

## ENHANCING EFL LEARNERS' LITERACY SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *The purpose of this study was to discover whether Twitter could improve the students' reading comprehension and their written communication in English. The course was designed to extend the students' reading competence through reading the external links on Twitter and the Twitter activities were to facilitate not only the students' reading fluency, but also the students' writing skills by having the learners to engage in the asking and answering questions activities. The results of the average scores progressed greatly from the students' pretest to the posttest. From the t-test analysis of the participants' full scores on their both exams, the students' mean score was 78.04 and SD was 9.226 in their posttest which showed better performance than their pretest. The mean score in their pretest was 60.24 and SD was 7.996. The analysis showed  $p < .05$  which indicated a significant difference. This showed that the majority of the students' English proficiency had improved in their reading comprehension and writing skills. The writing fluency was evaluated by a number of short-essay questions related to the students' materials in their textbook. The rubrics of the assessment were based on three principles; relevant to the topics, depth of the idea, and grammatical structure of the sentences. Furthermore, over 95 percent of the students felt that Twitter made a positive impact on their English learning as well as their motivation based on the result in the questionnaire.*

**KEYWORDS:** Twitter Assisted Learning, Social Interaction, Technology Assisted Learning

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### INTRODUCTION

The contemporary development of digital media and electronic devices has a vital influence on teaching and learning of English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Technology has the ability to overcome the distance and draw people to read and make comments on various topics as if people were talking face to face. It has been noticeable that the students may not learn in a way a teacher teaches, but there is more possibility of learning to happen if the learners are instructed in their ways. There are more teaching and learning activities using

technology for class and make it more engaging and stimulating. We see more and more websites and applications, such as Facebook and Twitter becoming part of the teaching and learning process. The social interaction engaging on the sites that is transforming daily communication in various ways (Al-Dawood, 2013). For instance, Twitter is one of the most popular microblogging applications and it allows its users to communicate by short messages. In the premise of both the students and the teachers have used Twitter for in-class or even after-class discussion, it could engage the students for further and deeper participation in learning (Harmandaoglu, 2012).

Twitter is a social media website that provides message boards for conversations. The characteristics of Twitter is that it has a limit on the length of each tweet/message you post. Twitter messages can only have 140 characters including letters, numbers, punctuations and even space. Due to this very short limit, the website really puts the focus on short updates, conversations, and thoughts. From the perspectives of using Twitter in education, there are a lot of international celebrities already using Twitter and so the students may well be interested in using it for getting connected with their idols in English. It has become a part of social, business and academic discussions. Moreover, it has already entered mainstream communication. From the perspectives of applying Twitter in education, there are several advantages in facilitating the discussion of the topics and the use of the learners' target language.

### **The Advantages of Using Twitter in Class**

Twitter can be used as the platform to announce assignments or tests. Mostly importantly, it is a great tool for teachers to encourage collaboration and peer feedback among students. The instructor can post a link or questions for the students to read and respond. As users become more advanced, they can take advantage of Twitter's functions, like "hashtags." It is the system of grouping a group of tweets under the umbrella of a keyword. The main characteristics of tweeting on Twitter and this is as known as posting a message on the message board which forces users to be concise and to get right to the point. This is an important language skills that need to be developed and Twitter provides students the opportunity to work on this writing skill. Moreover, Twitter might actually be a platform for teaching grammar. Many users who tweet often may abbreviate and abuse grammar rules. The style of the written communication produces a unique sort of twitter shorthand which makes messages really difficult for the uninitiated to understand in the process. Therefore, it is a good idea to develop the students' concept on syntactic structure based on Harmondaoglu's teaching strategies on evaluating the students' writing on Twitter (2012). Furthermore, many Taiwanese EFL learners still do not have sufficient opportunities to practice English language as an authentic means of communication both inside and outside of the classroom. Whereas most Taiwanese EFL students are familiar with various social media and are more motivated through using technology, Twitter might

be a valuable tool for extensive learning. Learners could use Twitter to practice their target language through interacting with native and non-native users of English and reading a lot of authentic materials on the site.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Language Learning And Social Interaction**

Language learning involves with communication that entails the bilateral communication to be effective. It is necessary for both the sender and receiver to comprehend the intentional messages (Verga & Kotz, 2013). Researches have shown that social interaction is a key in language acquisition and second language learning (Denise, 2003; Mundy & Sigman, 2006; Verga & Kotz, 2013 ). Interaction in language class has been considered one of the most important pedagogical research topics. The theoretical framework comes from the influence of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky. Vygotskian sociocultural theory views the act of language learning as a social activity in which learners build their knowledge through the peer scaffolding or teachers. Moreover, it has been demonstrated by a lot of studies that consider the application of the technology in relation to interaction in ESL/EFL context to enhance language learning. Most of studies reflect the behaviorist and interactionist views of language learning. The behaviorists consider learning the language through stimulus and response with the assistance of technology and the interactionists consider interaction with the native speakers in the target language or ESL/EFL context to enhance language learning (Bahrani & Sim, 2012).

### **Microblogging and Social interaction**

The social interaction that takes place on social media has proven to be significant on the students' engagement ( Junco, Heibertgert & Loken, 2010). Social media has the function of developing collaboration, forging a learning community, and improving participation (Junco, Heibertgert & Loken, 2010). Social Network Services have transformed as a combination of personalized media experience within social context of participation. For instances, the posts including messages, links or videos on Social Networking Services are publicly viewed (Yunus, Salehi & Chenzi, 2012). Therefore, the social media platforms allow learners to write to the instructors and to each other in ways that will open up teaching and learning opportunities for everyone involved. Moreover, in the setting of an EFL writing class, the writing-centered courses allow instructors and students to interact in ways beyond content delivery. The interactive platform allows students to build a community through electronic means. These social media communities can build the social and professional connections that constitute the value of educational discussion (Yunus, Salehi & Chenzi, 2012).

### **Twitter and Its Educational Value**

There are some students already using Twitter in in their target language. It has become a part of social, political, business and academic discussion platform. The phenomenon of Twitter has already covered mainstream communication on many topics especially English (Harmandaoglu, 2012). The power of social media is known to improve the learner's engagement in learning. Junco, Heiberger & Loken noted that the students who played an educational game designed to teach genetics concepts were more engaged in their work than a control group (2010). Social networking tools such as Twitter are the platforms which engage individuals to communicate and distribute the information of knowledge through micro-blogging. Social media such as Twitter could have educational or political purposes. The users take advantages of micro-blogging to spread one's opinions or thoughts and information with external links of text or videos (Yagci, 2015).

The educational value of Twitter can also be shown in a language class. Al-Dawood has mentioned that Twitter has the potential to improve the students' vocabulary in second language setting and their writing skills as well as the students' cultural awareness (2013). Some studies were described regarding their application of Twitter for storytelling projects in a middle school or a university. The findings include the improvement on the students' writing skills and their motivation in participation in discussion on the platform. The language classes which adapted Twitter mainly used the scaffolding and collaboration strategies to build up the students' written discussions by adding the peers; thoughts of the students through their collaborative writing on the tweets. The results showed that the students' output in writing was increased and their participation on Twitter was positive and active. Twitter-assisted learning strategy was found to create a meaningful and joyful learning environment and it allowed the users to practice their target languages (Al-Dawood, 2013). Another study done by Leis suggested that Twitter could improve the learners' learning autonomy, especially for those students who are highly motivated with higher confident. Twitter provides a relaxing environment for the students and it reduces anxiety to the students who are afraid of making mistakes in grammar (2014).

### **METHODOLOGY**

The participants were chosen from the freshman general English class. The purpose of this study was to find out whether Twitter can improve their reading and writing comprehension. The course was designed to extend the students' reading competence through reading the external links on Twitter and the Twitter activities were to facilitate not only the students' reading fluency, but also the students' writing skills by having the learners to engage in the asking and answering questions activities. The foundation of the curriculum design was based on social interaction learning in which the students

learned through the scaffolding theory. Wood, Bruner & Ross offered the following definition of scaffolding that the learners perform the tasks beyond their ability with the assistant from those who have the better ability (1976). In this investigation, all the participants were required to register their own Twitter accounts and used Twitter as a platform for further engagement of class activities. The Twitter-assisted learning strategy was implemented into the curriculum for the semester. The purpose of this study was to discover whether Twitter could improve the students' reading comprehension and their written communication in English. The method of implementation on Twitter-assisted learning was to create certain scenarios from the external reading material and the students were asked to respond to the questions on Twitter. The purpose of this method was to create the chances of reading authentic material and social interaction on Twitter. Social interaction is the foundation of communication. Thus, the students were guided to respond and communicate in their target language. The design of the Twitter assisted learning was to explore whether the students' reading and writing fluency could be improved.

The results were analyzed through their midterm and final exam. The design of the midterm and final exam was based on the reading materials and writing drills presented in the students' previous class sessions. For predicting the students' progress in their reading comprehension, some of the reading materials were not taught in the class. The purpose was to discover whether the extensive reading exercises and discussion on Twitter could have an impact on the students' reading and writing fluency. Furthermore, the questionnaire was given to the participants at the end of the semester for understanding their opinions after using Twitter for their general English class. The middle score of the reading comprehension was 23 out of the total points 50 in the students' pretest, and the middle score for the reading comprehension in the students' posttest was 35 out of the total points 50.

**Table 1.**

N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
25	9.226	1.845
25	7.996	1.599

**Paired Sample Statistics****Table 2.**

N	Correlation	Sig.
25	.721	.000

**Paired Sample Correlation**

**Table 3.**

	Paired Differences					t
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
				Lower	Upper	
Pair 1 post test - pretest	17.800	6.538	1.308	15.101	20.499	13.612

**Paired Sample Test****Table4.**

	df	Sig.(2 tailed)
Paired 1 post test - pretest	24	.000

**Paired Sample t-test**

This study is meant to explore whether there is any significant difference on the participants' scores in their reading comprehension and writing test after having Twitter as an assisted learning platform. The analysis of t-test showed that the reading and writing scores has the mean scores 78.04 and SD 9.226. It is significantly greater than the scores in their pretest in which the mean scores is 60.24, SD 7.996 and  $t(24)=13.612$ ,  $p < .05$ . The results indicate a significant difference. Moreover, the average scores in the posttest are 17.8 points higher than that in the pretest.

The writing fluency was evaluated by a number of short-essay questions regarding the materials in the textbook. The rubrics of the writing assessment were based on three principles; relevant to the topics, depth of the idea, and grammatical structure of the sentences. The results of the middle score of the writing in the students' pretest was 8 out of the total points 20, and the middle score for the posttest was 15 out of the total points 20. The result of the writing fluency demonstrated that the participants were making progress over the experiment and the overall scores showed the quality of writing entries were improved as well. At the end of the experiment, questionnaires were given to the participants. The example of the questionnaire is as follows.

- 1- strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-nuetral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

**Questions**

1. Twitter provides interactive communication
2. Twitter can improve the students' writing on topic-oriented discussion.

3. Twitter provides tremendous external reading materials.
4. I understand how to use Twitter now.
5. Twitter can stimulate my learning motivation.
6. Twitter provides a platform for practicing reading skills and basic writing skills.
7. I use Twitter to find anything or anyone that interests me.
8. Twitter can help me with learning English overall.

The average score of the questionnaires was 4.2. The questionnaires were collected after the students' posttest in class.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of the average scores progressed greatly from the students' pretest to the posttest. This showed that the majority of the students' English proficiency had improved in their reading comprehension and writing skills. From the t-test analysis of their full scores on their both exams, the students' mean score was 78.04 and SD was 9.226 in their posttest which showed better performance than their pretest. The mean score in their pretest was 60.24 and SD was 7.996. The analysis showed  $p < .05$  which indicated a significant difference. Furthermore, over 95 percent of the students noted in their questionnaires that Twitter made a positive impact on their English learning as well as on their motivation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Young generation nowadays has spent tremendous time surfing on the Internet. Twitter-assisted learning strategy takes advantage of this social media phenomenon and attracts those learners who have very low learning motivation into more target language exposure. In addition, Twitter also has the capacity to expand the students' reading materials by providing the external links. The instructors could use the platform for supplementing extra materials. Mostly important, the entertaining interface on Twitter provides the students with relaxing learning atmosphere while the learners could actually read a lot of authentic materials and reply their thoughts in response to the tweets. This interactive function stimulates real social interaction in terms the learners could use their target language as their communicative tools. According to Krashen, the acquisition of a language occurs when the speakers receive a certain volume of input and produce the output through engaging the conversation based on their needs (1988).

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

The further investigation of Twitter assisted learning will include whether the reading activities on the extensive authentic materials and interactive feedback on Twitter could actually enhance language

learners' critical thinking ability. Based on Bloom's Taxonomy, The learners' cognitive progress involve with the levels of complexity and mastery. There are six individual stages for the development of the learners' competence; knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis and synthesis. It will be a beneficial discovery to look into the use of the learners' strategies of cognition and metacognition. The information will provide future language instructors an insight whether the learners' critical thinking ability is improved in the engagement of Twitter assisted activities.

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