarro, 2011, p. 327).

Inextricably intertwined with the Internet access and social media on mobile phones is the implementation of *Mobile Social Network* technologies which are mostly "web-based and provide different ways of communication such as blogs, messaging, chat, discussion groups, podcasting, vodcasting", e-portfolios, and so forth (Murray, 2008, p. 8). At the same time, "the technological and social diversification of the field means that it has become much more open to innovation on the part of educators" (i.e., practitioners in teaching and training) (Kukulska-hulme & Pettit, 2009, p. 136). In this

regard, the innovative utilization of some *Mobile Social Networking* technologies in second language teacher education is discussed in the following sections:

• **Mobile blogging** (called moblogging by Kukulska-hulme & Pettit, 2009)

Social Networking technologies such as blogging support teachers' professional learning by developing "like-minded communities not geographically or temporally constrained" (Luehmann & Tinelli, 2008, p. 323) and providing opportunities for meaningful interactions between professionals, giving rise to their growth and development. At the heart of blogging is the notion that it can offer "new avenues for professional learning by providing teachers with new forms of participation and unique learning opportunities" (Luehmann & Tinelli, 2008, p. 325). With this in mind, Davies and Merchant (2007) identify a number of benefits associated with blogging:

> New affordances include textual connections with others on and offline; the facility to comment on others' blog posts and the possibility of replying to comments on one's own; hyperlinks to information sources; site meters which monitor visits from others; RSS feeds which alert subscribed readers to other newly updated sites; the facility to embed other texts within one's own and the possibility of including a range of modalities from audio podcasts to video streams. (p. 168)

Simply put, blog post writing through *Social Networking* engages teachers in different types of cognitive professional work such as "wrestling with dilemmas, documenting personal competence, engaging in personal self-critique" and involves them in affective professional works such as "sharing the emotional aspects of professionally growing and advocating for a certain vision of science education" (Luehmann & Tinelli, 2008, p. 331).

• Messaging (instant web-based messaging)

Regarding messaging on MSNSs, teachers can be trained in teacher education programs on how to use texting to assess their students by using different quizzes, spelling tests (Prensky, 2005) and implementing "SMS-based test preparation questions" (Thomas & McGee, 2012, p. 23). Teachers may also be trained with respect to using texting on MSNSs for giving students formal classroom assignments, providing them with information, giving additional instruction (Thomas & McGee, 2012) in English and sending students reminders regarding their homework and tests (Bull & McCormick, 2011).

Furthermore, a number of attractions have been enumerated for Short Messaging System (SMS) by the *University of Wolverhampton* consultancy:

1. SMS is not 'frozen' (compared to pre-recorded radio, video audio and print components) thus enabling topical content and responses to emergencies and contingencies;
2. SMS can be used peer-to-peer, in local decentralized groups, as long as message costs were reimbursed; SMS is not just top-down, center-out; not just broadcasts;
3. SMS has a high acceptability, coverage and ownership amongst teachers, SMS is socially inclusive;
4. SMS can give a sense of local ‘ownership’ and control;
5. In general, SMS is personal, mobile and flexible and is low-tech, accessible, universal and scalable;
6. In general, SMS within a comparable distance-learning program can be used for delivering study guide material, giving week-by-week support, maintaining momentum, and so forth (Traxler, 2006, p. 98).

• Wikis (modifiable collaborative web pages)

According to Stanley (2013), wiki is an online publishing platform which is mostly used by school teachers and learners. Etymologically speaking, the

very term 'wiki' originates from the Hawaiian meaning ‘quick’. Technically speaking,

> A wiki is a collaborative web space allowing for pages that can be created and edited by multiple users easily without any knowledge of web design. The wiki is similar to the blog in that it allows for quick and easy publishing, but the more flexible structure of the wiki means that it is good for project work, whilst the blog is better as an ongoing record of classwork as the latest work is always displayed at the top of the page. (Stanley, 2013, p. 52)

It is worth noting that teacher educators can provide student teachers with opportunities to publish their own wikis online in teacher education courses to be involved in collaborative web-based learning furthering their professional learning and growth.

• Video conferencing

Video conferencing (VC) equipment enables native speaking English tutors to "conduct online language activities and tutorial sessions with students on the same location or other branch campuses, either in the form of one-on-one basis or in groups" (Tsoi, Kwan, Leung & Tse, 2011, p. 366). This videoconferencing equipment can also be implemented in second language teacher education programs enabling teacher educators to deliver professional development materials and conduct tutorial sessions via MSNSs. To put it differently, "VC can also bring specialist English teachers into classrooms for direct teaching as well as modelling good practice for the mainstream teacher. Teachers themselves can also link up using the technology for more in-depth teacher training sessions" (Pim, 2013, p. 25).

• Podcasting (subscription-based broadcast over the web)

Broadly speaking, podcasts are "the combination of the words *iPod* and *broadcast*" (Stanley, 2013, p. 52). Technically speaking, podcasts are defined as "audio or video files, usually in an mp3 format that can be downloaded for broadcast/listening" (Thomas & McGee, 2012, p. 24) on an mp3 player, a computer, a cell phone or an iPod. As Thomas and McGee (2012) put it quite aptly, teachers can create podcasts of classroom discussions, reviews, lectures, demonstrations, interviews, video clips and news which can be shared online on different weblogs and wikis enabling students to have easy access to different types of materials.

• Vodcasting (video podcasts broadcast over the web)

Fairly recently, there has been an increased focus on using Vodcasting (video podcasting) in a variety of settings and disciplines. Vodcasting is regarded as the combination of 'vod' and 'cast'. Vod stands for 'video on demand' and cast for 'broadcasting' (Kargozari & Tafazoli, 2011).

Pedagogically speaking, there are a number of benefits with respect to vodcasts substantiating their value to be used in teacher education courses. In this regard, vodcasts:

1. Foster an active role of the learner (student teacher);
2. Promote flexible learning, anytime and anywhere;
3. Foment participation and collaborative-peer activities;
4. Facilitate the introduction of different communicative modes;
5. Adjust to students' (student teachers) learning styles, difficulties and disabilities;
6. Offer a great variety of topics creating rewarding learning experiences;
7. Distribute authentic-content situations;
8. Support formal and informal learning;

9.Promote blended learning environments. (Fernández-Pacheco, 2016, p. 53)

It may go unchallenged to argue that posting vodcasts via *Social Network Sites* supports teachers' ongoing professional development (Ushioda, Smith, Mann & Brown, 2011).

• E-portfolios or Electronic teaching portfolios

As Campbell (2010) puts it quite aptly, "a portfolio is an organized, goal-driven documentation of your professional growth and competence" (as cited in Christopher, 2011, p. 8). In the same vein, he maintains that an electronic portfolio (e-portfolio) may have the same purpose as a portfolio, "but artifacts are created and presented using electronic technologies and they appear in a variety of media formats: audio, video, digital photographs, graphics and text" (as cited in Christopher, 2011, p. 9). To Waters' credit (2009), "Social Networking technology is the e-portfolio enhancement of the day" (as cited in Aydin, 2012, p. 1100). To put it another way, "e-portfolios are collated and shared on Social Networking" (Chan, 2011, p. 244).

It is worth mentioning that the process of developing electronic teaching portfolios leads to teachers' long-term professional growth through "the multimedia development process (decide/assess, design/plan, develop, implement, evaluate) and the portfolio development process (collection, selection, reflection, projection/direction, presentation)" (Barrett, 2000, p. 1).

The benefits of electronic portfolio development are mentioned here:

1. Creating an electronic portfolio can develop teachers' as well as students' multimedia technology skills.
2. Modeling: If teachers develop electronic teaching portfolios, their students will be more likely to have their own electronic portfolios.

3. Each stage of the portfolio development process contributes to teachers' professional development and students' lifelong learning (Barrett, 2000, pp. 2-3).

Additionally, Chan (2011) puts much more emphasis on the pivotal role of MSNSs to be used for e-portfolio construction because of having a number of characteristics including:

- Ease of access via mobile phones,
- Minimal costs and all of the Web 2.0 sites evaluated were free,
- Simplicity with uploading, archiving and tagging multimedia evidence; and
- Suitability of the sites for collating evidence into e-portfolios. (p. 246)

Needless to say, with these advantages of e-portfolios in mind, it seems quite essential to train EFL teachers regarding the development and use of e-portfolios delivered via MSNSs in teacher education programs. The process of compiling e-portfolio using MSNSs is depicted in Figure 3.

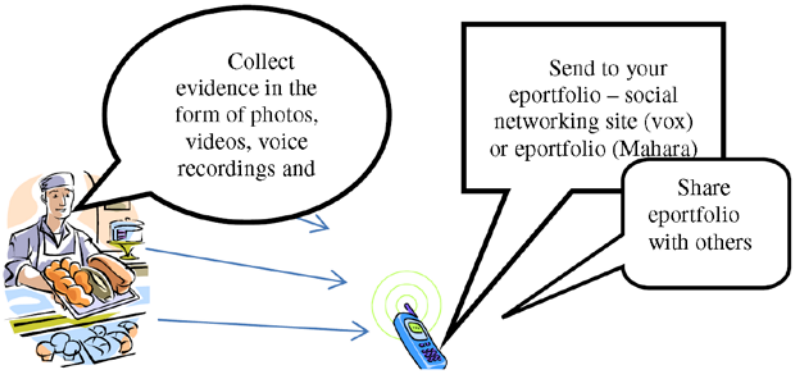

Figure 3. Compiling e-portfolios using mobile phones (Chan, 2011, p. 247)

• Virtual staffroom

MSNSs via the Internet provide teachers with opportunities to expand their own professional development through "a virtual staffroom to connect with colleagues around the word, share ideas, participate in webinars or conferences, or write and read blogs" (Kern, 2013, p. 99). To put it in more sophisticated terms, these virtual staffrooms are very important for teachers

> [w]hose multiple roles, for example as teacher, materials designer, collaborator, assessor, and researcher have expanded and evolved through IT, allowing collaborations with field-specific experts and other colleagues around the world, and giving them more easy access to an abundance of multimedia materials for even the most specialized of fields in order to design materials and courses that meet their learners' needs. (Arnó-Macià, 2012, p. 90)

• Blackboard or WebCT

Regarding the role of innovative technologies on SNSs, Blackboards or WebCTs offer a "courseware approach to delivering education through 'ready-made' Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs)" (Harrison & Thomas, 2009, p. 120). To put it differently, in these environments, the overwhelming weight of emphasis is on the effective delivery of a body of knowledge and evaluation of the members' progress by using different quizzes and testing features within the system (Harrison & Thomas, 2009).

Put in more recent terms, the above-mentioned Blackboards:

1. Serve as an up-to-date information hub for course participants, with scheduling, announcements, and private individual access to course grades and feedback. The LMS (learning management system) can be adjusted to reflect any unplanned changes to course scheduling or

the syllabus, and participants can be notified immediately through a messaging system.

2. Fulfil the traditional class website function of repository for course materials for student self-access. In web-enabled classrooms with digital projectors, audiovisuals and written materials such as short exercises or questions can be posted on the LMS and also displayed on a projection screen for the class.
3. Operate as a central online learning space, providing access to a range of activities which have the potential to support language development. Skills-focused activities such as tutorials, quizzes, and listening comprehension exercises can be created beforehand and released for student access as needed. A typical LMS will also offer a further set of Web 2.0 tools related by their capacity to facilitate communication, sharing of information, and collaboration, such as message boards, instant messaging, blogs, and wikis. It is normally up to classroom teachers to determine which blend of tools to use, based on what language learning affordances each tool offers, and how these tools might provide pedagogical advantages in specific teaching contexts (Gilbert, 2013, p. 136).

Motivated by the earlier discussion with respect to the innovative utilization of MSNSs in second language teacher education, there are some other application systems such as multimedia consulting system, lecture on demand authorizing system, communication platform and online test system (Bodendorf & Schertler, 2003). Pedagogically speaking, they are application systems supporting the teaching process, and it is essential to train teachers regarding their usage in teacher education programs. They are discussed elaborately in the following section (Figure 2):

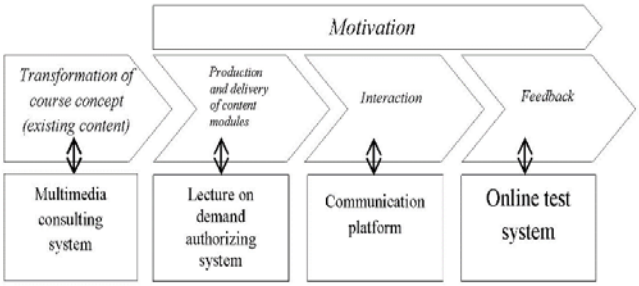

Figure 2. Application systems (Bodendorf & Schertler, 2003, p. 117)

• Multimedia consulting system

This system is implemented to help teachers in transferring course content to multimedia content. The main aim of the system is "to advance educational media production that is motivated from a didactical and not only a technical perspective" (Bodendorf & Schertler, 2003, p. 118).

• Lecture on demand authorizing system (LoD)

LoD provides teachers and students with lecture content on a variety of times and places. To produce such sorts of lectures, video and audio streams of lectures are recorded and edited. Then supplementary teaching resources such as PowerPoint slides, quizzes, animations and exercises are linked to the lecture videos. A user-friendly authorizing system enables teachers to produce LoDs by editing and producing course modules.

• Communication platform

It is "an effective and efficient technical infrastructure" connecting teachers and learners "to satisfy the students' demands for intellectual exchange, individual advice and personal guidance" (Bodendorf & Schertler, 2003, p. 119). It suggests the most appropriate tool and channel of communication.

• Online test system

This system provides teachers with a sort of ‘tool kit’ enabling them to create and conduct exams via the Internet. Different types of questions (e.g.,

multiple choice, yes/no questions, classification, etc.) with different levels of the learning target (e.g., application, comprehension, problem solving) with a variety of process time and difficulty level (easy, medium and hard) are included in each online test by the teachers (Bodendorf & Schertler, 2003).

Taking different innovative utilizations of *Mobile Social Networking* technologies in second language teacher education into consideration, finally it is important to note that the list of innovative utilizations of MSNSs is for sure incomplete warranting the necessity of conducting more comprehensive studies of this kind to enrich researchers' understanding of the issue at stake.

5. Skills Teachers Need to Implement MSNSs

According to Ally et al. (2014), teachers should expand their repertoire of knowledge and skills with respect to the 21st-centuary technology skills (e.g., using mobile technologies, MSNSs, etc.) in order to engage and teach their students effectively. They maintain that the essential knowledge and skills for teachers can be "models and methods of pedagogy, concepts of differentiation, awareness of policies, and skills in community building, online assessment and evaluation, accessibility, and preparation" (pp. 52-53). Further, they put an overwhelming weight of emphasis on six necessary skills for teachers, consisting of:

- Research and information skills: Teachers need to find, evaluate, and use authentic and reliable web-based content and effective resources (content, courses). Also, they must understand social bookmarking, how to annotate webpages, and how to use these skills to draw conclusions or create a product.
- Creating and sharing: They need to understand and use digital products and digital audio, video, and online content, along with wikis, blogs, digital portfolios, and personal networks, and know how to adapt courses to individuals.

- Using tools: They also need to know what to do with free online programs, simulations and applications, and tools for assessment (through quizzes, etc.), file sharing, collaboration, and time management and task management (to organize their work and learning).
- Social learning, social media, social skills, and digital citizenship: They must understand how to use text-messaging tools and social media so their students can work collaboratively and cooperatively. To reach out to colleagues, they need to understand and share good practices, collaboration methods, and the practicalities of the informal learning space.
- Safety and online security: They need to be aware of online predators and learn not to share personal information on the Internet.
- Careful attribution: Finally, they need to understand issues like copyright, plagiarism, the creative commons, and the fair use of online material (Ally et al., 2014, p. 53).

6. Technical Considerations in Using MSNSs

Taking mobile technologies, in general, and MSNSs, in particular, into consideration, Huber and Ebner (2013) summarized six necessary technical skills with respect to applying such sorts of technologies in classrooms:

- Visual aids: If several children are working in parallel on their personal devices they could have many questions. Therefore, the teacher must first explain the app carefully; another suggestion is to keep a computer projector in the classroom in order to show the app to the entire class.
- Organization: Teachers should carefully organize the apps so they can teach more efficiently—and students can learn

more efficiently. A key step is to move each necessary app to an appropriate folder. Another is to use an online file-sharing service, like Dropbox, to keep files organized.

- Materials: Teachers must be careful about copyright issues. Hence, we suggest using open educational resources in digital classrooms.
- Choice of apps: The teacher should test each app before using it in the classroom to be sure, for example, that unexpected error messages will not pop up and deter inexperienced users.
- Connectivity: Connections to the Internet often present technical problems. If more than 20 children need access at the same time, it might be helpful to add an additional router to guarantee stable Internet connections.
- Battery life: Teachers should be sure that the devices are fully charged each morning. It might help to establish policies on who charges the devices, and when (as cited in Ally et al., 2014, pp. 54-55).

7. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to examine the application of new manifestations of *Mobile Social Networking Sites* for teacher education. A number of issues with respect to the use of MSNSs in teacher education and ELT, *Mobile Social Network Sites* for Teacher Professional Development, the utility of innovative uses of MSNSs in teacher education (e.g., blogs, messaging, podcasting, vodcasting, etc.), skills teachers need to implement MSNSs, and technical considerations in using them were touched upon in the current paper.

In the light of the foregoing theoretical discussion in this paper, it is not difficult, on some reflections, to discern the importance of innovative technologies in ELT. However, one might safely come to the conclusion that keeping up with the innovative technology to be implemented in second language teacher education programs and also second language teaching and learning is a great challenge for teacher educators. According to Kukulska-Hulme (2008), a major obstacle to the implementation and integration of innovative technologies in teaching and learning programs pertains to "lack of personal experience of mobile learning on the part of those involved in teaching" (p. 9) and also the people who are responsible for the "preparation of distance learning materials and resources, and more generally, those who devise programs, courses, and methods of supporting learners" (p. 9), inspiring many a teacher educator and syllabus designer to consider the integration and implementation of innovative technologies in teacher education programs in order to enhance teachers' professionalism.

In short, as described in detail in book-length explanations of this paper, "this process of redrawing the boundaries of professional development may well entail ‘stretching’ the virtual boundaries of the teachers' academic learning base to offer possibilities for continued contact, support and engagement" (Ushioda et al., 2011, p. 121).

This remains a very exciting and promising area of pedagogical research at the present time warranting further investigation. That is to say, further studies are required to support the arguments made in this article opening up some new avenues of research.

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