

Social Media for Language Teachers' Development

Munassir Alhamami
King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia
&
University of Hawaii, USA

Abstract

This paper discusses the use of online social media tools for language teachers' professional development. The paper highlights the importance of the free social media tools for language professionals' development by presenting some of the influential social media tools that can be utilized by language teachers to develop their careers by creating communities of practices. First, the paper provides an overview of language teachers' development. Then, it highlights some of the key factors and methods for language teachers' development. Finally, it presents the social media as a creative and effective solution for professional development in the language teaching field.

Keywords: Social Media, Professional Development, Teachers' Education, Technology

Introduction

Education is a lifelong process. It is an ongoing process whose end is difficult to draw. The field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) is consistently changing. Without strategies and resources to develop their skills and update their knowledge, ESL teachers might be outdated about the latest effective methods, strategies, skills, materials and theories in their field. There is no doubt about the importance of ESL teachers' education for pre-service and in-service teachers (Burns & Richards, 1009; Crookes, 2003; Howard & Brown, 1997; Richards & Nunan, 1990; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Tedick, 2005). Second language teachers' education helps the in-service language teachers to cope with the current issues in their fields. In addition, it prepares the language pre-service teachers to the field of teaching and learning languages.

Excellent ESL teacher education programs prepare highly-qualified ESL teachers for the field. Around the world, language schools try to hire the language teachers who come from well-known language teaching preparation programs that have good reputations and a high quality of education. Burns and Richards (2009) stress that "there is consequently increasing demand worldwide for competent English teachers and for more effective approaches to their preparation and professional development" (p. 1). Excellent language teacher preparation programs introduce to the world well-qualified teachers who know about the theories and the practices in the field of language teaching and learning. As a result, they know how to teach their students the language in effective ways that meet the students' needs and achieve the curriculum objectives.

In addition, the importance of language teachers' education cannot be ignored for the in-service language teachers. The need for the ongoing education comes from that fact that the language-teaching field is updated consistently, and new topics and approaches come to surface. Richards and Farrell (2005) state that "opportunities for in-service training are crucial to the long-term development of teachers as well as for the long-term success of the programs in which they work" (p. 1). The learning environment is not stable. In few years, there are new students, new materials, new school policies, and new language research. This requires from the language teachers to be updated and be able to cope with the changes in their teaching environments.

Scope of Second Language Teacher Education (SLTE)

It might be difficult to define the borders of the second language teachers' education. It is tricky to draw the scope of the field of SLTE. Freeman (2009) stresses that "defining the scope of any activity - from parenting, to musicianship, to language teacher education - is a tricky undertaking" (p. 17). The reason is that "scope is often a largely de facto notion defined implicitly in the doing of a particular activity" (Freeman, 2009, p. 17). In SLTE, there are different disciplines that are associated with second language teachers' educations such as applied linguistics, psychology, cultural anthropology, technology, theoretical linguistics and education. These disciplines have their own theories that might be integrated in the SLTE implicitly. This comes from the nature of the field of language education as a new discipline. According to Burns and Richards,

"The field of TESOL is relatively new and, in the form that we know it today, dates from the 1960s. The origins of specific approaches to teacher training began with short training programs and certificates dating from this period, designed to give prospective teachers the practical classroom skills needed to teach new methods" (2009. p. 2).

As a new field, SLTE needs to be based on new theories and methods in other fields, for example, the audio-lingual method based on the theory of behaviorism in the field of psychology.

Another issue that is difficult to identify is categorizing SLTE into two categories: the initial teacher education (ITE) and the in-service teacher education (INSET). Putting SLTE into two categories is blurry and confused. Hubbard and Levy (2006) illustrate, "it is worth noting that in practice, the pre-service/in-service distinction may be blurry. Pre-service and in-service teachers may be combined in a single class, particularly in the online setting" (p. 13). We can see from the aforementioned quote how technology influences categorizing the field of SLTE into two broad categories. SLTE also encompasses "a wide range of second language contexts, national and international contexts, and instructional and institutional setting" (Tedick, 2005, p. preface). It ranges from English as a second language to English as a foreign language, from bilingual education to language immersion education, from pre-k-12 education to college education.

Factors in SLTE

There are many factors that play significant roles in SLTE. These different players shape the field of SLTE. For example, we can see technology as an important player in SLTE nowadays. Hubbard and Levy (2006), and Reinders (2009) state that technology reshapes the language classrooms practices these days. Language education programs need to prepare the language teachers to utilize the technology in their language classrooms. It can be difficult to avoid the use of technology in language teaching classrooms since that technology becomes a part of our daily life. Many language schools and published language materials require the use of technology to deliver the lessons.

Further, we can identify another factor affecting SLTE: teachers' identity. Teachers' identity plays an important role in SLTE (Miller, 2009). Kanno and Stuart (2011) clarify "the idea that identity formation is central to L2 teacher development has major implications in terms of what fundamental questions we should ask in L2 teacher education" (p. 49). Language preparation programs help the pre-service language teachers to formulate their new identities as language teachers. It is a major change in their life to establish a new identity. Language teachers act in the language classrooms based on how they identify themselves.

An additional important factor in SLTE is the culture and the context. Language teachers need to be aware of their students' cultures and their own culture that they bring to the language classrooms (Sowden, 2007). Language teachers need to understand their students' culture so they can avoid the culture conflicts with the target language. Teachers might learn about their students' culture by asking the students, reading online materials about the culture, and asking their colleagues who have long experience teaching in the context. SLTE programs need to include the social and the cultural position of the language and its impact on the lives of both teachers and students (Franson & Holliday 2009). We cannot separate the culture from the teaching environment. The list of the factors is long and includes teachers' experiences, teachers' attitudes, and teachers' native language. The above-mentioned examples are incorporated since they play significant roles in SLTE to give the readers an idea about how different factors shape the field of SLTE.

Methods in SLTE

There are different ways to provide an education for the ESL teachers. In this section, I will illustrate some of these effective methods for SLTE. Joining a SLTE program is the first step to getting education and knowing more about language teaching and learning. SLTE

programs provide the teachers with different kinds of certificates such as a Master Degree (MA), a Bachelor Degree (BA) and Graduate Certificate. During the program, the teachers explore different areas in the second language studies such as the methods of teaching, language teaching materials, language acquisition, and language and society. Joining such programs is helpful for both the initial language teachers who want to join the field and the in-service teachers who want to promote their status, update their knowledge, and get better jobs. Language teaching preparation programs help the teachers to have more theoretical knowledge about teaching (Wyatt, 2010). They learn about the history of the field language teaching and the current status of the field.

Another method is attending workshops. In workshops, language teachers are trained in using new teaching methods and dealing with new issues in their field. Workshops are usually conducted by experts in the field of SLTE. Many language experts offer workshops in their specialties such as language testing, language teaching methods, and course designs. In addition, some language materials publishers conduct workshops in their new language materials to show how language teachers can use them in their classrooms. Another method of development is attending language conferences. Language teachers might develop their careers by attending presentations and workshops at the language conferences. There are different conferences that concentrate on language teaching and learning such as the TESOL Conference and the AAAL Conference. In these conferences, the teachers know what other language teachers use in their classrooms and the current research trends in language teaching and learning.

Language teachers might join specific language organizations to extend their academic networks where they can make new academic friends. Those friends help them to find answers to their questions and solutions to their problems in the classroom. Organizations usually have specific groups of interests such as a group that concentrates on technology, a group that concentrates on assessment, and a group that concentrates on materials. Language teachers can be members of these specific groups of interests to strengthen their knowledge about a specific area in second language studies such as teaching writing, teaching pronunciation and teaching children. Another significant way to be updated with the latest in the field of language teaching and learning is the use of reading materials such as books and journals. Language teachers can develop their careers and be updated with the latest issues in their field by subscribing to language teaching journals such as TESOL Quarterly, the Asian EFL Journal, and Language Learning and Technology. Reading the latest articles and books in the field of language studies keep the teachers updated about the latest issues and theories in their area. Those language journals are usually peer reviewed, and the experts in the field edit them.

Another method for language professional development is reflection. In her study, Best (2011) has found that reflection is an effective method for in-service language teachers to develop their teaching skills. Reflection helps teachers to know their own teaching practices in the classrooms. Teachers might not be aware of these practices unless they reflect on them. SLTE research confirms that, "an effective teacher is a reflective teacher" (Brandt, 2008, p. 42). Reflection helps the teachers to learn and develop their skills within the context they teach. It shows the teachers their strengths and weaknesses. Another method to get SLTE is the collaborative learning with the other language teachers. Johnston (2009) illustrates, "collaborative teacher development (CTD) is an increasingly common kind of teacher development found in a wide range of language teaching contexts" (p. 241). Collaborative teacher development helps the language teachers to exchange ideas, thoughts and suggestions. It

is an investigation into teaching and learning in their contexts. Teachers solve their problems together and understand the contexts where they teach from different teachers' perspectives.

Observation is another effective method for professional development. Observation is necessary for the teacher training (Mackey & Gass, 2005; Maingay, 1988; Wallace, 1991). It helps the pre-served teachers to have an image about the learning environment they will encounter after their training programs. It prepares them for the work. By going to real language classrooms, pre-service teachers have access to their future teaching environment. In addition, observation is necessary for in-service language teachers because the learning environments are changing consistently. Teachers might invite their colleagues to come and observe their classes and point out how the teacher conducts the class. They might also go to their colleagues' classrooms and observe how they teach their classes. This will give the teacher ideas about the methods that they use in their classrooms.

Social Media

Social media allow people to create exchange, share, comment, and modify contents in different forms. Kaplan and Haenlein define the social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (2010, P.61). It is the connection in the cyberspace. Through social media, Internet users can exchange the contents with others. It becomes fact that the social media becomes a part of our daily life. For example, The YouTube official website, http://www.youtube.com/t/press_statistics, states that 500 years of YouTube video are watched every day on Facebook, and over 700 YouTube videos are shared on Twitter each minute. 100 million people take a social action on YouTube (likes, shares, comments, etc) every week. The Facebook official website <http://newsroom.fb.com/Key-Facts> states that there are one billion monthly active users as of October 2012. There is no doubt that "social media are Web 2.0 applications that have the potential to increase interactions among individuals through creating and sharing" (Joosten, 2012, p. 8).

The use of social media tools in language education is important because it creates a community for language teachers. The difference between social media as professional development tools and other professional development tools is that social media gives the teachers a community to participate with. The US Department of Education stresses that teachers should not only be connected to resources but they should have communities of practice that provide career-long personal learning opportunities for educators within and across schools, pre-service preparation and in-service education institutions, and professional organizations. (Office of Educational Technology, 2010 <http://www.ed.gov/technology/netp-2010/executive-summary>). Communities of practice are "groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise" (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 139). The social media tools help the language teachers to stay connected with their peers around the world and updated about their fields. Moreover, these online buttons give the language teachers the chance to help others in their fields, find solutions to their problems and improve their teaching language careers.

Examples of Social Media

The following social tools are selected to show the language teachers another way of professional development. These social tools will build the ESL teachers professional network for free. The tools will introduce them to active ESL professions and organizations where they will be updated with the latest development in their careers wherever they are. They are easy to

use and commonly used by ESL allies. They are accessible and do not require lots of works and efforts from busy ESL teachers. They can be used by both initial teachers and in-service teachers. The basic requirement is access to the Internet.

1- Facebook Pages

Facebook page is a public profile for organizations, companies, schools and celebrities. The Facebook page has fans instead of friends. Fans are the people who like the Facebook page. The Facebook page keeps the fans updated with the latest news of the organization. The updates appear on the page and the fans' personal news feeds. In addition, the fans can be updated via SMS and RSS. You need a Facebook account to use this tool 'Facebook pages'. You need to LIKE the page by pressing the button "Like" at the top of the page. After that you will be updated with the information posted in that page. The information will show on your in your account. Facebook pages are effective tools to be updated and developed in the field. By becoming a fan of some language oriented Facebook pages, language teachers can have access to the latest posts in that Facebook pages. Many language programs, language materials publishers, language organizations have Facebook pages. In their facebook pages, they share their news and their latest products.

Examples of Facebook Pages

1- Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), Inc. Facebook Page

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/tesol.assn>

2- American TESOL Institute Facebook Page:

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/American-TESOL-Institute/40054405592>

3- Free Technology for Teachers Facebook Page:

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/FreeTech4Teachers>

2- Facebook Groups

A Facebook group is a type of online social community where Facebook members can share and discuss relevant topics. There are three types of Facebook groups: A- Secret: only members can see the group and what members post in the group space. B- Closed: anyone can see the group, but the group members only can see the posts. C- Open: anyone can see the group and what the group members post. In addition, the group has email where all the group members can be notified even they are off Facebook. Language teachers might join Facebook groups that are dedicated to language teaching and learning. In these Facebook groups, the teachers share ideas, news and online resources about language teaching and learning. Language teachers can find these Facebook groups by typing language teaching key words in the research box and limit the results to groups.

Examples of language Facebook Groups

1- Applied Linguistics and Language Learning & Teaching Facebook Group

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/applinguistics/>

2- EUROCALL Facebook Group

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/255577856335/>

3- English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) Facebook Group

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/186045292528/>

3- Twitter

Language teachers can use Twitter for professional development too. In their Twitter accounts, they can follow famous language programs, language education well-known scholars, and language publishers. For example, there are Twitter accounts for TESOL Arabia, TESOL Korea, TESOL France, Oxford University Press, TESOL International Association, and Stephen

Krashen. They tweet their latest news, publications, thoughts, ideas and resources. Language teachers can find these accounts by typing language teaching and learning key words such as applied linguistics, language teaching methods, language materials, and language theories at the research box in the twitter websites.

4- YouTube

YouTube is a very attractive social medium that contributes to the global education (Bonk, 2009). It is increasingly being used by educators to teach English language (Duffy, 2008). YouTube allows its users to share large videos in high quality for free. It offers fast and fun access to language and culture-based videos and instruction from all over the globe (Terantino, 2011). We can see that YouTube is making new demands on learning that are changing the learning ecology (Kwan et al, 2008). YouTube has a special section for education where educators can post their videos. Every year, YouTube official website WWW.YouTube.com shares astonishing statistics about the use of the YouTube worldwide. According to the press link http://www.youtube.com/t/press_statistics, YouTube is localized in 43 countries and across 60 languages; YouTube has more than 1 trillion views or around 140 views for every person on Earth. These statistics show the influence of YouTube on sharing information and knowledge with other people.

Examples of YouTube Accounts

1- TESOL webinars by the American TESOL Institute

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6AD53A6A65AB8A54>

2- Teacher Development in English Language Teaching by Oxford University Press

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2193A8A6FB66E2E2>

3- Teaching Tips by the British Council

Link: <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL17B8E2A8B6003A38>

5- SlideShare

SlideShare is a website that hosts people documents in slide formats. It accepts the following formats: PowerPoint, Keynote, OpenOffice and PDF. It was launched on October 4, 2008. Users of SlideShare can rate, comment on and share their documents with others. According to SlideShare official Website <http://www.slideshare.net/about>, SlideShare was voted amongst by the World's top tools for education & e-learning. SlideShare is the world's largest community for sharing presentations. With 60 million monthly visitors and 130 million pageviews, it is amongst the most visited 200 websites in the world. Besides presentations, SlideShare also supports documents, PDFs, videos and webinars. Language teachers can have access to other language related presentations. By joining SlideShare, they can follow and keep updated with the latest presentations about language teaching and learning that are shared in SlideShare.

Examples of SlideShare Presentations

1= Best Practices for Teaching English to Young Learners by Joan Shin

Link: <http://www.slideshare.net/VenTESOL/teaching-english-to-young-learners-by-joan-shin>

SlideShare Account Holder is Venezuela TESOL

Workshop offered to English Language teachers in Venezuela as part of the Methodology of the ELT Tour 2011-2 organized by VenTESOL and sponsored by the US Embassy

2= TESOL International Association

Link: <http://www.slideshare.net/TesolAssn>

SlideShare account Holder is TESOL International Association

3= Creative Teaching

Link: <http://www.slideshare.net/TESOLChile>

SlideShar eAccount Holder is TESOL Chile

4= English classroom

Link: <http://www.slideshare.net/englishinthebox>

SlideShare account holder is English Classroom in Thailand

5= E-teaching.org

Link: <http://www.slideshare.net/eteaching>

SlideShare accountholder E-teaching.org

6- LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a social networking website for people in professional occupations. It is founded in December 2002 and launched on May 5, 2003. It is mainly used for professional networking. As of June 2012, LinkedIn reports more than 175 million registered users in more than 200 countries and territories. As of September 30, 2012, LinkedIn operates the world's largest professional network on the Internet with more than 187 million members in over 200 countries and territories. Language teachers can use this social media tools to connect with other language professionals around the globe as we can see in the following examples. There are different language related groups in LinkedIn. Joining these groups helps the teachers to find answers to their questions, read others ideas and suggestions and help other teachers to find solutions to their language teaching problems.

Examples of Groups in LinkedIn:

1= TESOL Association in LinkedIn

Link: http://www.linkedin.com/groups/TESOL-International-Association-3733067?trk=myg_ugrp_ovr

2= TESOL Arabia Group in LinkedIn

Link: http://www.linkedin.com/groups/TESOL-Arabia-3776048?trk=myg_ugrp_ovr

3= Applied Linguistics Group in LinkedIn

Link: http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Applied-Linguistics-1356867?trk=myg_ugrp_ovr

4= EUROCALL Group in LinkedIn

Link: http://www.linkedin.com/groups/EUROCALL-710067?trk=myg_ugrp_ovr

5= ELT Professionals Around The World group in LinkedIn

Link: http://www.linkedin.com/groups/ELT-Professionals-Around-World-3460329?trk=myg_ugrp_ovr

7- Academia.edu

Academia.edu is a platform for academics to share research papers. The company's mission is to accelerate the world's research. According to the official website <http://www.academia.edu/about>, Academics use Academia.edu to share their research, monitor deep analytics around the impact of their research, and track the research of academics they follow. 4,028,088 academics have signed up to Academia.edu, adding 1,631,776 papers and 857,013 research interests. Academia.edu attracts over 5 million unique visitors a month. Language teachers can follow the work of famous language researchers and know about their latest research as we can see in the following examples.

Examples of categories to find on academia.edu

1= People: Ahmar Mahboob <http://usyd.academia.edu/AhmarMahboob>

2= Papers: Languages and Linguistics

http://www.academia.edu/Documents/in/Languages_and_Linguistics

3= Journals: Language and Linguistics

http://journals.academia.edu/in/Languages_and_Linguistics

8- StumbleUpon

StumbleUpon is a discovery engine (a form of web search engine) that finds and recommends web content to its users. Its features allow users to discover and rate Web pages, photos, and videos that are personalized to their tastes and interests using peer-sourcing and social-networking principles. Language teachers can use this tool to have recommended online contents that are based on their interests.

Interests Examples: Applied Linguistics, Language Teaching and Learning, TESOL, EFL, ESL, TOEFL, Computer Assisted Language Learning

The Profile will have different sections based on your interests:

Likes Section, List Section, Comments Section, History Section, Following Section, Followers Section, Interests Section, Channels Section.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper reconsiders the use of social media for language professional development purposes due to the popularity and effectiveness of social media to communicate with professions around the globe. It provides the social media as communities of practice. Social media meets what the US Department of Education (Office of Educational Technology, 2010 <http://www.ed.gov/technology/netp-2010/executive-summary>) stresses that teachers should not only be connected to resources but they should have communities of practice that provide career-long personal learning opportunities for educators within and across schools, pre-service preparation and in-service education institutions, and professional organizations.

However, we should be aware of the fact that it is not necessary that what you will see in these social networks is relevant to your particular interests. Sometimes, the members of the social network post topics that might not necessary be relevant to the field of language teaching and learning. For example, some members post about their products to market. Another point is the quality of the post. Sometimes, the members might post about English websites or tips that are not necessary to be proven scientifically as effective in language teaching and learning. Further research need to be conducted to analyze the contents that are posted in these social network language related sections

About the Author:

Munassir Alhamami received his B.A in English from King Khalid University (Saudi Arabia) and his M.A from Trinity Western University (Canada). Currently, he is instructor at King Khalid University (on study leave) and PhD student at University of Hawaii (USA). His main academic interest is applied linguistics & technology

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