Personal Learning Networks as an Aid to Promote Reflective Practice by EFL Teachers
Key words/ Mobile media, Personal learning networks, Reflective practice.

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Abstract

The present study sheds light on the crucial role of social media generally and personal learning networks specifically in applying the aspects of teacher development specially in experiencing reflective practice among teachers. The study aims at ensuring full understanding of the term reflective practice by the target teachers, identifying teachers' attitudes toward using personal learning networks in applying reflective practice and then comparing their attitudes based on gender and age variables. The study also tries to clarify the main social media applications that teachers tend to use. Sixty teachers were chosen arbitrarily from different secondary schools in Baghdad to represent the study sample. A constructed questionnaire was used by the researchers after ensuring its face validity. After dealing with the results statistically, they show that the teachers have positive attitudes towards using personal learning networks in reflective practice. They also clarify that the use of group discussion via Viber, Facebook and Whatsapp applications are the most preferable among Iraqi teachers.

1. Introduction

As indicated by Schostak (2008:2), education can be defined generally as "the process of exploring alternative ways of thinking, doing, believing, and expressing one's self. It is the process through which one forms one's own judgment independently of those who set themselves up (or are set up institutionally) to be the judges of others". Based on that, it is clear that teachers must depend on new and innovative ways to develop themselves as to reflect on their work. Reflective practice is a good way for teaching and teacher development. Teachers need chances to put their feed in the right way. In this context, Hill (2000: 50) states that "If we want teachers to be educators, then we must educate them. We must provide them with opportunities, support, and challenge to become reflective, critical, and creative thinkers, to grow intellectually, to engage in a process of constant transformation". Teachers need to be supported through gaining efficient chances to participate in collaborative workshops and discussions of all types where the teachers can interact and exchange ideas and experiences. This comes in accordance to what is stated by Connelly and Clandinin (1995:13) that "What is missing in the classroom is a place for teachers to tell and retell their stories of teaching… (But) the possibilities for reflective awakenings and transformation are limited when one is alone. Teachers need others in order to engage in conversations where stories can be told, reflected back, heard in different ways, retold, and relived in new ways in the safety and secrecy of the classroom".

Technology is another dimension that plays role in accelerating the process of teacher development in all sides. The use of technology in the processes of teaching and learning is of utmost importance as stated by Taggart & Wilson (2005:212) that "communicating through the use of information technology has become a major source for effective teaching and learning. Such technologies

function as the tools that support ongoing, research-based, and result-based teaching". It is also used effectively in teacher development courses that highlight different types of activities as in " the study groups, collaborative learning, group problem solving, and discussion of assignments and beliefs can be strengthen through technology" (ibid). In this context, Scrivener highlights the importance of using personal learning networks as an active tool that can be used to enhance teacher' action professionally. According to him (2011:344) personal learning networks means a group of people that communicated online in order to talk about their courses and issues that are related to their job. The groups may be formed intentionally or informally, as an accumulation of people who can communicate with you easily.

Professional context requires a dynamic relationship between a teacher and other constituents of his/her institution. To be a member of professional context, you need to work hard to understand the relationship that exists in it. The use of mobile media in teachers' professional context can facilitate the process of exchanging ideas, can provide open forums for free and easy cooperation, and can promote for sharing ideas. Sharing is very important notion in this study as the concentration occurs upon it to see if the social media tools can facilitate the process of reflection among teachers despite the kind of the application used.

To reflect on your work, is to determine the challenge, take action toward it, share what you observe and what you intend to do with colleagues to gain different perspectives and then to evaluate again. Sharing the results of the teaching process, the challenges teachers may face, and their personal experiences represent one of the strengths which characterize the successful education process, as stated by Mettetal (2003:3) that "teaching can be a solitary activity, with successes and failures rarely acknowledged to others. Sharing the findings can provide an

exciting forum for discussions on teaching. Results can be shared informally, through departments or teaching center brown-bags, or more formally at teaching conferences".

Based on what is stated above, this study intends to answer the following questions:

1. Do teachers are aware of the meaning of the term reflective practice?

2. Do teachers have positive attitudes toward using personal learning networks in reflective practice?

3. Is there any statistical difference between male and female teachers' attitudes towards using personal learning networks in reflective practice?

4. Is there any statistical difference between the attitudes of the two age generations used in this study (25-35) and (35-55) towards using personal learning networks in reflective practice?

5. What are the main online reflective practice techniques that used by teachers?

2. Literature Review

2.1Reflective Practice

Reid (1993:305) defines reflection as "a process of reviewing an experience of practice in order to describe, analyze, evaluate and so inform learning about practice". Jarvis (1992:180) adds that "Reflective practice is something more than thoughtful practice. It is that form of practice that seeks to problematize many situations of professional performance so that they can become potential learning situations and so the practitioners can continue to learn, grow and develop in and through practice". Posner (1993:21) clarifies that reflection leads teachers to work intentionally to create new plans of teaching more than repeated the usual and

traditional ways and to develop their new innovative perspectives. Reed and Bergemann (2001:9) mention that teachers who can reflect on their work and action are more effective than those who do things they observed to process their ideas. In this context, Khourey-Bowen (2005:85) states that "Practitioners become more accomplished professionals when they are able to remove themselves from the immediacy of the situation, and interpret it using new perspectives, refining their beliefs and future courses of action".

The use of reflective practice as part of teacher professional development is dependent on the fact that teachers can enhance their own practice by being aware to reflect systematically on their teaching (Farrell, 2004, 2007) cited in (Farrell, 2008:1). Valli (1997:70) suggests that teachers can "look back on events, make judgments about them, and alter their teaching behaviors in light of craft, research, and ethical knowledge". In this concern, Richards (1990:5) maintains that discussion and deep thinking can "help teachers move from a level where they may be guided largely by impulse, intuition, or routine, to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking".

Two main forms of reflection have been noticed: a strong and a weak form. In the weak form, teachers' reflection related to thinking performance, where most teachers, as Wallace (1991:292) suggest, "Informally evaluate various aspects of their professional expertise". In this form, there are no solutions to classroom problems, rather annoying feelings without providing any solutions. (ibid: 13). The second stronger type of reflection required a systematic reelection by teachers with a responsibility of taking action toward it. (go with the this stronger version stating that teachers must "collect data about their teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about teaching" .

Two types of reflection are mentioned: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Reflection-on-action represents the evaluation of teachers to their past events and takes benefit from them. The other type is reflection-in-action where teachers can observe their current situation and develop their inner invoice to connect the past practices with the current and then with the future.

The main reflective practice techniques are the journals of all types such as reflective learning journals, web based journals, double entry journal, interactive journal, dialogue journal, narrative journal in addition to autobiographies, portfolios, critical group audience, mentoring, micro-teaching, video reflection and self-assessment.

2.2 The Use of Mobile Media

In contemporary years, there has been an growing interest, specifically in EFL contexts, towards the use of mobile technologies in education which, in turn, has changed the traditional academic environment to mobile learning. It is worth emphasizing that mobile media are great methods for both the communication and education. They are widely used by most students and teachers because of their accessibility and mobility.

Murcia (2001:460) defines media as the "technological innovations in language teaching, of mechanical paraphernalia, and of glossy polished audiovisual aids-with all the media anxiety that these can conjure up in teachers "

The importance of mobile media can include many areas in learning and teaching. Rezaei, et. al, (2013) assert that mobile applications motivate students to learn more material. Moreover, Harmer (2010:191) highlights this importance of mobile applications saying that "many apps have interactivity. Students can

communicate with each other .They can make audio or video recording and send them straight to internet sit". Mobile application can also provide immediate feedback and availability of information and therefore, effective tools for learning. (fraga, et.al , 2011). In this context, Scrivener (2011:34) asserts that social personal networks can enrich interaction by stating that by using applications such as Facebook help to create groups of teaches who can communicate with each other and help to share pictures and files.

The use of technology in general and mobile media in particular can benefit teachers not only learners. The use of it can be an efficient method in teacher education and in teacher development. It can move them easily and quickly to another developed generation that can exploit the current digital trends for their educational sake. More specifically, it can help them exchange, register and share of ideas, links, photos, and join discussions and queries easily to find instant solutions.

Goria, et al., (2019, 6) show an interesting conclusions as they study both personal learning environment (PLE) and personal learning networks (PLN). They conclude that "the two case studies demonstrate diverse ways as to how teachers can use PLEs and PLNs for supporting their own as well as their students' learning and for creating professional development opportunities within their own teaching and educational contexts". Yang (2009) studied the use of blogs, which is one of the mobile media techniques, in the process of training student-teachers where it was used as a platform for reflection. Results show that student-teachers were actively engaged in interaction with others and they produce significant queries during the period of training. In a study by McKinney (2016) who study the effects of using mobile media on students' reflective writing, he states that though his students like the use of smart phones but still the use of face to face

communication is more valued. It becomes clear that mobile media provide both teachers and students with new means by which language can be taught and learnt more effectively. Viber application is also investigated by (Al-Obaydi and Ibrahim, 2019) to know the effect of it on students' acquisition of certain types of vocabulary words.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Participants

To achieve the objectives of the study, sixty English language teachers were chosen randomly from the intermediate schools in Baghdad to represent the sample of the study.

The researchers also chose other ten teachers to represent the pilot administration of the study in order to check the suitability and clarity of the instruments. The second sample answers all the items of the questionnaire with some discussion with the researchers in a suitable period of time and without obstacles. .

3.2 Instrument

A questionnaire of three parts is used in this study. In the first part, the researchers ask the participants whether they know the meaning of the term reflective practice or not. They also write a little introduction to clarify the meaning of the term in case that there are some participants that do not know its meaning. In this way, the researchers ensure full understanding of the term by all participants. The second part represents the attitudes of teachers toward using personal learning networks as an aid in reflective practice. It consists of fifteen items each of which measures

teachers' opinions towards the importance of using social media in reflective practices. The last part of the questionnaire includes approximately all mobile applications that are available in the area of study and ask teachers to choose three of the most used of them. The final version of the questionnaire was applied to the sample of the study after presented to a certain jury of experts to ensure its face validity.

4. Results and Discussion

As follows, the results that are related to each part of the questionnaire:

4.1 Results Related to the First Question

The participants are asked to reply whether they have any idea concerning the term reflective practice. The results show that 83.33% of the participants know the meaning of the term. The other 16.66 % of the sample knew its meaning from the introduction that is provided in the questionnaire. They state that they use it informally without recognizing its name. This means that most teachers deal with reflective practice whether intentionally or unintentionally.

4.2 Results Related to the Second Question

In order to answer the question two of the study, the responses of teachers are investigated by calculating the standard deviation value which is 6.008 and the mean score which reads 50.69. After applying the t-test formula for one sample, it is found that the computed t-value 26.696   is higher than the tabulated t-value 2000 at 58 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significant. This result indicates that teachers have positive attitudes towards using personal learning networks as an aid in reflective practice.

Table 1 *Results of the Second Question*

Group	Sample	Mean	Standard deviation	Degree of freedom	t-value		Level of significant
					Computed	Tabulated	
Male and female	60	50.69	6.008	58	26.696	2.000	(0.05)Statistically significant

4.3 Results Related to the Third Question

By using t-test formula for two independent samples (male and female), the results of this question illustrates that the computed t-value reads 3.667 is higher than the tabulated t-value 2.01 at 58 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. This shows that there are statistically significant differences between male and female teachers'   attitudes   in   favor   of   male   teachers.

Table 2 *Results of the Third Question*

Group	Sample	Mean	Standard deviation	Degree of freedom	t-value		Level of significant
					Computed	Tabulated	
Male	30	27.76	5.04	58	3.667	2.01	(0.05)Statistically significant
female	30	22.93	5.016				

4.4 Results Related to the Forth Question

Table (3) below illustrates that the computed t-value 3.1 is higher than the tabulated one 2.000 at 58 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. This

clarifies that there are statistically significant differences between teachers of age (25-35) and teachers of age (35-45) in favor of the first group; teachers of age (25-35).

Table 3 *Results of the Forth Question*

Group	Sample	Mean	Standard deviation	Degree of freedom	t-value		Level of significance
					Computed	Tabulated	
Age (25-35)	30	28.5	32.38	58	3.1	2.000	(0.05)Statistically significant
Age (35-55)	30	25.1	3.89				

4.5 Results Related to the Fifth Question

In the last part of the questionnaire, the researchers list eleven applications of mobile media specifically those that are available for Iraqi users' app stores of mobiles. These are Facebook, Facebook messenger, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Snap chat, You Tube, Whatsapp, Viber, Imo, and Skype. The researchers ask teachers to choose three of the most used applications. The results revel that teachers used Viber, Facebook and Whatsapp more than other social media applications with the percentages 40 %, 35% and 25% respectively. The groups in these applications serve the aim of reflective practice communities so much as most teachers joined these groups in order to communicate with each other and to discuss different types of teaching issues and professional problems in different educational dimensions.

5. Discussion

The results of the present study clarify that the majority of teachers reflect on their teaching practice in formal or informal ways by joining the social media groups like personal learning networks. This indicates that the participants of the study own positive attitudes towards working chorally in online groups to solve the challenges they face in their daily teaching practice. These results prove that teachers are always interact socially for the sake of professional development whether formally in governmental training forums or informally via social media groups and applications and that this use benefit them so much as it represents instant solutions to many of their professional problems. The use of mobile media, which is the cheapest communication tool, can provide teachers with free solutions to many problems. Their entrance to these online forums and groups helps them achieve many services such as exchanging links, photos, reports and joining online discussions as stated by the questionnaire of this study. The ease of using mobile media and the low cost of it makes it under the hand of most teachers as they used to use it in their daily social life. So, it becomes an important chance for them to learn and develop themselves at the same time.

6. Conclusions

Based on the results obtained, the researchers conclude that the use of reflective practice is not new for Iraqi teachers and that most of them apply it specifically in its online form. Reflective Practice provides teachers with a chance to take a stance towards their teaching in a structured manner. It provides teachers with a great opportunity to self-evaluation which provides them in turn with an occasion to see their strength and weaknesses in teaching and to put a hand on the problematic areas and to work on it. The use of reflective practices, whether in pairs or by

group of teachers, allows them to communicate with each other about teaching, teaching strategies, problems, challenges and other educational areas.

The role of mobile media and more specifically the personal learning networks here is to facilitate the use of reflective practice and to provide opportunities for more and instant social interaction which leads at the end to good relationships among teachers. Joining the groups in social media help teachers present their teaching challenges easily and find many suggestions to choose from.

It is worth mentioning that the results of this study come in line with Goria, et. al. (2019) and Yang(2009) who assert the importance of different mobile media applications in training students-teachers and teachers.

7. Recommendations

The researchers recommend the following:

1. It is important to insert monthly meetings for teachers to increase their knowledge of the reflective practice, whether traditional or online, in order to raise their awareness towards its crucial role.
2. Encouraging teachers to join the social media groups in order to interact with teaching communities so as to learn intentionally and unintentionally from them.
3. Managing teachers' grouping to make sure that the educational aim of them are achieved and to support them continuously with an updated plans and programs.
4. Increasing teachers' awareness towards the importance of self-evaluation as this will help them determine the weaknesses in their performance and to work on it.

شبكات التعلم الشخصية كاداة لتشجيع استخدام التدريب التقويمي بين مدرسي اللغة الانكليزية لغة اجنبية

الكلمات المفتاحية: التدريب التقويمي، شبكات التعلم الشخصية، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي.

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الملخص

تلقي الدراسة الحالية الضوء على الدور المهم لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي بشكل عام وعلى شبكات التعلم الشخصية بشكل خاص وعلى وجه الخصوص في تطبيق مجالات التطوير المهني للمدرسين من ناحية تجربة التدريب التقويمي . تهدف الدراسة الى التاكد من الفهم الكامل لمصطلح التدريب التقويمي من قبل عينة البحث، معرفة اتجاهات المدرسين حول استخدام شبكات التعلم الشخصية ومقارنة اتجاهاتهم اعتمادا على متغيري الجنس والعمر . تحاول الدراسة كذلك ان توضح اهم تطبيقات التواصل الاجتماعي التي اعتاد المدرسون على استخدامها. ستون مدرسا اختيروا عشوائيا من مختلف المدارس المتوسطة في بغداد ليمثلوا عينة البحث. تم استخدام استبيان معد من قبل الباحثتين بعد التاكد من صدقه الظاهري. اظهرت النتائج بعد معاملتها احصائيا بان لدى المدرسين العراقيين اتجاهات ايجابية نحو استخدام شبكات التعلم الشخصية في الاداء التقويمي . كما اظهرت بان استخدام المناقشات عبر المجموعات المشكلة في تطبيقات الفايبر، الفيس بوك والواتس اب هي الاكثر تفضيلا بين المدرسين العراقيين .

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Appendix (1)

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Reflective Practice questionnaire (RPQ)

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Age:

    a) **25-35**

    b) **35-55**

Gender:

    a) **Male**

    b) **Female**

1. Do you know the meaning of reflective practice? Yes/No

For those who don't know the meaning of reflective practice; reflective practice occurs when teachers consciously evaluate their daily work in the classroom, put their own traditions of teaching and learning under critical analysis, make decisions concerning their work, share their opinions and ask about what they ignore with other teachers and continue to improve their teaching practice.

2. Rate the following statements by choosing one of the following choices:

The use of personal learning networks in reflective practice …….	agree	neutral	disagree
1. are very easy way of sharing ideas.			

2. are easy to use and apply.			
3. Help me solve my students' problems by gaining instant solutions.			
4. Don't need extra time to be applied.			
5. Motivate me to read outside school time.			
6. Help me join online workshops easily.			
7. Encourage me to cooperate with other teachers that create close relationships among us.			
8. Could enrich my knowledge of researching.			
9. Think chorally with other teachers when facing specific problem.			
10. Help in registering and sharing the important links and videos.			
11. Benefit me more than theoretical researches.			
12. Help me in registering my dairies easily.			
13. Can facilitate the process of evaluation to me and to other teachers.			
14. Can help in receiving informal reports.			
15. Can help for sharing photos and clarifications.			

3. What are the main mobile media techniques that you usually use in

reflective practice? Chose three of them:

1-
2-
3-

Facebook groups

Facebook messenger

Twitter

LinkedIn

Instagram

Snap chat

You Tube

Whatsapp groups

Viber groups

Imo

Skyp