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## Twitter as a Discussion Space: Exploring Students' English Communication Patterns

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### Abstract

This study investigates how students in the English Department at Mulawarman University use Twitter as an informal platform to improve their English communication skills. Unlike traditional classrooms, Twitter offers a relaxed, real-time environment where students interact in English through tweets, slang, memes, and interactions with classmates. Using a qualitative narrative research approach, data were collected from six students and one instructor through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed three main findings: students learn English informally through daily practice and self-motivation; they adapt to a flexible communication style influenced by online slang and global discourse; and they benefit from peer interactions that provide feedback, vocabulary models, and confidence-building. This study concludes that Twitter functions not only as a social media tool but also as a dynamic space for authentic, self-directed, and culturally embedded language learning. Unlike previous studies that focus on the formal integration of social media in education, this research highlights the non-academic motivations driving meaningful engagement with English. While acknowledging limitations such as deliberate sampling and digital access, this study offers new insights into how digital platforms support socio-linguistic language development. The research recommends further investigation into long-term impacts and broader student populations to understand the educational value of informal digital learning environments.

**Keywords:** Twitter; English language learning; informal learning; digital communication; peer interaction; language acquisition; social media; narrative inquiry

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Language learning and use has changed because of the increased use of social media, especially among younger users. Through humor, topical themes and peer interaction, social media platforms like Twitter offer a relaxed and entertaining environment for EFL students to practice English. Unlike the typical classroom setting, Twitter encourages impromptu



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conversations where accuracy is not so important. Through tweets, hashtags, memes and comments, students use English in real-time, allowing for flexible and culturally embedded language use. Both among social media users and the general public, virtual social media features often give rise to rapidly developing phenomena. Trending hashtags, memes, and other phenomena are examples of phenomena emerging from social media (Ana Rahmayani et al., 2021). Digital influence is the reason why English is constantly changing online. In addition, children are exposed to slang, acronyms (such as “ICYMI”, “DM”), worldwide variations of English, and visual components such as GIFs and emojis, all of which enhance their language and digital literacy.

This research investigates how students' digital identities, goals and habits affect their language acquisition outside the classroom. This study highlights how students interact with English in their own way, whereas previous research has concentrated on the use of social media in formal education (Prestridge, 2014; Aminah et al., 2019; Arbain et al., 2017). Through real encounters motivated by purpose and social relevance, they learn vocabulary, grammar and cultural cues. According to sociolinguistic theory, language learning is a socially mediated process influenced by technology. Elavsky et al. (2011), who found that how digital natives use language informally can help educators and curriculum designers develop more engaging and productive language learning environments when they choose online platforms over traditional classroom settings.

The study aims to better understand how Twitter functions as an informal language learning medium by providing answers to these questions. This will enable students to improve their English communication skills in a way that is relevant, engaging and in their digital environment. This study focuses on students enrolled in the English Education program at Mulawarman University to explore the use of Twitter as a tool to improve their English skills.

## **1.2 Concept of Informal Learning Through Twitter**

This study can examine how Twitter serves as a relaxed yet productive venue for language acquisition. Informal learning is defined as learning that occurs outside of formal educational



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settings, often organically and spontaneously through digital or real-world encounters. According to (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018), Twitter serves as a helpful tool for learning a second language since it fosters vocabulary growth and cultural awareness in a laid-back setting. Because they were interacting with real English speakers on Twitter, learners were able to organically pick up language usage. Similarly, (Kim et al., 2009) found that regular informal interactions help Korean EFL students enhance their ability to produce natural English.

According to a study of master's students in Saudi Arabia, Twitter encourages the continuous exchange of information, which supports informal learning throughout life (Alhassan, 2024; Arbain & Nur, 2017; Arbain & Rohman, 2023). The results of this study show that Twitter serves as a place for social connection as well as a place where students can hone their English communication skills through informal real-world interactions.

### **1.3 Concept of Digital Communication**

This study examines the factors that influence students' use of English on Twitter using digital communication theories. According to (McCulloch, 2019) in “Because Internet” is informal, creative, and expressive—characteristics that are encouraged by social media platforms such as Twitter. These characteristics encourage spontaneous conversation and help students adapt to international standards. As stated to (Malik & Haidar, 2020), learners can participate in real-time interactions with English speakers around the world thanks to digital media, which also helps spread new English dialects. This promotes understanding of modern terminology, pragmatic language use, and idioms. The use of Twitter in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning enhances language proficiency and digital literacy (Nur, 2020; Nur & Jamilah, 2022).

### **1.4 Concept of Peer Interaction Theories in Language Learning**

According to (Tenenbaum et al., 2020), when students cooperate, negotiate meaning and provide feedback to each other in a supportive environment, learning is enhanced. Peer-to-peer contact is naturally encouraged on Twitter through direct messages, retweets, mentions and replies. According to (L. S. Vygotsky, 1978) social contact is essential for the development of



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cognition. A contemporary forum for this kind of communication among English language learners is Twitter. Peer interaction on Twitter allows students to help each other in their language use by correcting, modeling and improving their communication skills.

Borau et al. (2009) found that Twitter facilitated collaborative learning and peer feedback in an EFL context. Twitter can provide language learners with opportunities to communicate spontaneously, which can promote language development in ways that may not be possible in traditional classrooms. Similarly, (Blattner & Lomicka, 2012) study showed that EFL students using Twitter increased their pragmatic awareness due to their continuous interaction with their peers in real-world discussion threads. In addition, contact with peers helps students develop a sense of community. Students are more motivated to participate and improve their English when they feel part of a virtual learning community (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Erliana & Arbain, 2020; Gracella & Rahman Nur, 2020).

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This qualitative case study explores students' communication experiences on Twitter through a narrative lens. Six English Department students and a teacher participated, selected based on their active use of Twitter in daily interactions, so their experiences may not be representative of all students. Explaining how this sample affected the results of the study can help make the findings more valid and easier to understand. All participants sign a consent form and participant data is kept confidential. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and then translated into English for analysis.

### **2.2 Data Collection Instruments**

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed students to share their experiences of using Twitter to communicate in English. Questions covered frequency of use, motivation, communication style, use of slang, interaction with peers, perceptions of Twitter's learning potential, technological barriers, and experiences with grammar correction.

### **2.3 Data Analysis Techniques**



The data collected from the interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher will transcribe the interview recordings, read the transcripts carefully, and then code the data to identify recurring patterns and key themes. These themes will be grouped by categories relating to their experiences in improving their English language skills and their communication styles, as well as peer interaction theories on the twitter app.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

The results section contains the research findings organized by the main topics of the research questions. The interview results show that the use of Twitter to develop English communication skills is divided into three categories: informal learning, digital communication, and peer interaction. For ease of reference, the following are the two research questions: Thus, (1) What are the factors that influence students to use English when discussing on Twitter? (2) To what extent does the use of Twitter contribute to the development of students' English communication skills?

#### 3.1 Informal Learning : Self-Motivation and Dially Practice

This section shows data on how students use Twitter as a medium for informal English language learning, with an emphasis on self-motivation and everyday participation. Informal learning, in this case, refers to natural and spontaneous language acquisition outside formal instruction. The participants expressed how Twitter has become part of their daily routine, and how they are naturally driven to interact with English materials.

The seven participants, six students and one instructor, recognized that using Twitter to communicate in English was motivated by personal interest and fun rather than academic needs. They frequently utilize English to communicate with overseas acquaintances, discuss global issues, and express themselves in a more fluid and comfortable manner.

P1 explained:

*“I used to rely on Google Translate, but now I can write tweets on my own. I’ve learned a lot just by reading and replying to other users’ tweets.”*



P2 described Twitter as a place to improve vocabulary naturally:

“Because I follow a lot of foreign accounts, English just becomes the language I use the most. I learn new words every day without realizing it.”

P3 reflected that Twitter helped her learn from exposure to English used by international followers:

*“I learned English just by interacting with mutuals from abroad. From 2022 until now, it’s become a habit to use English when discussing certain topics.”*

P4 shared how Twitter became part of daily practice:

*“I check Twitter almost every day, and when I reply to people or join a discussion, I just use English directly. It helps me improve without feeling like I’m studying.”*

P5 discussed the shift in her language skills through daily use:

*“In junior high, I only knew formal textbook English. But since I joined Twitter, I’ve become more fluent and less afraid to make mistakes.”*

P6 emphasized that consistent exposure and practice on Twitter helped them think more naturally in English:

*“Now, I don’t have to translate in my head anymore. It’s like English becomes automatic because I use it every day on Twitter.”*

These experience shows that intrinsic motivation, such as personal interest, curiosity, enjoyment of international engagement, and drive for self-improvement, play a major role in enhancing informal language acquisition through Twitter. These motives are not imposed from outside, but rather stem from the desire to communicate, stay connected and express oneself authentically. Most people believe that using English on Twitter seems more real and relevant compared to classroom instruction.



This conclusion is consistent with (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018) observation that social media platforms such as Twitter promote second language learning through continuous and informal engagement. Similarly, (Alhassan, 2024) found that Twitter promotes lifelong learning by providing a forum for users to practice the language informally and regularly.

P7 (Teacher) confirmed the platform's informal learning value:

*"I use Twitter frequently to follow global trends. Reading English tweets helps me find unfamiliar vocabularies used by educated communities. It's more idea-based than visual, which keeps me focused and improves my English."*

This supports the idea that Twitter serves as an unstressed, real-time learning environment, which is in line with (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018), who found that emphasizes the importance of microblogging in independent language development. Students and teachers regard Twitter as a communication medium and learning environment, which provides opportunities to read, write and interact with English on a regular basis. The persistence of these informal behaviors allowed them to gain confidence, rely less on translation technology, and participate in more spontaneous communication.

Overall, Twitter promotes autonomy and real-world interaction in English. It allows students and teachers to incorporate English into their daily lives, making the language more relevant and useful both inside and outside the classroom.

In addition, although Twitter is the main topic of this study, teachers' comments provide insight into how Twitter compares to other social media platforms in terms of informal English language learning. According to P7, Twitter offers a unique atmosphere that is more effective in improving concentration and language development than Instagram or TikTok. He observed that:



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*“Twitter plays more with ideas and thoughts, not images or videos. That makes it better for improving English. Other apps with too much visual content tend to distract us from our original learning purpose.”*

Unlike Instagram and TikTok, which rely on images and sometimes direct users to irrelevant content, Twitter's text-based approach is considered an advantage. P7 emphasizes that reading and responding to tweets, especially from educated communities, helps him learn new words and better understand the communication habits of the younger generation. He mentions:

*“On TikTok or Instagram, you might start with the intention to learn English, but it’s easy to get distracted. Twitter keeps you focused especially for users who prefer reading and thinking.”*

These findings suggest that, compared to other visual platforms, Twitter may provide a more cognitively stimulating environment for both students and teachers to develop their English language skills. The combination of public conversation, privacy, and idea sharing on this platform tends to encourage more consistent and meaningful informal learning, especially among users who prefer text-based interactions.

### **3.2 Digital Communication: Use of slang and Communication style**

This section includes data on how students interact with digital communication on Twitter, namely the use of informal language, digital slang, and communication style. As a social media site, Twitter promotes short, fast, and casual forms, which has a considerable impact on how users, especially EFL students, communicate in English.

All participants, including teachers, consistently agreed that Twitter promotes a more casual and spontaneous style of communication, which is often characterized by the use of acronyms, emoticons, online memes and other types of digital slang. Rather than following rigid grammatical norms or academic language traditions, users of the platform prefer to prioritize delivering messages that are simple, approachable and easily understood by their





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target audience. This technique provides greater freedom and originality in expression, allowing users to engage in more natural and real interactions. This pattern of communication contrasts sharply with the organized, rule-bound style typically emphasized in academic writing and speaking situations, where accuracy, coherence, and formality take precedence over immediacy and tone.

P2 shared:

*“When I post tweets or replies, I don’t think too much about grammar. I just say what I want to say, even if it’s short or slangy. Everyone understands anyway.”*

P5 emphasized the influence of pop culture and online trends:

*“I learned a lot of slang from Twitter. Sometimes even memes teach me something. Like, people will shorten everything—one sentence becomes one word. It’s fun.”*

Similarly, P4 mentioned that Twitter helped them adapt to a more global and casual communication style:

*“My friends on Twitter are mostly international. So, I naturally started using English to reply to them. Most of them use slang or casual words, so I try to copy and learn from them.”*

P1 reflected on how this digital environment allowed her to practice English without fear of judgment:

*“Because everyone writes casually, I’m not afraid of being wrong. I just write and go.”*

This digital communication environment also influenced how students adjusted their language depending on the audience. P6 pointed out:

*“When it’s with strangers, I try to be more polite. But when I’m with mutuals, I use slang or short expressions—it feels more natural that way.”*



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P3 emphasized that Twitter taught her how to write concisely and use commonly accepted informal expressions in a way that felt natural and relevant:

“Sometimes I write only short responses or use abbreviations. People on Twitter understand the tone even without full sentences. That’s something I learned by watching others.”

P3 also added that adjusted her communication style depending on whom she interacted with:

“If it’s someone I don’t know well, I keep it polite. But with mutuals, I use more casual words or internet language.”

The students found Twitter very liberating and instructive. After hearing native and fluent English speakers use the language online, the participants were exposed to genuine, real-time English usage that differed from textbook examples. They found that, although this style was not very grammatically rigorous, it helped them understand tone, cultural references and practical uses of English in online discussions. Most students also stated that digital communication on Twitter allowed them to be more open and creative. Unlike in the classroom, where structure is emphasized, Twitter allows them to play with language, mimic what they read, and vary their tone depending on the environment.

From a teacher perspective, P7 highlighted a generational difference in digital language use:

*“As a teacher in my 40s, I prefer using formal English on Twitter. Since tweets can be screenshotted and shared widely, I choose words carefully to avoid misinterpretation.”*

P7 added that even though he doesn’t use slang himself, Twitter helps him learn the expressions used by younger generations:

*“I search Twitter conversations to understand how Gen Z uses certain terms, even if I don’t use them myself. It helps me understand their culture and expressions.”*

This finding is consistent with (McCulloch, 2019) research, who found that online language prioritizes clarity, conciseness, and tone over grammatical accuracy, and noted that



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the digital age has introduced a new genre of “internet English” where meaning is often constructed through conciseness, creativity, and shared cultural understanding. Furthermore, Through memes, hashtags, and lingo, Twitter fosters hybrid forms of communication that blend humor, criticism, and identity expression, particularly among young people. Memes with an indicated communication style are those that the researcher saw on the Twitter platform (Ana Rahmayani et al., 2021). This experience allows students and teachers to become more adaptable, pragmatic and sensitive in their language use, especially when navigating various social situations on this platform.

### **3.3 Peer Interaction: Learning Through Community and Feedback**

This section describes how peer contact on Twitter helped students improve their English communication skills. In this study, peer interaction is defined as collaborative engagement, mutual correction and learning through social exposure all core to Vygotsky's theory of social development, which states that learning is influenced by social circumstances and contact with more capable peers. Throughout the interviews, participants said that informal feedback, observations and corrections from their Twitter networks especially from proficient peers or native English speakers - helped them improve their language skills.

P1 described how interacting with international friends naturally built confidence:

*“I follow and reply to friends from abroad. Sometimes I ask questions, and when I make mistakes, they give feedback—politely, without judgment.”*

P2 shared a similar experience of receiving informal peer correction:

*“Once, someone corrected my grammar in a DM after I tweeted. At first, I was embarrassed, but then I realized it helped me learn faster.”*

P3 highlighted how observing others also led to passive learning:



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*“I often read tweets from Filipinos or Americans. From the way they speak, I learn sentence structure, vocabulary, and slang usage.”*

P4 emphasized the role of peer vocabulary sharing:

*“When I talk to foreign friends on Twitter, sometimes they give me the correct vocabulary if I use the wrong one. That way, I learn by doing.”*

P5 explained that conversations with Twitter mutuals provided ongoing practice:

*“Sometimes we discuss films or music. If I say something that sounds unnatural, they suggest a better way to say it. It’s like a casual class.”*

P6 gave an example of observing public corrections in comment threads:

*“People often correct grammar in replies. I learn from their corrections—even when it’s not directed at me. It’s very useful.”*

These data suggest that peer engagement on Twitter takes many forms, including direct correction, indirect modeling and social encouragement, all of which influence language development. Correction is perceived as supportive, not criticism, and is often delivered in a kind tone. Modeling allows students to acquire natural uses of language, such as idioms, tones and cultural allusions. Encouragement from more fluent peers fosters a sense of belonging, which helps to maintain motivation and minimize worries about making mistakes.

Furthermore, some participants mentioned how they themselves had begun to help others, reinforcing their own learning. P2 explained:

*“Now, if I see someone make a small mistake, I correct them politely—just like others helped me before. It feels good to support each other.”*

The teacher (P7) described how peer interaction works even for educators:



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*“When I make mistakes, people on Twitter—even those who aren’t my followers—will politely correct me. It’s a form of real-time peer feedback that helps me improve.”*

He also mentioned that English discussions with global communities revealed his own weaknesses:

*“When I talk to native speakers, I realize how basic my English is. But that’s how I improve—they give me the correct vocab, and I remember it better than from books.”*

This finding is in line with (L. S. Vygotsky, 1978) sociocultural theory, which found that social contact plays an important role in language acquisition. The interactive nature of Twitter provides a relaxed yet authentic possibility for students and instructors to connect with the English language in a meaningful way, with students benefiting most from social engagement with more skilled peers. Twitter creates such an atmosphere with its interactive, multilingual and real-time communication capabilities.

Overall, collaboration on Twitter improves language and social skills. Students improve vocabulary, grammar and phrasing while developing confidence and intercultural understanding. Peer interaction, which includes observation, correction and feedback, promotes meaningful language development alongside formal instruction.

Furthermore, while the majority of participants said that Twitter offers a fun and adaptable English learning experience, it is important to consider the technological barriers that can interfere with its efficacy. Not all users have the necessary internet connection, technological ability or language proficiency to use Twitter to its full potential. Therefore, a more thorough examination of the drawbacks and potential benefits of using Twitter for informal English language acquisition requires an awareness of these difficulties.

P6 mentioned the need for a stable internet connection as a basic limitation:

*“Twitter has to be online, right? So if there’s no signal or internet, we can’t use it at all.”*



P5 pointed out technical issues that disrupt user experience:

*“Sometimes Twitter crashes, or the translate feature doesn’t work. I’ve had to copy tweets manually into Google Translate just to understand them.”*

P7, the teacher, provided a broader view of usability limitations, especially for older or less digitally literate users:

*“Twitter isn’t always user-friendly—especially after they changed the name to X. Older users or people unfamiliar with the interface might feel confused. The layout has changed, the color’s black now, the caption limit is a challenge, and even the account recovery process is more difficult than on Instagram or Facebook.”*

The findings suggest that while Twitter is considered useful for language exposure, different learners have different experiences with Twitter. Significant barriers can be caused by constraints such as poor digital literacy, erratic internet access, and lack of experience with the platform's functions. Some users may not be able to fully participate in informal English learning on Twitter due to these difficulties. Addressing accessibility and usability issues is critical to maximizing the platform's potential. To encourage a more inclusive and equitable approach to digital language education, future research could examine how user training, inclusive platform design, or the incorporation of alternative tools can help bridge these gaps.

This research shows that students' informal English communication on Twitter has an impact on their language skills in general, especially in an academic setting. Many people reported that they felt more confident, had a larger vocabulary and were better able to answer questions in English. In addition, this study focuses on the benefits of using Twitter for casual English learning, but does not investigate the consequences of long-term participation. Understanding how consistent use of the platform affects language development over time is important. A longitudinal study could indicate whether regular Twitter engagement can lead to significant progress in terms of grammatical accuracy, writing ability, or whether the benefits



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are limited to vocabulary and conversational ability. Future research that tracks students' development over time may provide a better understanding of how continued participation with social media can improve language learning in the long term.

#### 4. Conclusion

This research shows that Twitter serves as a useful platform for casual English acquisition, allowing students to practice the language through impromptu conversations in the moment. By interacting with peers from around the world through slang, memes and informal conversations, students gain vocabulary, fluency and confidence. Social engagement and peer review encourage language development in a genuine and culturally appropriate way.

While there are still issues with internet connection and platform usability, Twitter also fosters a sense of community and increases digital knowledge. Teachers can create more engaging and relevant language learning activities by having a better understanding of how students use sites like Twitter. Future research should address barriers to wider access and investigate the long-term effects of social media on language proficiency.

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