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The Use of Twitter by EFL School-Aged Learners in Armenia

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ABSTRACT

The use of technology has become prevalent in today's society and also more important for educational purposes. It was found that Twitter as a technological tool engages learners in interaction, discussion, and collaborative learning based mainly on an asynchronous form of communication.

The purpose of the current research is to determine Armenian EFL school-aged learners' engagement level on Twitter and the impact of Twitter on their collaboration. To carry out the research two groups (Group A) and (Group B) at the Experimental English Classes (EEC) run by the Center for Research in Applied Linguistics at the American University of Armenia were selected. The results revealed differences between Group A and Group B students' engagement and collaboration, the reasons of which are discussed. It was also observed that the level of students' engagement and collaboration is greatly dependent on the formal guidance provided.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Blogging is an interactive form of publishing content on the web. It comes from the term "web log." The act of blogging dates back to the late 1990s, and has become a dominant way of self-publishing in the 2000s. Micro-blogging is seen as a new form of blogging activity and is described by Templeton (2008, as cited in Ebner, 2011) as a small scale form of blogging, generally made up of short, succinct messages to share news, post updates and carry on conversations.

Twitter is the most popular micro-blogging application, founded in March 2006 by Obvious Group, with its Head quarters in California, U.S.A. Twitter has almost one million users called twitterers, who can send and receive messages via web. Posts in Twitter are limited to 140 characters which forces users to be as concise as possible. Another notable feature of Twitter is that tweets can be seen from any public account, which makes it easier for users to follow links to web content: news stories, video shots at conferences, job postings, questions, and replies. Common practices on Twitter include the use of @ plus the user name at the beginning of the tweet to indicate a message to a user. The hashtag (#) is used to tag or organize tweets. In addition, the letters RT are used to signify a "retweet," to a user or a specific group of users (Greenhow & Gleason, 2012).

Twitter has its own jargon: A "tweet" is a message or post, and "twitter" is the verb form for writing a message. The "Twittisphere" is that area of cyberspace where people twitter (Mork, 2009).

According to O'Connel (2012), Twitter offers new and exciting ways for students' English related interaction both in formal and informal settings. Twitter also has a great potential for teaching practices. ESL teachers can use Twitter micro-blogging platform for word games, discussions, short stories, quizzes, questions and answers and helpful links related to the course content. Teachers can also send out reminders about upcoming tests, project due dates or any news that needs to be shared. As referred to students, they can work together on projects by setting up a group via such app as Tweetworks to facilitate communication between each other. Students can also find native speakers and practise the target language with them.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

In Armenia, most EFL students do not get enough motivation to use communicative English. Most English courses favor prescriptive grammatical rules and vocabulary proficiency over oral fluency and communicative uses. It is a common scenario in Armenia for students to merely study specific vocabulary and grammatical points in order to receive high scores on a test. Furthermore, the learners' English related engagement and interaction is limited to the classroom setting and isn't tied to learners' life outside the academic environment. Thus, implementing Twitter micro-blogging communicative platform in EFL learning it is hoped to address the problems stated above inherent in the Armenian setting.

1.2. Significance of the Study

With the integration of technology in Armenian school-aged learners' daily life, there is a need to look at the how technology could be implemented for educational purposes, specifically for EFL learning. This study was carried out to find out Armenian EFL school-aged learners' experience with Twitter in terms of engagement and collaboration. Furthermore, implications are carried as to how Twitter can be effectively used for teaching and learning practices.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

As already mentioned, Twitter is the world best-known micro-blogging platform, where anyone can post 140 characters to address a worldwide community of followers. There are many studies showing how Twitter can be useful in the language acquisition area and how it helps learners to study English effectively. These studies also suggest that while using Twitter can have a positive impact on students' language learning experiences, it may also represent some challenges.

2.1. Using Twitter to Learn Languages

Borau et al. (2009) conducted research to find out the effectiveness of Twitter on Chinese learners of English. Students were asked to tweet at least 7 times a week, and read their classmate's tweets. Many students liked using Twitter as a tool to practice English, and felt improvements in their language learning skills. The students also answered in the survey that the sense of community has improved in the class.

Borau et al. (2009) proposed that Twitter is beneficial to get not only language and linguistic skills but also improve cross-cultural understanding and be viewed as a supplement to practice what students have learned in classroom. In a similar study conducted by Nakashima (2011, as cited in Acar & Kimura, 2012), students were asked to use Twitter and were allowed to post anything as long as they keep everything in English. They were told that this would affect their

grades. As a result, students felt that using English has lowered their resistance towards expressing themselves in English. Nakashima (2011, as cited in Acar & Kimura, 2012) argued that while Twitter might not be the most effective way to make learn English language, it is a good way for students with limited opportunities to practice their language learning skills.

A study conducted by Holotescu and Grosseck (2008) revealed that Twitter is the best place to practice a wide variety of expressions and fixed phrases. Furthermore, Antenos-Conforti (2009, as cited in Acar & Kimura, 2012) argued that Twitter is effective tool for language learning because of two main reasons: a) even a single tweet can trigger communication between learners b) Twitter lowers affective filters

Acar & Kimura(2012) report that the author of the book “Twitter 英語学習法 “ Masato Homma mentions four reasons why Twitter is a good platform to study English. First, in Twitter one can easily track what others are saying. Second, the fact that users are connected with lots of other network members makes them motivated. Third, 140 characters make it easier for users to read and post tweets. Last Twitter is a visual medium to which learners can always look back to see what they have written and whether there is a progress in their EFL learning.

The author of the book “Tweeting in English” and the founder of the hashtag #twinglish Mayumi Ishiara (2010, as cited in Acar & Kimura, 2012) gives guidelines to practice English by giving an idea of what to tweet and some useful phrases that can be used for tweeting. Ishiara suggests six main categories to tweet and some examples 1) Greetings –e.g. “Hi everyone”, “Have a great weekend” 2) Thanks and Sorry –e.g. “How sweet of you!”, “Thank you for tweeting me back” 3) Feelings and Intention –e.g. “How impressive!”, “I couldn’t agree any more” 4) My day-e.g. “I had a productive day”, “Uh-oh, now u know I’m still up” 5) Questions and Suggestions

– e.g. “Is this the right expression?”, “Let’s wait and see” 6) Things around me –e.g. “Hello March”, “I am glad it’s getting warmer”

2.2 Instructional Benefits of Twitter

Dunlap & Lowenthal(2009) suggest that participation in the Twitter community helps learners to become sensitive to their audience, and make professional decisions about what ideas they should be available to the public and what ideas should remain private.

The other greatest benefit of Twitter is that it’s free and learners can easily connect with native speakers, EFL teachers and many other practicing professionals. Besides the networking potential, students receive immediate feedback to their questions and ideas from practicing professionals, which enhances students’ understanding of the course content and their enculturation into the professional community of practice.

Furthermore, Twitter supports informal learning which involves “activities that take place in students’ self-directed and independent learning time, where the learning is taking place to support a formal program of study, but outside the formally planned and tutor-directed activities” (Aspden and Thorpe, 2009, as cited in Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009).

When Twitter is being used for class discussion, it improves students’ skills of summarization by consolidating their thoughts into precise syntactic structures (Bart, 2010).

Twitter also enables faculty and students to maintain on-going relationships after a course ends. Although the semester is over, students and the teachers are still in daily communication

with each other. This allows for academic and professional advice, community maintenance, information and moment-to-moment experiences sharing.

2.3. Challenges of Twitter

While implementing Twitter for language learning purposes it should be considered that potential response rate is going to be fairly limited (140 characters) which may lead to bad grammar skills, and to lack of elaborated reflection on complex ideas (Rankin 2009, as cited in Gao, Luo & Zhang, 2012). There is also the issue of addiction, privacy and spam (block those “followers” that have nothing to do with your classroom activities) (Grosseck & Holotescu, 2008).

Furthermore, while Twitter is free to use on a computer connected to the Web, users are required to pay for texting if they access Twitter on their cell phone (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009).

Ebner (2011) claims that despite of its affordance in facilitating communication, micro-blogging can sometimes lead to “information flow”. Another challenge is that some students may feel it is a waste of time reading posts containing less useful information (Holotescu & Grosseck, 2009). Last, studies suggest that many learners are not familiar with Twitter and find it difficult or even intimidating to use. Therefore, creative ways should be found to convince students of Twitter’s benefits or establish rewards to encourage its use (Gao, Luo & Zhang, 2012).

2.4 Student Engagement in Twitter

Student engagement, as defined by Kuh (2009, as cited in Welch and Bonnan-White, 2012) and Astin(1984, as cited in Tyma, 2011) is “the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities” .

It is commonly accepted that engagement and academic achievement are tightly connected . An example is provided by the National Research Council in stating that in order for students to feel motivated to learn, they need to feel that they have, “competence and control, beliefs about the value of education, and a sense of belonging” (Welch and Bonnan-White, 2012).

It was found that when micro-blogging was incorporated into learning activities, students participated at a higher level than they would normally do (Ebner, 2011). Student interactions via micro-blogging led to “a culture of engagement” and “deepening of interpersonal connections”(Junco et al, 2010).

According to Kop (2011, as cited in Gao, Luo & Zhang, 2012) and Junco et al (2012), Twitter, first, offers students a convenient channel to express their ideas. Second, the integration of Twitter as a communication tool encourages participation from some students who otherwise may not be active participants in class. Third, micro-blogging provides students with opportunities to communicate virtually at any time. As a result, students’ engagement with the course content or relevant activities is extended beyond the limited class time. For example, the

instructor's brief notes on a specific content can trigger an in-depth discussion in Twitter lasting several weeks.

It was also evidenced that learners remained active even after the course had ended and the original tasks were completed communicating and interacting with other facilitators and participants in Twitter (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009 and Holotescu & Grosseck, 2009).

Junco, Heiberger & Loken (2010) claim that structured use of Twitter in college courses, lead to increased engagement and higher grades. Analyzing test scores and the number of tweets for the engagement of control group and experimental group differences were found. Students of the experimental group who were more engaged in Twitter had higher test scores than students of the control group who were less engaged in Twitter. Furthermore, the examination of tweets showed that while students were engaged in asking questions to their peers they also provided emotional support to each other, and created and scheduled real-world study groups via Twitter. In short, Twitter enhanced students' academic and psychological development.

Welch & Bonnan-White(2012) carried out a research to find the correlation between student's engagement and Twitter enjoyment. To measure the level of engagement a three scaled questionnaire for peer, academic and intellectual engagement was used. To measure the level of Twitter enjoyment four open ended questions were provided. It was found that there is a significant affect of Twitter enjoyment on student engagement with those saying they enjoyed Twitter being significantly more engaged than those who did not enjoy Twitter.

Furthermore the findings of Junco, Elavsky & Greg Heiberger (2010) provide evidence to support the idea that *how* instructors use Twitter (for example, to engage with students by

answering questions, encouraging discussions and providing support) is an important factor in engagement and achievement gains. Specifically, faculty who are more engaged on the platform with their students will see greater gains in academic outcomes.

Dunlap & Lowenthal (2009) examined the impact of Twitter on developing “social presence,” which is defined as learners’ ability to “project their personal characteristics into the community”. It was shown that Twitter adoption for educational purposes allows students and instructors to engage in sharing, collaborating, brainstorming, problem-solving, and creating. Furthermore, participants of the research noted that using Twitter for socializing and learning purposes felt more “natural and immediate” than using formal learning management system.

Elavsky & Mislán (2011, as cited in Greenhow & Gleason, 2012) examined tweeting practices in a large undergraduate media studies course where instructors sought to integrate student opinion into the classroom discourse and increase their engagement with course themes. They found that, although not required, the majority of the students chose to tweet: about one-quarter of the tweets were directed at a peer, and the average number of tweets per user was 14. They concluded that using Twitter “deepened and extended the class’ potential for engagement with course themes” by combining online and offline discourse.

From an educational technology perspective, Young (2010, as cited in Cheng & Chang, 2012) noted that one advantage in adopting Twitter for educational purposes is that introverted students may feel more comfortable to be engaged in interaction by sharing personal updates, news, thoughts, and hobbies.

According to Ullrich, Borau & Stepanyan, (2010) the results of Twitter network analysis indicate: [a] a preference of participants to interact with peers of the same gender; [b] no

significant evidence of popularity effect in relation to gender; [c] self-reported inclination to reply to initiated posts; and [d] self-reported tendency towards public communication.

2.5. Student Collaboration in Twitter and Sense of Community

Twitter offers a multicultural platform in which users from different parts of the world can interact and make friends, therefore, possibilities for cooperative learning are increased. In social group discussions Twitter has the capacity to facilitate learner's language acquisition process resulting in higher language achievement and problem solving capabilities (Borau et al., 2009).

Galagen (2009) mentions that learners can actually obtain advice by tweeting their questions to teachers and peers. Additionally, students can view their classmates' tweets and provide feedback and teachers can check everyone's comments and responses to evaluate learner's writing progress and ideas.

Mork (2009) and Cohen & Ducan (2012) claim that Twitter is a great tool for teachers to encourage collaboration and peer feedback among *blended learning communities* (groups which utilize face-to face as well as online meetings). Teachers can post a link or a question for students to respond to using Twitter's system of responding to a single user or a group of users (@ replies). As users become more advanced, they can take advantage of Twitter's functions, like "hashtags," to seek for information about specific content. Making use of these functions and applications can trigger students into trying to discover more on their own beside what

they learned in their EFL class. For example, by searching for a particular hashtag based on key concepts assigned to them from the teacher, students may find unexpected, substantial, relevant and interesting content as a supplement to what they have learned in the classroom.

Junco, Heiberger & Loken (2010) suggest that in addition to increasing students' motivation in language learning the use of Twitter created a culture of engagement between students. As was reported in the results of the case study, students interacted with each other a great deal around academic and co-curricular issues, which led to deepening of their interpersonal connections.

According to Lomicka & Lord (2011) and Borau et al (2009) Twitter fosters a sense of community, social coherence and social interaction within and beyond the walls of the classroom which is vital for the effectiveness of the educative process. Furthermore, they suggest that *social presence* can be key factor in facilitating collaborative learning, encouraging greater satisfaction in the learning process, increasing dynamic interaction, fostering greater and more in-depth discussion. Social presence is described as the degree to which the participants can present themselves, both socially and emotionally, as 'real' people in their online community (Garrison et al., 2000, as cited in Lomicka & Lord, 2011).

Another online survey and interview data showed that being part of a Twitter-based learning community helps the participants to maintain motivation and keeps them engaged in the project. All of the 12 participants of the research stated that viewing members' tweets encouraged them to keep up with their study. They also commented that they became a little competitive. When someone tweeted often or introduced useful apps or interesting articles,

they felt inclined to tweet more or to introduce a better article. Thus, healthy and friendly rivalry was cultivated in the learning community (Sekiguchi, 2012).

Gao, Luo & Zhang (2012) argue that Twitter can be a great collaborative medium and trigger for in-depth topic discussion while using arguments and materials from the tweets. However, it is a challenge for the teacher to stimulate students to seek answers to fruitful questions and to be engaged in a dialogue in Twitter.

It is also suggested that if Twitter is used for collaboration, communication in dyads or small groups would be more effective than large, open discussions, since the larger the number of participants, the greater the risk that threads will cross and topical coherence will suffer (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009).

2.6. Summary of the Literature Review

In summary, the findings mentioned above suggest that Twitter use in higher education may facilitate increased student engagement with course content and increase student-to-student or student–instructor interactions potentially leading to stronger positive relationships and rich authentic learning experiences.

To measure the level of student engagement and collaboration in the current study the instrumentation part of Junco, Heiberger & Loken (2010) and Welch & Bonnan-White(2012) was adapted. Namely, there is analysis of number of tweets, tweet content and questionnaire. Additionally, number of @ mentions, peer followers, peers following, platforms for tweeting, results of unstructured interviews were taken into consideration.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The current study is exploratory in nature and follows quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodology.

3.1. Research Questions

For this research project the following research questions were formulated:

- *To what extent are students engaged in Twitter?*
- *What is the impact of Twitter on students' collaboration?*

3.2. Settings and Participants

This research was conducted in the Experimental English Classes (EEC) run by the Center for Research in Applied Linguistics at the American University of Armenia. The duration of the procedure was 8 weeks. 1 week was spent on giving students instructions on how to create a Twitter account and how to use Twitter. For that purpose a tutorial link <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYdlOBEZjeI> was provided on the blackboards. The rest of the procedure (except some unstructured interviews with the teachers and the students) was administered outside the classroom setting via technology. The target population were learners enrolled in two EEC groups (Group A and Group B) of the same level of proficiency (intermediate). The age level of participants ranged from 11 to 15 and the number of

participants was 18 (10 in Group A and 8 in Group B). The criteria used for the sampling strategy was to choose school-aged learners of possibly younger age and of possibly lower level of English language proficiency .

3.3. Materials

The materials used for this research project were laptops for Twitter usage and the learner’s course book “ English in Mind”, based on the units (e.g “Have fun!”, “Holiday or vacation?”, “Music makers, etc.) of which 15 questions (see, Appendix) were provided by the researcher in Twitter.

3.4. Instrumentation

The data for the research were collected through the following instruments:

- The quantitative data were collected through:

Twitter report - [Twitonomy](#) Twitter analytics and visualization tool (hashtags, @ user mentions, number of tweets, followers, users following)

- The qualitative data were collected through

Unstructured interviews - external factors (e.g. positive or negative atmosphere in the classroom, students’ attitudes towards each other, the level of their motivation in using Twitter, etc.) affecting students’ engagement and collaboration

- Mixed quantitative and qualitative were collected through

Questionnaire – five closed ended questions based on Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) and two open-ended questions for students overall experience with Twitter

Tweet analysis- tweets in English, tweets in Armenian, links

For finding out the level of student engagement the analysis of the number of tweets, tweet content, platforms for tweeting, questionnaire and unstructured interviews were taken into consideration.

For finding out the level of student collaboration the analysis of the number and content of @mentions, peers following, peer followers, questionnaire and unstructured interviews were considered.

3.5. Procedure of the experiment

At the beginning of the research a five-minute unstructured interview with the teachers and the students of the two groups was conducted to find out what they know about blogging, micro-blogging, specifically Twitter, whether they have Twitter accounts and use them, and if yes, what they generally use Twitter for. Afterwards a tutorial link <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYdlOBEZjeI> was provided on the blackboard as a guideline on how to create a Twitter account and how to use Twitter. It took one week to achieve this goal, although not all the students were eager to participate in the research because of the unfamiliarity with Twitter. Overall, 10 students from Group A and 8 students from Group B took part in the research. Since students had their Twitter accounts created they exchanged their usernames with each other and with the researcher to be able to follow each other if they

wanted to. For start-up students were asked to post one or two tweets as a reply to the question provided by the researcher in Twitter. The questions were provided twice or three times a week and were based on the topics that the students were covering in their course book “English in Mind”. Students were also acknowledged that they could post self-initiated tweets on topics that interests them, have discussions with their classmates, ask questions to each other, express freely their thoughts and opinions. They were encouraged to post as many tweets as possible and share information which they considered to be interesting and helpful for their peers. Meanwhile interviews continued to be conducted to find out whether students face any difficulties in using Twitter, what attitude do they have towards using Twitter, whether they enjoy it or not. The face to face communication was also hold to trigger students to participate more actively in Twitter.

At the end of the course, students were given a questionnaire to fill in. As the procedure was over, [Twitonomy](#) Twitter analytics and visualization tool was used to analyze the quantitative data (@ user mentions, number of tweets, followers, users following).

3.6. Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed descriptively using numbers and percentages and the qualitative data was analyzed through content.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The current study was carried out to investigate the engagement and collaboration level of Group A and Group B students in Twitter.

4.1. Analysis of Twitter Report

Table 1

Group A Twitter Report: Numbers

Username	Tweets	Following		Followers		@ Mentions	
		Others	Peers	Others	Peers	Other	Peer
Student 1	22	76	7	13	5	9	0
Student 2	6	6	4	5	4	6	0
Student 3	46	177	4	26	6	11	5
Student 4	41	12	1	6	4	30	10
Student 5	8	0	0	1	5	8	0
Student 6	7	6	6	3	3	7	0
Student 7	733	115	1	12	2	9	7
Student 8	6	4	5	2	3	6	0
Student 9	11	4	7	3	5	8	3
Student 10	12	1	8	2	6	11	0
Total	892	397	43	73	43	105	25

Table 2

Group B Twitter Report: Numbers

Username	Tweets	Following		Followers		@ Mentions	
		Others	Peers	Others	Peers	Other	Peer
Student 1	17	4	4	1	2	10	1
Student 2	0	33	3	3	3	0	0
Student 3	3	12	0	2	2	3	0
Student 4	32	2	5	1	3	16	10
Student 5	2	2	0	2	1	2	0
Student 6	15	1	2	2	5	15	0
Student 7	1	4	0	1	0	0	0
Student 8	12	5	5	1	4	11	0
Total	82	61	19	13	20	57	11

Twitter reports of Group A and Group B show that students of Group A were more engaged (number of tweets) and collaborating (peers following, peer followers, @ mentions) than

students of Group B. This can be explained by the fact that students in Group A were mostly girls and as the unstructured interviews reveal they were more friendly and positively inclined towards each other and towards collaborative learning. Whereas, students in Group B were mostly boys, viewing themselves more as individual learners. Possible variations in the results can also be referred to the encouragement and motivation on the part of the teachers to participate in Twitter.

Table 3

Platforms for Tweeting and Number of Tweets

Twitter Web	Twitter Button	Weheartit.com	Twitter for iPad	Twitter for Android	Mobile Web
812	55	40	35	20	12

The results show that most of the students used Twitter website on their laptop to post a tweet. Since using Twitter on a mobile phone is a paid service, students gave preference for free ways of tweeting. Whereas mobile phone is a more flexible micro-blogging platform reading and posting tweets. It is supposed that this factor could also have affected the level of students' engagement and collaboration in Twitter.

4.2. Analysis of Questionnaire

Table 4

Questionnaire for Engagement and Collaboration: Group A: Percentages

	Str. Agr.	Agr.	Neu.	Dis.	Str. Dis.
While using Twitter I am motivated to learn English language	10%	80%	10%	0	0
I get a lot of satisfaction from using English language in Twitter	20%	50%	30%	0	0
The use of Twitter stimulates my interests in English language learning	10%	60%	30%	0	0
While using Twitter I feel part of a group of students committed to learning	20%	80%	0	0	0
While using Twitter there is a positive attitude towards English language learning among my fellow students	20%	50%	30%	0	0

Table 5

Questionnaire for Engagement and Collaboration: Group B: Percentages

	Str. Agr.	Agr.	Neu.	Dis.	Str. Dis.
While using Twitter I am motivated to learn English language	12.5%	37.5%	37.5%	12.5%	0
I get a lot of satisfaction from using English language in Twitter	12.5%	37.5%	50%	0	0
The use of Twitter stimulates my interests in English language learning	0	75%	25%	0	0
While using Twitter I feel part of a group of students committed to learning	12.5%	50%	25%	12.5%	0
While using Twitter there is a positive attitude towards English language learning among my fellow students	0	50%	50%	0	0

A positive correlation can be found between the results of the questionnaire and Twitter report. Students of Group A, who gave more Strongly Agree and Agree answers were more engaged in Twitter than students of Group B who gave less Strongly Agree and Agree answers.

1. Describe your experience with Twitter over this course. What did you like? What didn't you like?

Overall, students enjoyed their experience with Twitter. They mentioned that the process of writing tweets and reading tweets was very interesting and helpful for them. Students liked tweeting about their thoughts and feelings as the questions were provided. They were also excited to get new information about each other and recognize each other better. In terms of English language acquisition some students felt improvements in their writing skills. For most of the students the most motivating part was that they had developed a sense of community and of a group of learners who they can communicate and interact with on daily basis outside the classroom setting.

In terms of dislikes a few students mentioned the limited length of the message. They claimed that sometimes they had to post several tweets instead of one and compete to convey a thought. Some students also didn't like the public nature of the tweet.

2. Compare this course to you other general educational courses that didn't use Twitter.

Did you find yourself to enjoy this class more or less?

Almost all of the students mentioned that they enjoyed this class more than other general educational courses that didn't use Twitter. It was mainly explained by the opportunity of Twitter to stay in touch with peers outside the academic environment.

4.3. Analysis of Tweets

Table 6
Tweet Analysis for Engagement: Numbers

Tweets (974)	Group A	Group B	Examples
Tweets in English (178, out of which 162 were replies to the questions provided by the researcher)	110	68	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My first and the best hobby is skating, I really enjoy it! Even for that I have gone to the skating school for more than five years!!! 2. I like honest, kind, intelligent, responsible and frank people
Tweets in Armenian (21)	16	5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Չորեքշաբթի օրը տեստ ենք գրելու, 1.5 ժամ!!! 2. vonca exanak@ Gyumrium??? ☺
Links (775)	766	9	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Little Things via Tumblr hrt.it/12e8hzW 2. color, music, like it! via Tumblr whrt.it/10Ll1Cp 3. beautiful via Tumblr whrt.it/YCDdLc

Table 7
Tweet Analysis for Collaboration: Numbers

@ Mentions (198)	Group A	Group B	Examples
Researcher (162 , replies to the questions)	105	57	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. @xxx You know, every time when I plan smth., it will be failed. But I dream about having a good education, to have a happy family... ☺ 2. @xxx I prefer Face to face interaction, because i can't call online interaction - interaction, it is just chatting ☺
emotional (9)	5	4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. @xxxx Oh, xxx, I didn't know that you are skating! 2. @xxxxx Nice!!! 3. @xx Thanks for information ☺ !!!
Peer(36)			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. @xxxxx download.radionetplus.ru/fleshki/heart....
links (27)	21	6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. @xxxxxx whrt.it/Y4hqqW

The results of the tweet analysis show that without formal guidance there was little stimuli for students to post self-initiated tweets in English content. The students were mostly restricted to replying to the questions provided by the researcher. There was also little collaboration (@ mentions) between peers which may somehow be explained by the type of activity that the students were performing(question-reply). It is assumed that if students were asked to perform another type of activity in Twitter, such as collaborative story writing, the collaboration level would be higher.

4.4. Analysis of Unstructured Interviews

The results of the unstructured interviews with the teachers and students reveal that most of the students were unfamiliar with Twitter. Only a few students had Twitter accounts which they didn't use. Furthermore, students in Group A were mostly girls who were more friendly and positively inclined towards each other and towards collaborative learning. Whereas, students in Group B were mostly boys considering themselves more as individual learners whose interaction with peers was obviously being restricted to the classroom setting. As the interviews proceeded and as Twitter had been experienced for a while, some students expressed their willingness to get more than 2 or 3 questions a week. They said that the questions were mostly about their hobbies, interests and feelings to which they enjoyed answering. It was concluded that in case of sufficient formal guidance the students were eager to participate in Twitter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Findings

The current study shows that, overall, students have positive attitude towards using Twitter. With regard to the first research question, it can be concluded that the level of student engagement is greatly dependent on the formal guidance provided. The more you provide formal guidance the more students feel motivated to participate. Otherwise, there is no stimuli for students to post self-initiated tweets. It was also observed that girls are more engaged in Twitter than boys, therefore, creative ways (e.g. establishing rewards) should be found to encourage boy's participation in Twitter too. As referred to the second research question, it can be summarized that although Twitter helped students to develop a sense of community, it didn't have a great impact on students' collaboration. One of the reasons may be the type(question-reply) of formal guidance provided. It is supposed, that for example , in case of collaborative story writing students would have collaborated more actively. The results of the following research support findings of Junco et al(2012) that *how* instructors use Twitter is an important factor for student engagement and collaboration.

5.2. Pedagogical implications

While the use of Twitter by EFL school-aged learners came naturally (except some formal guidance by the researcher) and did not require any special attention, the pedagogical use does require advanced planning for guiding the group. Pedagogical use can be encouraged by raising open questions which stimulate group discussion. To increase student engagement and

collaboration in Twitter it is also recommended to provide students with such Twitter based – learning activities as short story creating, collaborative story creating, short poetry (e.g. Haiku) writing, sentence making with new words and expressions. It should be mentioned that there is a need to develop guidelines for designing, implementing and assessing Twitter-based learning activities to evaluate student’s progress and the effectiveness of Twitter.

Furthermore, it is also recommended that teachers constantly encourage students to participate in Twitter by establishing rewards or by presenting students the benefits of Twitter in English language learning.

The teachers can also notify students not to over-tweet as, first, the topical coherence may suffer and second, the teacher may face difficulties in following the students posts and finding answers to a specific content.

5.3. Delimitations

The current study was delimited to EEC students. Only 11-15 years old school-aged learners of intermediate level of English language proficiency took part in this research. Considering the fact that students may be unfamiliar with Twitter, it was initially determined to examine students’ general experience with Twitter by giving them little formal guidance. Furthermore, Twitter was used in a asynchronous way, whereas the use of Twitter synchronously in a classroom setting could have revealed different results.

5.4. Limitations

Three major limitations were observed in this study. First, there were only two groups of the same age and level of English language proficiency in EEC. Thus, the sample size was smaller. Second, most of the students were unfamiliar with Twitter. Third, the research was conducted by other person than the teachers of Group A and Group B. Since the teachers are more aware of their student's learning styles, strategies and the course content, it is assumed that they could have provided more effective guidance on the students' use of Twitter than a person who merely conducts research.

5.5. Observed Twitter limitations

A number of Twitter limitations were observed in this study. First, some students claimed that they didn't like the 140-character limit of the tweet which may have resulted in their low engagement and collaboration. Second, as using Twitter on a mobile phone is a paid service, student gave preference for free ways of tweeting. Whereas mobile phone is a more flexible micro-blogging platform for reading and posting tweets. Third, the sequence of Twitter posts appeared in chronological order and not by topic, which made it difficult for the researcher to follow students' tweets related to a specific content. Last, some students claimed that they didn't like the public nature of the tweet, as a result of which they posted fewer tweets.

5.6. Suggestions for Further Research

Due to a small sample, this preliminary study is not representative, however it can be seen as an exploratory focus on the use of Twitter as a teaching-supporting tool in EFL learning. It is hoped that this study will stimulate awareness and desire among teachers and researchers to further test its application. For further research the following suggestions can be made

- Conducting similar study by an EFL teacher with online identity
- Conducting a similar study with a larger sample
- Using Twitter in a classroom setting in a synchronous way
- Considering to implement creative and stimulative Twitter based learning activities

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Appendix

Week 1

“ Suppose you have won tickets for a tour to one country? What country would you choose to go and why?

“What hobbies and interests do you have?”

Week 2

“What kind of food do you prefer and where do you like to have your lunch?

“In your opinion what countries have the best cuisine?

Week 3

“ What makes you laugh?”

“Do you think it’s true that laughther is the best medicine?”

Week 4

“Do you remember things best by seeing, hearing or feeling?”

“What music do you like to listen to and who are your favorite artists?”

Week 5

“What is the best way for you to learn a language?

“Do you think foreign language study should start as early as possible or is it okay to start later?

Week 6

“Do you prefer online or face to face interaction?”

“ How often do you use a computer and what do you use it for?”

Week 7

“What qualities do you appreciate in a person?”

“If you had a chance to meet one famous person in your life who would you like to meet?

” What do you hope to achieve in 10 years?”

