

Using Twitter to Enhance Writing Skills among ESL Undergraduates: A Casual Learning Approach

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Abstract

Writing is a fundamental skill in language learning yet it is the biggest challenge for students these days. Students are discouraged to write their own thoughts and it leads them to become demotivated. Students' involvement is limited in any learning process, however, with the implementation of a casual learning approach, it could be possible to get students to participate in the classroom. In this 21st century era, educators have been using various techniques and materials to enhance students' writing. Therefore, educators believe that using social media as a platform for teaching and learning might be helpful to make the lessons fun and interactive. Thus, this paper aims to investigate the use of Twitter as a casual learning approach in enhancing students' writing skills. A study was conducted among 20 undergraduate students to investigate if Twitter makes any difference in enhancing their writing skills and their motivation to write. ESL lessons via ZOOM were conducted with the integration of Twitter's threads as the casual learning approach to help students to be more interested in writing, which in a way will help to enhance their writing skills. A questionnaire was later distributed to the students to investigate their feedback on the use of Twitter as a platform to help them to enhance their writing skills. Findings have shown that students are more comfortable to have Twitter as one of the platforms to help them to enhance their writing skills. It can be seen that the students participated more when Twitter was used in the lessons as part of the writing activity. One of the reasons might be because of the flexibility and the casualty. The end result of this study shows that utilizing Twitter in ESL teaching and learning gives a positive impact for both educators and the students.

Keywords: ESL, Writing, Online Learning, Twitter, Casual Learning

Introduction

The utilization of technology is one of the aspects which can reflect today's generation. Taskiran et. al., 2018 stated the generation of the millennium was born into a century in which technology began to influence nearly every aspect of everyday life. It is believed that by using

technology, students are able to improve their language skills, mainly writing. Lopez (2017) said, the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) affects the writing ability of students as it enables them to compose, increasing their passion, inspiration and self-confidence. Writing skills serve as the core of communication (Naveed and Bhowmik, 2016). Its importance increases when it comes to writing in English, which is widely used for global mediation of knowledge (Mahboob, 2014; Mansoor, 2005; Marlina and Giri, 2014; Rahman, 2002). Hyland (2003) thinks that language development success is subject to growth of writing skills. On the other hand, Nunan (1989) argues that writing is the most difficult cognitive activity which requires the learner to have control over various factors. According to Enonbun (2010), learning is an engaging process where the learner looks at the essence of the knowledge being transmitted about by the use of the five senses. Being mainly a group practice, it includes a chain of individuals such as teachers, students, peers, respectively. Furthermore, Enonbun also reported that Web 2.0 innovations are now a big student career, including blogs, wikis, social networks, requiring that teachers actively update their technological abilities and utilize them in creative ways.

In Malaysia, learning writing has always been a challenge for students. Hashim et al (2018) claimed that one of the reasons leading to this is that the students' lack confidence and are not motivated to learn. As discussed by Stalin and Tan (2020), writing is the most laborious ability to be achieved by Malaysian English as a second language (ESL) learners, among the four learning abilities (i.e., listening, hearing, reading and writing). The most successful approach to improve and cultivate the writing skills of students is still uncertain, as various experiments have different outcomes. (Ang and Tan, 2018). Chandran et. al (2019) also stated students and teachers accept that teaching and learning how to write the English language was highly difficult. Besides that, Wil et al (2019) posits that as innovations play a crucial role in today's educational growth, social media apps are viewed as a fantastic forum for ESL learners to express their views and thoughts, as these applications promote diversity within them. Hashim et al (2018) claims that Facebook, Twitter or Instagram are networking channels used for educational purposes. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the use of Twitter as a casual learning approach in enhancing students' writing skills.

Literature Review

To acquire more information on the study, the following review will elaborate on the integration of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) in writing skills, use of Twitter in language learning and the approach of casual learning in English Second Language (ESL) classroom.

Integration of Social Networking Sites (SNS) in Writing Skill

A social networking site (or SNS) functions as a forum for the creation of social networks and relationships between individuals who share the same relationships, behaviours, histories or real-life connections, (Vidyakala and Nithyakala, 2016). SNSs is a tool that has been used by most people and is now often used in education. Lim & Richard (2016) said that students often and actively use SNSs for various purposes in their daily life and have shown positive expectations of using SNSs for educational purposes. The invention of Social Networking Sites (SNS) is forming a transition for people to communicate better and share information. According to Yunus et al (2012) most SNSs allow users to share their view, interest and experiences on their networks.

SNSs can also be seen as a great platform to enhance writing skills. It is supported by Fithriani et al (2019) where they mentioned most students find the use of Facebook in writing class is useful in improving their interest to use English as a means of communication, promoting their participation in class discussion, and improving their English language skills, especially writing skills. Similar results were obtained from Ahmed (2016), where in the finding it stated that Facebook could improve EFL students' grammar discussion and writing skills as a means of language learning. Meanwhile, many studies that were conducted on the integration of SNSs in writing skills gained positive results at the end of the study. For instance, the results showed in the study that was conducted by Altakhaineh & Al-Jallad (2018), participants enhanced their knowledge of writing mechanics in English by using Twitter rather than Facebook or likewise.

Use of Twitter in Language Learning

The use of Twitter in language learning has not been utilized fully as a new teaching and learning platform. There is also a distance in the use of Twitter as a way of enhancing informal writing to link it to formal academic writing, while many articles explore the use of Twitter in various educational contexts. (O'Reilly and Milstein, 2009; Morris et al., 2012; Busch and Shepherd, 2014). The use of Twitter in language learning allows students to produce a good outcome from their target language because it is a great platform to communicate with native speakers and other people around the world. Rosell (2020) said that many learners are engaged in the production of target language content and make the most of the opportunities that Twitter provides to be exposed to target language input and interaction with native speakers, making Twitter a valuable tool for their language learning development. It is also supported by Hattem & Lomicka (2016) where they mentioned the implementation of Twitter as a language learning tool has proved the interaction between learners and native speakers, community development, language acquisition which help them to improve in certain areas such as vocabulary and pronunciation. Besides that, when using Twitter as part of the course, students become inspired to communicate with both professors and peers (Junco et al., 2011). In addition, Rinaldo et. al (2011) mentioned that Twitter can be used to create interaction in an online course or to complement a face-to-face course. In all environments, Twitter helps the teacher to establish a social presence amongst students and faculty members.

On the other hand, some students' feel it is difficult to give commitment to replying to tweets on a daily basis because they have to construct proper sentences using appropriate word choice. However, it helps them to enhance their knowledge and improve their ability to read and write in English. This situation is similar to the results in Blattner and Dalola (2018) study where high intermediate ESL students relied most heavily on word choice while making sense of English tweets, showing that the majority were able to derive relevant meaning from common abbreviations, personified hashtags, twitter mood indices, and a larger tweet background. Hattem & Lomicka (2016) has also found that some learners described feeling frustrated by having to review or write tweets on a regular basis. However, the studies have highlighted the many advantages of integrating Twitter into L2 learning due to the potential to improve L2 digital literacy.

Casual Learning in ESL Classroom

Casual learning or learning informally using technologies is an approach used by educators to enhance students' achievement. According to He et al (2020) the use of digital media by students strengthens their comprehension and awareness of the discipline in informal

learning environments, engages in self-expression and keeps them informed about the growth of discipline. Formative assessments are frequently used in this approach to ensure educators are able to monitor students' involvement and feedback in the learning process. Torres (2019) mentioned that by using formative assessments, the role of the instructor focuses more on observing the way students perform in an ongoing teaching process that may or may not take place entirely inside the classroom.

Casual learning also can be identified when students participate in self-regulated learning. This is because students are able to learn at their own pace at their preferable time. Richard (2015) stated that it is versatile and fun, and learners can choose the level, phase and environment according to their needs and interests while Salehi and Jafari (2015) found that thirteen related factors represent self-regulation, such as intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, language learning attitude, self-monitoring, preparation and goal setting, and self-assessment.

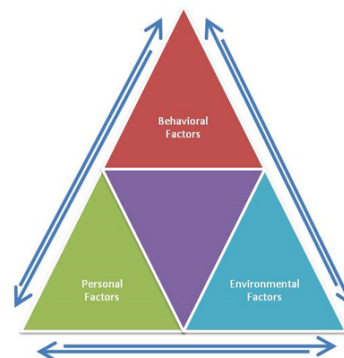
The Social Cognitive Theory

This innovation is supported by Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), where it is assumed that the Twitter thread serves as a tool to help students using a casual learning approach and ultimately boost the writing skills of students.

Underpinning Theory of Our Research

Bandura's Triadic Reciprocal Determinism

Social Cognitive Theory by
Albert Bandura (1986)



Bandura (1986) mentioned, social cognitive theory provides a detailed analytical structure for explaining human behaviour. Social cognitive theory is a psychological theory on human functioning that stresses the vital position played by the social environment on motivation, learning, and self-control (Schunk & Usher, 2019). In this theory, self-efficacy is considered as an important characteristic that can change a person's attitude and response. It believes that individuals are able to control their emotions, feelings, inspiration, and behaviour on their own. Locke (2018) said, self-efficacy can be created from the idea that learners are making positive progress. Therefore, social cognitive theory is suitable to be used in teaching using social media because of its characteristic that allows the students to believe they can perform their task effectively. It is supported by Yoon & Tourassi (2014), self-efficacy is the degree or strength of one's confidence in his or her own willingness and abilities to accomplish objectives and attain goals. Individuals with high self-efficacy are strongly expected to be

efficient, valuable and helpful to them in the results or effects of the tasks they perform, and feel they may demonstrate such action.

Methodology

This section discusses the methods used in this study. It consists of four parts that explain the research design, research instrument and data collection method.

Research Design

To identify the effectiveness of using Twitter as a tool to enhance writing skills among students, the researchers chose to use quantitative design. A questionnaire with a total of 10 questions were distributed to 20 respondents who participated in this program.

Research Instrument

The researchers prepared a questionnaire using Google Form. It consists of 10 questions in total that were adopted and adapted from Osharive (2015); Bashir et al (2018) . The questionnaire was distributed to 20 respondents who participated in this program through WhatsApp. All the data collected from the respondents were then analyzed using percentage.

Data Collection Procedure

For this research, teaching sessions have been conducted using ZOOM. The lesson was conducted every week for 4 weeks. Students' were required to follow a Twitter account that was created for this research and reply to meaningful questions that are posted based on the discussion.

Participants

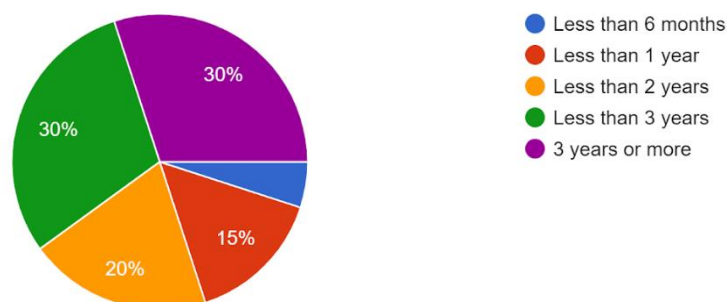
The participants of this research were 20 ESL undergraduate students from a private university in Selangor. The participants' level of proficiency is between intermediate and advanced. In addition, the participants enrolled in an education course where most of them choose their career path as teachers.

Findings & Discussion

Based on the data collected from the questionnaire, there are a total of 20 respondents mainly from a private university. The questionnaire given to the respondents consisted of 10 questions.

How long have you been using Twitter?

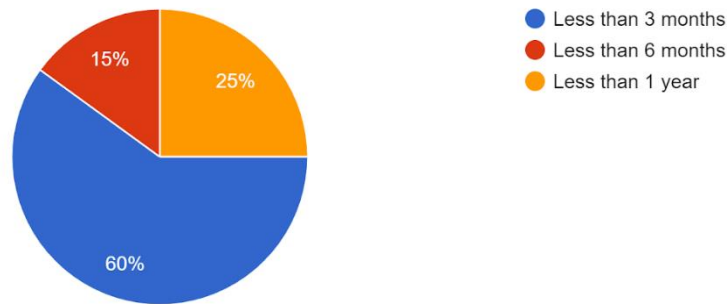
20 responses



Based on the findings, 30% of the respondents have used Twitter for more than 3 years whereas another 30% have used Twitter for less than 3 years. On the other hand, 20% of the respondents have used Twitter for less than 2 years and 15% of the respondents have used this social media platform for less than 1 year. From the total of the data, only 5% of the respondents have used Twitter for less than 6 months. Therefore, we can imply that the majority of the respondents are familiar with Twitter.

How long have you been using Twitter for academic purpose?

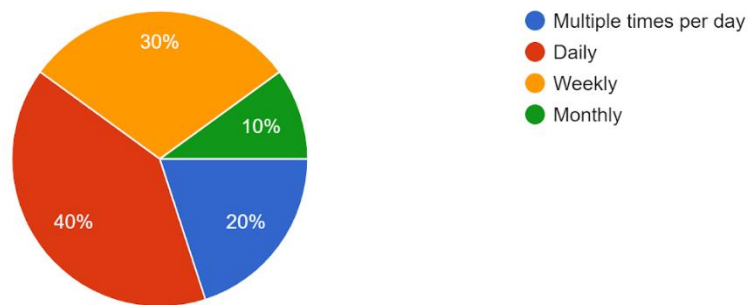
20 responses



Based on the chart above, most of the respondents (60%) have been using Twitter for academic purposes for about less than 3 months. Besides that, about 25% of the respondents have been using it for less than a year. In addition to that, 3 respondents (15%) have been using Twitter for classes and lessons for less than 6 months.

Typically, how often do you use Twitter?

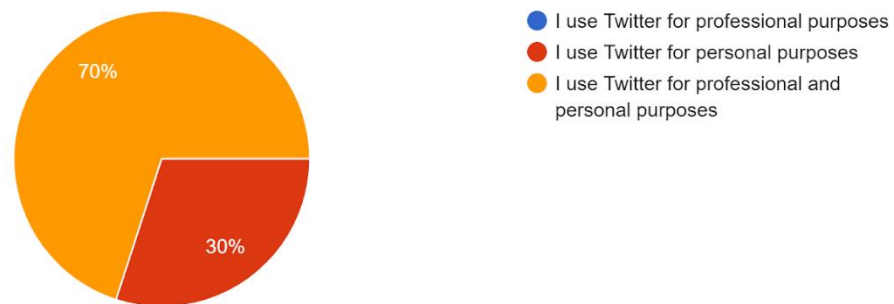
20 responses



The chart above shows the results of respondents' active states of using Twitter. 10% of the respondents' claimed that they use Twitter monthly while 30% of the respondents' used Twitter weekly. Besides that, 40% of the respondents' stated they used Twitter daily and only 20% of the respondents used Twitter multiple times per day.

Professional vs Personal Use of Twitter (Choose one)

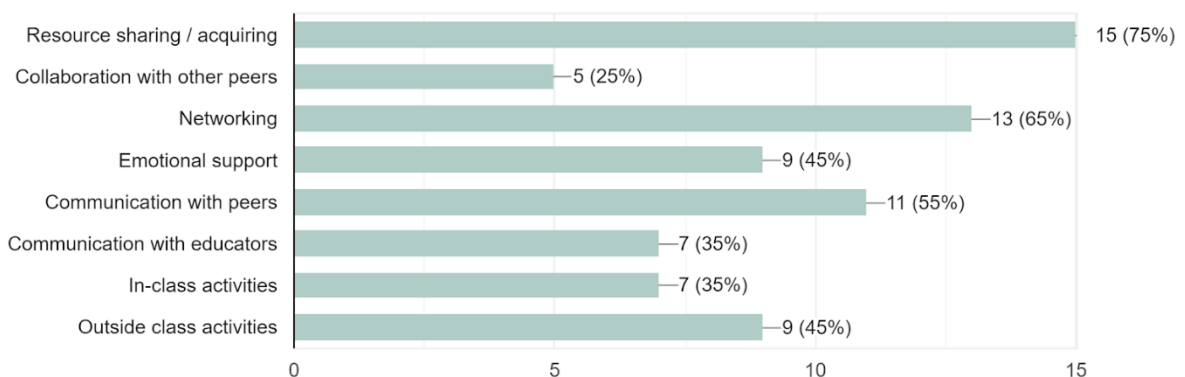
20 responses



According to the chart, it can be seen that the majority of the respondents' (70%) use Twitter for professional and personal purposes whereas 30% of the respondents claimed that they only use Twitter for personal purposes. None of the respondents have used Twitter solely for professional purposes.

For what professional purposes do you think is suitable when using Twitter? (Choose ONE or more that applies to you)

20 responses



In this section, respondents were allowed to pick as many as they think is suitable for professional purposes. A majority of 75% of the respondents think that sharing and acquiring resources is suitable when using Twitter. Networking has been chosen by 65% respondents; this is because some of respondents like sharing common interest with people on Twitter. Besides that, 11 students (55%) prefer communication with peers when using Twitter. In addition to that, 45% of the respondents have chosen emotional support and outside class activities respectively. As for communication with educators and in-class activities, only 35% of the respondents think it is suitable when using Twitter. Other uses were less common, including collaboration with other peers (25%).

ITEMS	ANSWERS (%)				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Twitter is a great platform to be used for language learning.	0	0	15	60	25
Twitter motivates students to write better.	0	5	15	55	25
The use of Twitter should be exposed for in-class and outside classroom activities.	5	0	20	45	30
Twitter can improve students' academic performance.	0	10	25	60	5
Teacher should encourage students to use social media to improve their writing and other skills.	0	0	15	50	35

This table above used Likert Scale to measure respondents' perception on the statement regarding the use of Twitter in language learning. Item 1 shows a higher percentage (60%) of the respondents who agreed that Twitter is a great platform to be used for language learning while 25% of the respondents strongly agree that language learning should be implemented using social media platforms such as Twitter. Only 15% of the respondents stated they neither agree or disagree on the idea of using Twitter as a language learning platform and. None of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the concept of using social media for language learning. Lim & Richard (2016) said that students often and actively use SNSs for various purposes in their daily life and have shown positive expectations of using SNSs for educational purposes. Item 2 discusses if Twitter can motivate the respondents to write better. The result obtained shows 55% of the respondents agree and 25% strongly agree with the statement. On the other hand, 15% of the respondents are neutral, thinking Twitter can motivate them to write better whereas the minimum percentage of respondents which are

5% disagrees and think Twitter can't motivate them to write better. It can be concluded that the majority have positive perception on Twitter motivating them to write. Altakhaineh & Al-Jallad (2018), participants enhanced their knowledge of writing mechanics in English by using Twitter rather than Facebook or likewise.

The question in Item 3 is to observe respondents' thoughts on implementing Twitter as one of the tools for in-class and outside classroom activities. The highest percentage is 40% where respondents agree and 30% of the respondents strongly agree that Twitter should be implemented as part of classroom activities. On the other hand, 20% of respondents' neither agree or disagree and 10% respondents strongly disagree with the idea. This might be because they can't give a commitment to reply to the tweets regularly. Based on the results obtained, it can be concluded by a study from Hattem & Lomicka (2016) where they found that some learners described feeling frustrated by having to review or write tweets on a regular basis. However, the studies have highlighted the many advantages of integrating Twitter into L2 learning due to the potential to improve L2 digital literacy.

In addition to that, item 4 shows that most of the respondents agree with this item where 60% of the respondents vote that they agree and 5% state that they strongly agree with the statement; Twitter can improve academic performance. However, 25% of the respondents neither agree or disagree with this item. Followed by, 10% of the respondents which disagree with this item. Rosell (2020) said that many learners are engaged in the production of target language content and make the most of the opportunities that Twitter provides to be exposed to target language input and interaction with native speakers, making Twitter a valuable tool for their language learning development.

Item 5 on the Likert Scale section discusses the perception of respondents as to-be-teacher on encouraging students to use social media to improve their writing skills or other skills. 50% of respondents agree and 35% strongly agree on this statement while only 15% of respondents are neutral. It can be concluded that respondents accept the integration of social media in language learning because it can give a positive impact to the students. It is supported by Hattem & Lomicka (2016) where they mentioned the implementation of Twitter as a language learning tool has proved the interaction between learners and native speakers, community development, language acquisition which help them to improve in certain areas such as vocabulary and pronunciation.

Does Twitter help or Motivate Students to Write?

In an educational environment, Twitter is a microblogging tool that facilitates social networking by out-of-the-room experiences that can have a high educational value (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009b). The respondent who completed our survey mentioned that Twitter did help and motivate them to write better.

In what ways, you think Twitter helps you or motivates you to write?

20 responses

People on Twitter really support each other. They won't judge you unless it involves unhealthy activity.
Being on twitter, i tend to rant a lot hence it helped me to write and enhance my vocab also helps me to control my emotions by tweeting.
Twitter help to enhance my writing skills,
i get inspirations from other tweets
Bcs of the features
I think Twitter helps me to write by the alphabet limit. It makes us to write more when our words is not complete. And also Twitter has many users that we can interact with.
Enhance my self confidence to share my opinion or tweets in english
The features and the information shared by people
By sharing an opinion.
When i see other people share their thoughts on common interests
Twitter allows me to experiment with different styles, voices, subjects, tones and etc
Twitter help us to participate in class activities that promotes a stress free environment
the word limit in twitter seems catchy to me. i love how it has the thread to reply and collaborate with my friends
Learning using Twitter is fun and casual, I see it as a new platform that should be used in language learning
my editing skills has improved since i've used twitter. i believe i write more creatively now.
twitter motivates me to voice out my opinion when i'm writing.
The word limit in twitter can encourage me to write more. I like it because can participate in activities anytime and anywhere
Using social media such as Twitter really motivates me to join the activities conducted because it is interesting and casual

Based on students' opinion, the researchers found that Twitter does motivate students to write creatively and it has enhanced students' writing skills. Besides that, it has also improved their vocabulary since they have been practicing their writing on Twitter. One of the participants stated that the word limit in Twitter had encouraged them to write more. As a matter of fact, using Twitter as part of a lesson had made the participants learn in a stress-free environment. The participants have also mentioned how they are able to voice out their opinion on Twitter because of its meaningful lesson; they also said interaction from others has given them some sort of inspiration. The statement is supported by Wil et al (2019) where it mentioned, social media apps are viewed as a fantastic forum for ESL learners to express their views and thoughts, as these applications promote diversity within them. Some of the

participants mentioned that the features in Twitter are convenient for sharing thoughts on common interest with peers and others. One of the participants had highlighted an important element of writing; where the participants had mentioned that Twitter allows them to experiment with different styles, voices, subject and tones. The use of Twitter has enhanced participants' self confidence in order to share their opinions or tweets in English. It is aligned with a study done by Yunus et al (2012), that most SNSs allow users to share their view, interest and experiences on their networks.

Conclusion

It is claimed that this innovation allows educators to provide students with meaningful learning and also simply creates trust between teachers and students. This innovation aims to enhance undergraduate ESL students' writing via casual learning approach. It has implemented Twitter as a teaching and learning platform rather than the other social networking sites which is normally used in this 21st century. Twitter can be seen as a great tool to attract students to participate in lessons especially those who are in tertiary level. The participants have also been given questions related to real life situations which helps them to voice out their opinion and improve their writing skills at the same time. Hence, considering the problems, factors hampering the development of their writing skills and suggestions to improve it, this innovation has concluded that undergraduate ESL learners face various problems in their writing, and it can be improved by taking into account the reasons for these problems. The findings of the study shows that students get encouraged to use Twitter in doing their task; however, the small sample size is seen as a limitation of this study. Future research suggests that Twitter should be used for language learning and focus not only on writing but also other language skills. In general, if teachers allow students to brainstorm by Twitter or any social networking sites, it may be beneficial for students to learn ESL writing.

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