

INVESTIGATING THE USE OF TWITTER FOR NON-ENGLISH STUDENTS' VOCABULARY ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract: This study investigates the use of Twitter as a platform to support vocabulary engagement among non-English major students. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the research involved five non-English students from various Indonesian universities who were selected through purposive sampling based on their active use of Twitter in English. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and supported by documentation of participants' Twitter activities. The findings indicate that Twitter facilitates vocabulary engagement by providing authentic language exposure, repeated encounters with new words, and opportunities for contextual use through reading and interaction. Students engaged in both intentional learning, such as following educational accounts, and incidental learning through daily timeline browsing and participation in online communities. Overall, the study concludes that Twitter has strong potential as a supplementary medium for vocabulary engagement beyond formal classroom settings.

Keywords: Twitter; vocabulary engagement; non-English students; language learning

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media platforms have increasingly been recognized as alternative spaces for language exposure and learning. The emergence of social media as part of modern technology has provided new opportunities to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Nissak et al., 2023). Popular social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and WhatsApp offer diverse functions for multiple purposes, including business, entertainment, education, and data collection. Among these platforms, Twitter offers unique characteristics through its microblogging format, allowing users to interact using concise texts in real-time contexts. Alhabash and Ma (2017) stated that Twitter, which belongs to the microblogging category of social media, was established in 2006 and remains one of the most widely used platforms worldwide, along with Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

Vocabulary knowledge is a fundamental component of language proficiency, influencing learners' ability to comprehend texts and express ideas effectively. According to Abidah et al. (2019), having extensive vocabulary knowledge facilitates learners' ability to learn English easier, communicate effectively, and be proficient in the language. Vocabulary engagement is one of the key aspects that supports the success of language learning, as it allows learners to comprehend, express, and interact effectively in English. According to Nation (2022), vocabulary engagement included knowing the form, meaning, and use of words, which must be continuously developed through exposure and practice in authentic contexts.

Nowadays, the use of twitter as a micro-blogging media for generation z is not only for reading or creating threads, but also used as a means of communication between users worldwide. Steckenbiller (2016) noted that Twitter enables users to connect and interact with others through features like hashtags, mentions, and replies.

Previous studies have shown that Twitter can support vocabulary development through authentic input and interaction. Melliyni (2022) found that students used Twitter to communicate and explore topics of interest, which helped them learn new English vocabulary through interaction and hashtag searches. The character limit and engaging threads encouraged users to read more actively than traditional materials. The use of trending hashtags by global users further exposes learners to varied English content related to their interests.

However, most existing research has focused on students majoring in English. Limited attention has been given to non-English major students, who may engage with English differently due to varied academic needs and motivations. Therefore, this study aims to explore how non-English students use Twitter to support their vocabulary engagement. This study aims to investigate how non-English students utilize Twitter to engage with English vocabulary and to examine the potential of Twitter as a supplementary tool for vocabulary learning.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. This design focuses on collecting rich, detailed, and contextual data through methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, allowing researchers to describe participants' perspectives and experiences without manipulating the environment.

Five non-English major students from different universities in Indonesia participated in the study. The participants were aged between 19 and 23 years old and had used Twitter actively for more than five years. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure that participants regularly interacted with English content on Twitter.

Participants were selected based on predetermined criteria, namely non-English major students in Indonesia who actively use Twitter in English. Before the interviews, participants were contacted to explain the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, and their rights as respondents, including confidentiality and permission to record the sessions. An interview schedule was then arranged according to the participants' availability. The interview questions were adapted from previous studies by Htay et al. (2020) and Fu et al. (2021). These studies were selected because they focus on students' perceptions of using digital platforms and learning resources to support English learning in higher education.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted online and supported by documentation of participants' English tweets, replies, and retweets. The data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis involving three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to identify patterns related to vocabulary engagement. According to Mezmir (2020), qualitative data analysis combines approaches of a rough analysis of the material with approaches of a detailed analysis.

The data were validated using the member-checking method. This method is carried out where the researcher and participants collaborate to ensure the accuracy of the data. As Motulsky (2021) stated in their study, the member-checking method is a powerful validity tool where researcher provides the interview transcript to the participants to review, edit, add to, or correct in a form of data accuracy.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings are organized into two main sections. The first section describes the ways the participants use Twitter to support their vocabulary development, including a comparison of their vocabulary engagement before and after using Twitter. The second section presents the specific Twitter features that participants identified as helpful in supporting their English vocabulary learning process.

Twitter for Improving Vocabulary Engagement

1. Reading authentic tweets from native speakers, famous accounts, and topics of interest

Students like Nayla and Putri explained that they follow native speakers, public figures, and fan community accounts to read authentic tweets in real contexts. Nayla said, “Reading tweets from native speakers made me more familiar with casual and creative expressions.”

Putri also shared, “I learn a lot from fan communities because there’s so much slang I don’t find in textbooks.” This exposure helps them find informal, casual, and even creative expressions that are rarely taught in textbooks.

2. Following educational or vocabulary-focused accounts for daily word input

Nayla highlighted that she intentionally follows trusted accounts like @MerriamWebster to discover new words and understand how they are used in real sentences. “I like following @MerriamWebster so I get new words every day, and they show how to use them.”

Putri shared, “It’s really helpful because I get useful vocabulary every day without having to search for it myself. I like following @UrbanDictionary because they share new slang words and their real meanings.” This shows how she combines different sources on Twitter to enrich her vocabulary with both informal and up-to-date terms.

3. Writing and posting tweets in English to practice using new words

Nayla said, “I tweet about my daily life, and I try to do it in English to practice new words.” This way, she actively uses new words in context, which helps her remember them better than just reading.

Putri explained that she often replies to posts in fan communities using English, “I like replying to tweets in English in my fan communities because it makes me practice new words naturally. Sometimes I even learn how people react or use slang when they reply back.” This shows that interacting through replies not only helps her use new vocabulary in context but also exposes her to authentic conversational English.

4. Following topic-specific accounts for technical and academic vocabulary

Dwi shared, “Since using Twitter, I’ve learned more engineering words and idioms. Threads help me see how they’re used naturally.” Lala also said, “I follow engineering topics so I can get more technical vocabulary than just from textbooks.”

5. Browsing the timeline daily for incidental vocabulary and figurative language

Students like Dwi, Lala, and Dinda emphasized that they scroll through Twitter almost every day. Dwi said, “Sometimes I open Twitter just to relax, but I find new words by accident and try to use them later.”

Dinda shared, “Reading literary tweets makes me more comfortable using figurative and descriptive expressions.” This daily browsing exposes them to new words incidentally, while Dinda uses it to explore literary and figurative language that expands her vocabulary beyond her medical major.

Twitter facilitates vocabulary engagement through authentic exposure, intentional input, and active use. Students learn informal, academic, and technical vocabulary by reading native speakers’ tweets, following educational and topic-specific accounts, and browsing timelines daily. Writing and interacting in English further reinforces vocabulary retention, while incidental exposure to slang, idioms, and figurative language expands lexical knowledge beyond textbooks.

The Features in Twitter for Learning English Vocabulary

Dwi shared that she regularly explores hashtags to discover new idioms and expressions, “Hashtags help me find posts related to vocabulary easily, and I like using the bookmark feature to save tweets for review later.”

For Putri, the Community feature has been especially useful because she can join fan or interest-based communities where English is commonly used, “It gives me exposure to different expressions and slang in a focused environment. I use retweets with comments to practice making sentences with new words.”

Other participants valued the Lists and Search features. Dinda, who loves literary content, organizes accounts into Lists for easier access to poetic tweets and book excerpts. Lala highlighted how the search bar helps her look up specific technical terms and see how they are used in authentic conversations.

Across all participants, these features were consistently described as tools that make vocabulary learning incidental yet intentional. By using Twitter’s algorithm, hashtags, and interactive functions, students encounter vocabulary in natural settings, see how words are used by native speakers, and then practice using them in their own tweets or replies.

Discussion

The findings reveal that Twitter contributes positively to students’ vocabulary engagement through authentic exposure and contextualized language use. Participants reported encountering new vocabulary while reading tweets from native speakers, educational accounts, and interest-based communities. This repeated exposure enabled students to recognize and understand vocabulary in real-life contexts, supporting incidental learning processes.

In addition, active participation through replying to tweets and posting original content in English allowed students to apply newly learned vocabulary. This finding supports Nation’s (2022) view that vocabulary engagement involves not only recognizing word meanings but also using words appropriately in context. The interactive features of Twitter, such as replies, hashtags, and communities, facilitated meaningful engagement with vocabulary rather than passive memorization.

These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that social media platforms can enhance vocabulary learning by combining exposure, interaction, and learner interest (Rao & Mackenzie, 2021; Sirait & Hanim, 2022). While Twitter was not designed as an educational platform, its affordances for communication and content sharing create opportunities for informal yet effective vocabulary engagement. This suggests that Twitter can complement formal instruction by extending language exposure beyond classroom boundaries.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study concludes that Twitter can serve as an effective supplementary platform for vocabulary engagement among non-English students. Through authentic exposure and interactive features, students are able to encounter, understand, and use new vocabulary in meaningful contexts. The findings highlight the importance of learner autonomy and purposeful engagement when using social media for learning.

It is suggested that students use Twitter with clear learning intentions to maximize its benefits. Future research may involve a larger number of participants or adopt mixed-method or longitudinal study approaches to further examine the impact of Twitter on vocabulary development across different learner populations.

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