
The Utilization of Twitter for Improving the Writing of Non-native Speakers of Arabic

Dr. Naif Althobaiti^(*)

Abstract

The use of Twitter as an auxiliary tool for language teaching and learning has recently caught the attention of many researchers. Many studies revealed that Twitter has the potential to facilitate students' improvement in writing. Twitter can help second language (L2) writers and foreign language (FL) writers, including non-native speakers of Arabic (NNSA). The current qualitative case study intends to investigate the utilization of Twitter in improving non-native Arabic speakers' written production. The participants in the study were 34 non-Arabic speakers who represented different nationalities (N= 8). Data were collected from the students' actual participation in the Arabic Hashtag program designed for this purpose (#I_Learn_Arabic) and from interviews with students. All the tweets in the Hashtag were qualitatively analyzed. The results show that the use of Twitter has generated different types of writing that benefit the students' learning. Thus, the study offers insights into classroom teaching and the integration of social media into writing classes.

Keywords: Twitter, L2 and FL Writing, NNSA, Error correction, microblogging

*- Taif University, Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the four basic language skills that help people communicate and create an understanding. It is a skill by which writers can share ideas, express thoughts and feelings with their readers. It is a faceless means of communication (Hyland, 2020). It conveys a message to a reader for a specific reason. However, it is not an easy skill to acquire (Graham, 2019). It becomes further complicated in case of L2 and FL writers (Al Badi, 2015).

Writing is an essential skill that every student should master in order to achieve their course outcomes. Writing skills help students to communicate and show their thoughts, understanding, and intellectual growth. In the language teaching and learning context, students need to show a good command of writing in order to pass assessment tasks (Alshammari, 2020). However, when students are Second language (L2) and Foreign Language (FL) writers, such as NNSA writers, the case becomes further complicated. They need both to improve their writing skills generally and to fulfil the requirements of the courses studied. Thus, improving students' writing is vital. This puts pressure on writers to select appropriate vocabulary, spell words correctly, punctuate sentences, put them together in a grammatically correct way, and express their thoughts accurately and fluently (Althobaiti, 2019).

As shown in many studies, many L2 and FL students suffer many writing obstacles relevant to spelling, punctuation, lexicons, grammar, morphology, and semantics (Al-Adawi, 2019; Zhang, 2019). They have many deficiencies in writing accuracy and fluency (Althobaiti, 2015; Althobaiti, 2019). The students also suffer from a lack of motivation and involvement when writing (Graham, 2019).

To help remove these problems and obstacles, teachers should adopt newer writing visions in their instruction and involve their students in more exciting and attention-catching activities to help overcome these deficiencies (Althobaiti & Algethami, 2018). One possible strategy is to integrate technology in their curricula, such as social media tools and applications, which allow students to write for a larger audience and take responsibility for their writing (Morgan, 2014; Nasrullah & Khan, 2019). The integration of technology is not without its drawbacks (Dommett, 2019). Nevertheless, this exploratory study attempted to investigate these issues in a new context. It may provide some insightful understanding of the integration of technology in writing.

A new trend of research questioning different technologies suggests that teachers are increasingly encouraged to adopt technologies in their teaching. Specifically, Twitter, the popular microblogging platform, has caught the attention of many researchers and has been suggested as a way of attempting to resolve many writing problems for students (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018).

Twitter has gained popularity among 325 million users all over the world (Statista, 2020). Users have a limit of 280 characters for each post, or “tweet”. They can connect with others, share ideas, thoughts, daily life stories, and converse with followers who may or may not share their hobbies and interests (Twitter, 2020). They have the option of including avatars, and using their real names or nicknames. Such a platform can make teaching and learning more fun. Of course, writing teaching and learning are not excluded. Twitter has the capacity to provide students with autonomy and freedom to write whatever, whenever, and wherever they like (Morgan, 2014).

Twitter in the Saudi context

The estimated population of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is 33.85 million. 89.39% of this population use the internet, while 68% use social media actively. Those who use social media actively represent 75% of the total population. These statistics show the strong social media presence in KSA and put KSA at the top of the global social media charts (GMI_Blogger, 2020).

Twitter is the fourth most popular social media network platform, with 20.03 million users, which represents nearly two-thirds of the population, (58%) in KSA, coming after Youtube (76%), Instagram (65%), and Facebook (62%) (GMI_Blogger, 2020). This wide spread of social media platforms may be used as a good indicator for implementing the use of such platforms in education, and specifically teaching and learning writing. This implementation aligns the notion of a digital nation or net generation who use smartphones in most of their daily activities (Saaty, 2020).

Twitter and improving Arabic language writing

There is no doubt that writing is a universal act (Zhang, 2019). Thus, no matter what language L1, L2 or FL students are learning, it can be expected that they will struggle, commit errors and attempt to express their thoughts in writing. This is being the case; NNSA writing is examined in terms of the integration of technology in much the same way as any other language

writing act. Specifically, this study aims to explore further the integration of Twitter in improving writing.

The use of Twitter in writing courses is expected to enhance students' writing in real-life situations and writing for the public (Rosell-Aguilar, 2018). It also encourages students' autonomy (Leis, 2014; Morgan, 2014). Students are not passive recipients of knowledge; rather, they are active agents. At the same time, teachers become facilitative agents rather than dominant figures. Furthermore, the shift toward digital pedagogy intends to move teaching and learning beyond classroom walls (Kartal, & Korucu-Kis, 2020). However, this movement requires a great deal of effort to be exerted in teaching and assessment. Teachers, when integrating such technology, should plan well (Morgan, 2014). They need to make students more motivated and fluent writers, and not to focus solely on errors that might be embarrassing for students in front of their nameless and faceless audiences (Schreiber & Worden, 2019).

The primary purpose of implementing Twitter is to help students select proper words, use correct grammar and punctuation, and become more aware of their writings when submitting assignments for assessment (Davis & McGrail, 2009). Another important purpose is to prepare students to be digital citizens (Morgan, 2014).

As many researchers have called for qualitative-based research (Graham, 2019), this study describes and analyses non-Arabic speaking students' views and actual writings when integrating Twitter into their coursework. We argue for the benefit of Twitter in improving non-Arabic speaking students' writings. We also expect that Twitter will help students appeal to wider, more diverse audiences beyond the classroom's confines.

THE STUDY

The Saudi government makes all possible efforts to equip learners with the necessary skills for job markets (Taif University, 2020; TUGA, 2020). One way in which this is achieved is by connecting educational institutions to Saudi Vision 2030, which emphasizes the importance of the Arabic language and its existence and equips learners with necessary skills for the 21st century, such as writing and the use of technology (Saudi Vision 2030, 2020). This pushes universities and other public schools to apply technologies in teaching and learning. To go with this stream, the researcher and his colleagues try to utilize Twitter in writing courses as a supplementary

tool to encourage quality writing products among non-Arabic speaking students in the Teaching Arabic for non-Arabic Speakers Institute in Taif University.

Research questions:

These are the research questions:

- 1- What are the challenges faced by students while using Twitter in the course?
- 2- How do non-Arabic speaking students perform on Twitter?
- 3- What are students' views on the improvement (recommendations) of the course?

Method

The study utilized the qualitative case study method to investigate the students' written products, the group discussion sessions, and their views about the use of Twitter in their course. A case study tends to investigate a phenomenon in its natural context (Yin, 2017). Therefore, a case study method is adopted in order to analyze, describe, and interpret the written productions and views in terms of meaningful patterns (Duff, 2018).

The study participants are 34 non-Arabic speaking students at Taif University in the Institute of Teaching Arabic for Non-Arabic Speakers. They represent nine countries: Australia, United Kingdom, India, Afghanistan, Philippine, Indonesia, Somalia, Senegal, and Malaysia. They are all classified as intermediate students according to their placement tests. The researcher believes that intermediate students may be a rich source of information, as they are eager to learn.

Table 1 shows the nationalities of the 23 participants who took part in Twitter writing. They were from Senegal (N= 6), Philippine (N= 4), Somalia (N= 3), Afghanistan (N= 4), Malaysia (N= 3), India (N= 1), Indonesia (N= 1), and Australia (N= 1). This gives the study a variety in that students came from different linguistic backgrounds, and Arabic is considered their L1 and FL. The rest of the students are "lurkers" who observe and do not participate.

Table 1: Nationalities of the participants

Nationality	Number
Senegalese	6
Filipino	4
Somali	3
Afghani	4

Malaysian	3
Indian	1
Indonesian	1
Australian	1
Total	23

The study triangulates the tools of data collection to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Flick, 2020). The data are collected from three sources:

- group discussion (See Appendix 1);
- students' written production on Twitter (See Appendix 2); and
- post interviews (See Appendix 3).

After collecting the data, the group discussion session and interviews were transcribed, reduced, and summarized by selecting the representative themes and statements. The representative examples were translated. In addition, the written productions were grouped, summarized, and checked to identify errors and discourses. The frequency of discourse and errors and percentages are presented in Appendix 4.

In general, all data were grouped, transcribed, read several times, reduced, and summarized in a way that allowed themes and patterns to emerge from the data. The data analysis uses the rigorous and accelerated data reduction (RADaR) technique (Watkins, 2017). Finally, data are presented in a way that answers the research questions and helps reach conclusions.

Procedure

In the second week of the semester, the students were asked to attend a discussion session as a part of extracurricular activity in the Teaching Arabic for non-Arabic Speakers' Institute in Taif University. These sessions provided teachers and students with opportunities to share their thoughts and opinions about their classes. In the group discussion session (see Appendix 1), the attendees discussed the issue of writing: problems and solutions. In the following week (Week Three), the implementation of Twitter as a supplementary tool in the Arabic Writing course was suggested to students. To increase their participation and involvement in using the platform, they were assured that such activity was voluntary and would not be assessed and would not affect their grade point average (GPAs). They did participate and took part over four months. They also acknowledged that their participation in the hashtag implies their consent to participate in the study. The hashtag

was created to encourage students to write on twitter. It is #I_Learn_Arabic “أنا أتعلم العربية#” (See Appendix 2). As the hashtag stands, it serves dual functions: providing students with a space to practice their writing in an organized way, and enhancing students’ autonomy and motivation, as the hashtag name implies.

The use of hashtag

At the beginning, in Week three, the students wrote many tweets outside the designated hashtag. This is understood to have been because of the absence of clear regulations and the students’ lack of knowledge concerning using Twitter. After the directives of the teacher, the students started using the same hashtag. A hashtag is an affinity space that allows users to keep their discussions connected, and they can make moves back and forth between tweets (Greenhalgh, Rosenberg, Willet, Koehler, & Akcaoglu, 2020).

After finishing the assessment requirements for the semester, the students were asked to participate in an interview. The purpose was to learn their views about their experiences of writing by using Twitter. The data analysis started as soon as the students had completed the interviews. Results are discussed and interpreted in the following section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study and their interpretations. They are presented in three sub-sections: group discussion session, students’ written productions, and students’ views of using Twitter in Arabic writing.

Group Discussion themes

This section summarizes the most important themes emerging from the group discussion, as shown in Figure 1. The students were given some prompting questions at the beginning of the semester about their writing skills and the problems they faced. They raised some problems and suggested some solutions. The main problems (as represented by the small icons in Figure 1) were: the lack of necessary vocabulary, the lack of motivation and confidence in what they write, the lack of sharing culture either with their colleagues or other readers as they have to satisfy the teacher’s expectations, and the reluctance to initiate topics by themselves. However, they suggested four principal solutions (as represented by the large

icons in Figure 1): they need more time to practice writing without pressure, they would like teachers to be more tolerant of their mistakes and errors, and they want follow up feedback. They also expressed some concerns about the strict assessment criteria that sometimes impede their progress and make them afraid to write freely and creatively. In addition, students discussed the writing timeline in the class in the sense that they are required to write within a fixed time frame. They raised the issue of topic selection, and said that they would like to write about their hobbies, likes, dislikes, daily life situations, and cultural differences.



Figure 1: The emergent themes from the group discussion session about the problems and solutions of students' writing

Equally important, they sought some suggestions for acquiring new styles of writing and vocabulary. The researcher intended to lead the discussion toward the benefits of using technology to provide the students with the opportunity to suggest it themselves. However, they did not refer to it because they were not familiar with such a form of writing activity, and they did not expect to use such a platform in their language courses or for it to be part of their assessment. This clearly shows they are accustomed to the

traditional learning methods that heavily rely on teachers. This is evident in their demands. Also, they did not refer to students' autonomy, presumably because they may be fear it might result in failing the course.

On the basis of the issues raised in the session, it is safe to say that writing is a difficult skill for non-Arabic speaking students. It can be understood from the previous literature that these difficulties are connected to the methods used in traditional teacher-dominated courses.

Thus, this pedagogically driven study adopts a new goal of improving writing for students by implementing Twitter. It aims to explore students' written productions and views as they use Twitter. It is worth mentioning that students deal with their writing problems within the confines of their deep-rooted beliefs about their role as receivers of knowledge. This is clearly shown in the fact that the issue of students' autonomy has gone mostly unnoticed. The researcher deliberately did not raise this issue with the students in order to see how they would react when using Twitter. Would they have sufficient ability or would they be influenced by the traditional course norms in which they abide by regulations and do what they are asked? Therefore, the discussion session helped guide the subsequent writing activities and generate some recommendations, which are detailed in the recommendations section.

Students' actual writing using Twitter

This section shows how students took part in writing on Twitter. It starts with a general overview of the results. Then, it presents the analysis of students' tweets in the Hashtag #I_Learn_Arabic.

Table 2 shows the general statistics of the students' participation in Twitter. There were 23 participants who took part in the Twitter experiment. Fifty-five tweets were made up of 1496 words. There were 152 sentences, falling into three main types. The tweets represented six types of discourse. In addition, the researcher counted the error types and their frequencies (N= 319).

Table 2: General statistics in Hashtag #I_Learn_Arabic

Labels	Number
Participants	23
Tweets	55
Discourse types	6
Sentence types	3
Words	1496
Errors	319

Table 3 shows the types of sentences according to their frequency (See also Figure 2). The most commonly used type of sentence is a simple sentence, which occurred 103 times, followed by compound sentences (29), and complex sentences (20).

Table 3: Frequency and percentage of sentence types

Sentence type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Simple Sentence	103	67.76
Compound Sentence	29	19.08
Complex sentence	20	13.16
Total	152	100

The results relating to the sentence types have three potential interpretations. First, the more frequent use of simple sentences than compound and complex may be because of the capacity of Twitter: microblogging has limited characters (N=280), so the students chose to be direct and straightforward.

Second, simple sentences might be the safest option for students to avoid committing grammatical and punctuation mistakes. This is more likely the case because most of the errors listed in Table 4 are related to compound and complex sentences. Therefore, the students avoided what they were not familiar with.

Third, the students may want to conform the trendy style of writing typically used on Twitter. This is congruent with Mukherjee and Bhattacharyya's argument that simplicity in writing is the prominent trend nowadays (2012).

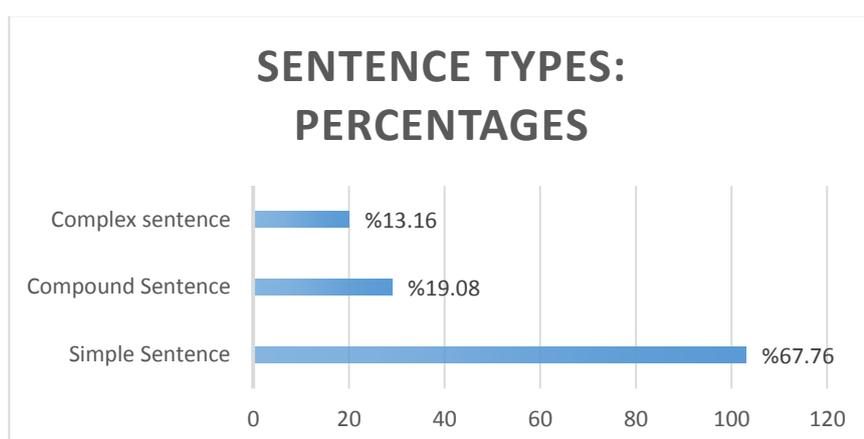


Figure 2: The sentence types and their percentages

Table 3 shows the types of errors found in the students' Twitter writing, and their frequencies. The percentages are presented graphically in Figure 3. The most frequent errors were grammatical (46.39%) and the second most frequent were punctuation (24.15%). The least frequent errors were semantic and spelling errors, which both occurred 47 times (14.73%). One possible reason for these kinds of errors may be the students' lack of grammatical knowledge. Also, the frequent occurrence of punctuation errors may be because students imitate some inaccurate trendy styles of writing in which some famous Twitter users use certain abbreviations and ignore some punctuation markers to reduce the number of characters used and therefore enable them to complete their thoughts. This is not uncommon; Signorini, Segre and Polgreen (2011) state that the writer uses any possible abbreviated alternatives if they run out of characters. This argument is similar to Pratiwi and Marlina's (2020) observation that abbreviations are trendy styles on Twitter.

Table 3: Error Types and their frequencies

Error type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Grammatical	148	46.39
Semantic	47	14.73
Spelling	47	14.73
Punctuation	77	24.15
Total	319	100

The occurrence of spelling is somewhat unexpected because the students have the option of spell check features available on Twitter. Most of the spelling errors were in (Hamza= ء), which is placed on Aleph (ا) as opposed to (إ). Also, the spelling errors were found in omitting some letters that are pronounced but not written, such as (Lam الشمسية) and also in some vowels (a) (See Appendix 4 for more examples). These common errors may be hard to master even for native Arabic speaking writers. Also, these kinds of common errors may be tolerated by readers because they have no significance in the shape of the word and its meaning. These studies are in line with Azzam's (1993) finding that students showed a kind of omission and addition of Alif and Hamza due to the disassociation between the sound and symbol in Arabic reading and writing. Of course, the errors mainly resulted from the lack of Arabic written system knowledge and the context, which has sensitive rules.

Some of the spelling errors were connected to the definite (ال) either by deleting it when it was needed or adding it when it was not. This because the mother languages of some of the students lack this feature (Shin, Cortes & Yoo, 2018).

The categories of errors could be cross-tabulated and grouped under more than four types, but for the current study, we focused on the most frequent ones. Regardless of the errors counted, they are supplementary indicators for other aspects of writing that were improved, such as students' motivation and engagement in the writing activities via the hashtag. These two aspects had improved. This result is congruent with what Altakhaineh & Al-Jallad (2018) found in their study, in which they reported that students committed many errors when writing through Twitter, but at the same time, they showed improvement in motivation and communication with other users.

These errors can be used as supporting materials for subsequent writing activities where the students and the teachers can discuss and correct the errors. Jiménez-Muñoz (2014) findings can support this statement in that twitter showed some evidence for more sophisticated language learning and error correction. The study further supports the results of a study by Mompean and Fouz-González (2016), who found that there were benefits derived from Twitter-based EFL pronunciation instruction in correcting students' pronunciation errors.

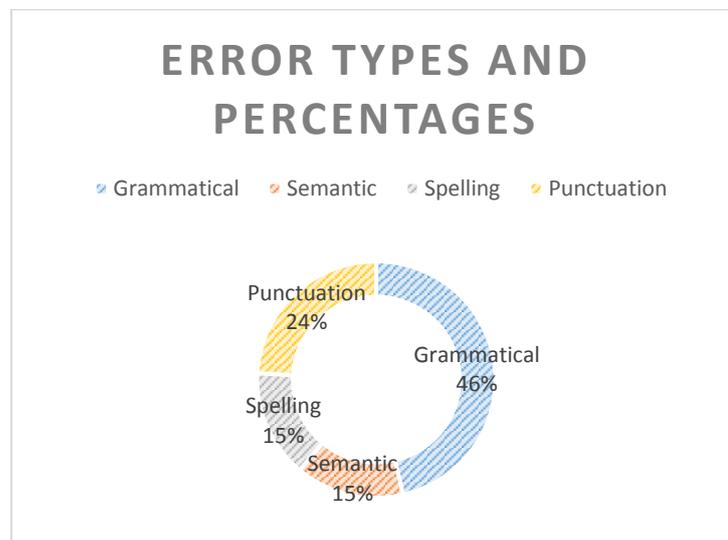


Figure 3: The error types and their percentages

Table 4 presents the emergent themes of discourses types, their frequencies, and their percentages. There were five types of discourse and a total of 59 examples. These overarching types have many significant interpretations by themselves and by connecting them to some of the error types and sentence types.

Table 4: Discourses types and frequency

Discourse type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Self-documenting	19	32
Information giving	15	25
Socializing	11	19
Advice giving	10	17
Commenting	4	7
Total	59	100

The most frequent type of discourse was self-documenting, which occurred 19 times (32%), followed by information giving (25%). Information giving discourse was less frequent (19%), followed by socializing discourse (17%). The least frequently occurring discourse was Commenting (7%).

The high frequency of self-documenting and information discourse types indicates that the students were writing in a pressure-free environment. This result confirmed some previous studies that supported the use of social media technologies, including Twitter, which, it is argued, help students write without tension and pressure (Althobaiti & Algethami, 2018). Furthermore, the results showed that the students wrote for a wider audience. These results also align previous studies that reported that students liked to write for a wider audience. Considering the written production as a whole, the students showed progress and started to write in order to express themselves and use language in authentic contexts.

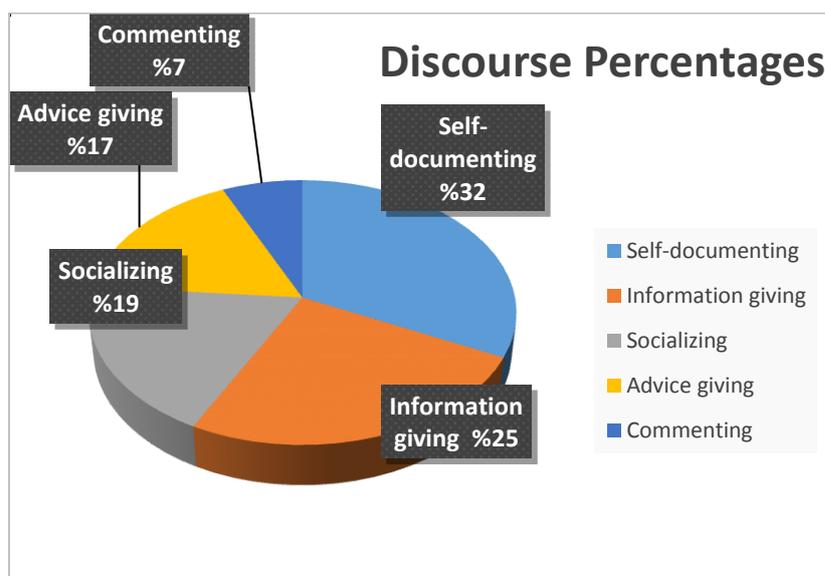


Figure 4: The discourse types and their percentages

The socializing and advice-giving discourses were also indicators of the students' active engagement and interaction. This result is in line with Morgan's (2014) argument that Twitter provides students with opportunities to participate and communicate actively.

Advice giving discourse is an interesting one in that no errors were detected in these tweets. The reason for this might be that students who gave advice were proficient writers. This result may be considered as a sign of enhancing grammatical complexity. This result is similar to Ammar's (2016) finding that Twitter helped EFL tertiary students improve their morpho-syntactic complexity.

The commenting discourse was the least frequent one. Presumably, this discourse had fewer examples because the students were the writing initiators rather than receivers. This assumption is justifiable if we consider that the four examples were in simple sentences and contained many errors. Three of the students who commented were first time participants. If they had taken a more active role in the tweeting, they might have committed many mistakes and errors. Therefore, their lack of participation might be attributed to a strategy of avoiding what they were not familiar with and were requested to write. This result confirms James's (2013) statement that students usually avoid what they are unfamiliar with.

Overall, the study gave an indication that the students' writing fluency and motivation improved. However, errors were frequent; they are considered natural parts of the learning process and should be treated as such (Althobaiti, 2014). The frequent occurrence of errors is expected because of students' active learning strategies (Kroll & Schafer, 1978).

The variety of discourses here can be attributed to the absence of directives from the teacher. Thus, the students were able to be more autonomous in the selection of the topics about which they wrote. The students received some initial directions to write in the hashtag with no specific topics. This result has two sides: bright and dark. The former is that the less the teachers direct students' writing, the more autonomous the students will become. The latter is that the implementation of Twitter in the writing course may lose its significance in enhancing the students' motivation and students' anxiety might increase if the teachers intervene repeatedly. This interpretation is compatible with Craig's conclusion that teacher dominance may disappoint the students and eventually lead to the abandonment of Twitter (Craig, 2012).

The students' views about the use of Twitter in their writing course

After experimenting with Twitter's use in the writing course via the hashtag, the students were interviewed. The students' responses revolved around four main themes: views about the use of Twitter, problems, solutions, and suggestions for future efforts.

In general, the students expressed positive views about using Twitter. They generally stated that Twitter helped to improve their writing and their views about writing. This finding is similar to those of many studies that show evidence of Twitter's utility in language learning and specifically writing (Altakhaineh & Al-Jallad, 2018; Ammar, 2016; Dommett, 2019; Kartal & Korucu-Kis, 2020; Mompean & Fouz-González, 2016; Wu, 2020).

The students also stated that Twitter provided them with a new culture of writing, and that they had acquired new sets of vocabulary. They further explained that Twitter helped them to follow expert writers and imitate their styles. Taken together, these statements match Rosell-Aguilar's (2018) finding that there are many merits in using Twitter in that students are exposed to a variety of registers and styles, can communicate with native speakers and, most importantly, can be introduced to vocabulary and grammar in authentic contexts.

They also stated they had the chance to communicate with their colleagues and comment on their writings. However, this finding has no strong correspondence in the data derived from students' written production. There were only six examples of the commenting discourse. Most of them were in response to news and one of them was to the teacher. This incongruence between the actual production and the perception of the use of Twitter may have resulted from insufficient knowledge of using Twitter in writing. As Greenhalgh et al. (2020) argued, students' familiarity with the use of Twitter's different features is necessary in order for them to benefit from Twitter-based learning.

Twitter's main purpose in teaching language is to help students select proper words, correct grammar and punctuation, as well as to become more aware of their writings rather than simply submitting assignments to their teachers (Davis & McGrail, 2009).

However, the students identified some problems with using Twitter, including that they sometimes had to deal with irrelevant topics in the tweets. The results indicated that the students struggled with many tweets written in an informal language, which confused them as to which form of language to

use. The students' struggles spring from their familiarity with teacher-dominated courses. Therefore, the students' autonomy had gone unnoticed at all stages of the study as the students probably viewed writing on Twitter as a task to be fulfilled to pass the course. This dilemma raises the issue of the stringent assessment criteria of traditional courses. Such courses make students merely knowledge receivers rather than knowledge seekers and makers. Teachers should be lenient and tolerant with their students' writing when using tools such as Twitter for teaching purposes.

In addition, the students reported that they faced many mistakes and errors in the tweets in the hashtag. Their preoccupation with error correction is understood in the sense that they are accustomed to the culture of exam-oriented courses and grades. However, errors, as stated earlier, are considered as signs of learning. Students can use the errors as starting points for learning new language items. The students further stated that sometimes they experienced anxiety, as they were not sure what to do with their incomplete thoughts. This problem is linked to the limited space provided by Twitter (280 characters). This result is in line with Carpenter's statement (2014) that the capacity of Twitter characters may inhibit writers from completing their thoughts.

The students made some suggestions for maximizing the benefits of using Twitter in their writing activities. They believed that training workshops on how to integrate Twitter in their assignments and how to deal with different situations and errors would be helpful. This suggestion shows the importance of careful planning by teachers. The students also suggested follow up discussion sessions to monitor their progress. This suggestion supports Lackovic et al.'s (2017) argument that teachers' careful planning is necessary to implement Twitter in the curriculum.

Limitations and implications

The study revealed a generally positive view of using Twitter in L2 and FL writing. This positive stance might be relevant in a similar context where students are in manageable class sizes. However, the results should not be generalized to other countries where accessibility to the internet is limited or not existed. Further, the results are reported from students' perspectives. Teachers' views should also be researched. Future efforts should look into the congruency between teachers' views and students' views. Also, gender-based studies should take place as this study focused only on male students

since female students have not been enrolled in our institute yet. More insightful understanding may be possible when comparing two different contexts, such as L1 writing and L2 writing. Also, researchers could compare students' writing on Twitter in the Arabic speaking countries and non-Arabic speaking countries. Furthermore, the researchers may compare students' writing using Twitter and other social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Parlor. We repeat the call for more qualitative based research to obtain a more profound understanding.

Other Arabic language skills could be tested when using Twitter, such as reading and listening, by attaching links to external resources or allowing the students to use their phone cameras and voice recorders. Also, future researchers could investigate vocabulary, which was not explored in the current study.

The implications for teachers and policymakers

Writing skills are essential and, consequently, students should be encouraged to write, even when they are likely to make mistakes. This approach maintains a balance between pushing students forward and having reasonable assessment measures. Teachers can assess writing according to general criteria related to a proper selection of topics and vocabulary, clarity of communication, and the fluency of writing. Teachers can tolerate common local errors (instead of the global ones) relevant to punctuation and confused spellings. Academic discourse is important but should not be overly emphasized for beginner writers.

Teachers should be cautious about the factors that lead to the writing activity. These factors include raising students' motivation, building and boosting their self-confidence, and enhancing their autonomy. The teachers should allow students to work at their own pace and make themselves available to assist students in need. Teachers should not deal with writing tasks in general or on Twitter as a final product. They can plan writing activities and discuss them with students, and the teachers can have follow-up sessions to provide the students with the necessary feedback.

Academic institutions and policymakers should invest in technology and encourage teachers to attend thorough professional development sessions to enable them to implement different technologies in their courses in order to come up with well-designed courses that are tailored to the necessary skills for job markets. The policymakers are expected to define the guidelines for teachers on how to implement technology in their courses and how to plan

and assess them appropriately. Thus, teachers can familiarize themselves with the Twitter platform as an essential part of their courses, not just an add-on.

Conclusion

This study aims to provide more insights into the use of Twitter in L2 and FL writing. It provides evidence for the benefits of using Twitter in the classroom. It suggests that decision-makers and teacher educators work in parallel to encourage teachers to facilitate the integration of the new technologies that someday may replace the traditional methods of teaching and learning. Our future students, the digital generation, deserve every effort we can make.

References

- Al-Adawi, S. (2019). Omani EFL written errors at a college level. In English language teaching research in the Middle East and North Africa (pp. 455-478). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Al Badi, I. A. H. (2015). Academic writing difficulties of ESL learners. The 2015 WEI international academic conference proceedings, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 65-78.
- Alshammari, S. (2020). "Writing to Learn or Learning to Write". A Critical Review of "English as a Foreign Language"(EFL) Teaching Practices in Writing in Saudi Universities. *Research in Education and Learning Innovation Archives*, (24), 1-22.
- Al-Jahwari, H. S., & Abusham, E. E. (2019). A theoretical framework for designing educational website based on scientific standards to non-native Arabic speakers. *International Journal of Engineering Business Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1847979019840500>
- Altakhaineh, A. R. M., & Al-Jallad, M. Z. (2018). The use of Twitter and Facebook in teaching mechanics of writing to Arabic-speaking EFL learners. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)*, 13(09), 4-14.
- Althobaiti, N. (2019). The feasibility of virtual classrooms in teaching Arabic for non-native speakers in Taif University. Paper presented at The First TU-KAICAL symposium on Documenting Saudi Efforts in Teaching Arabic for Non-native Speakers hosted by the College of Arts, Taif University, Taif
- Althobaiti, N. & Algethami, G. (2018). Engaging EFL Saudi tertiary students' writing skills by using Weblogs: Implications to EFL program development. *Menoufia University Faculty of Arts Journal*, 113 (29), 3-16.
- Althobaiti, N. (2015). Written corrective feedback: An EFL postgraduate perspective. In C. Gitsaki, M. Gobert & H. Demirci (Eds.) *Current issues in reading writing and visual literacy*. Cambridge Scholars: Cambridge Press.
- Althobaiti, N. (2014). Error correction in EFL writing: The case of Saudi Arabia, Taif University. *Journal of Modern Education Review*, 4(12), 1038-1053.
- Ammar, A. M. I. (2016). Tweetstorming in the language classroom: Impact on EFL tertiary students' ideational fluency and syntactic complexity. *Journal of Education*, 69(153), 1-36.
- Azzam, R. (1993). The nature of Arabic reading and spelling errors of young children. *Reading and Writing*, 5(4), 355-385.
- Bin-Tahir, S. Z. (2020). Blended learning approach in Arabic teaching for non-native speaker students. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.2-10-2018.2295458>
- Carpenter, J. (2014). Twitter's capacity to support collaborative learning. *International Journal of Social Media and Interactive Learning Environments*, 2(2), 103-118.

- Craig, D. (2012). Twitter for academic writing. Daniel Craig: a critical eye on education and technology [Blog post]. <http://www.danielcraig.com/2012/09/06/twitter-for-academic-writing-2/>
- Davis, A. P., & McGrail, E. (2009). The joy of blogging. *Educational Leadership*, 66(6), 74-77.
- Dommett, E. J. (2019). Understanding student use of Twitter and online forums in higher education. *Education and Information Technologies*, 24(1), 325-343.
- Duff, P. (2018). *Case study research in applied linguistics*. Routledge.
- Flick, U. (2020). *Introducing research methodology: Thinking your way through your research project*. Sage Publications Limited.
- GMI_Blogger (2019). Saudi Arabia social media statistics 2019 (Infographics) - GMI Blog. [online] Globalmediainsight.com. Available at: <<https://www.globalmediainsight.com/blog/saudi-arabia-social-media-statistics/>> [Accessed 9 August 2020].
- Graham, S. (2019). Changing how writing is taught. *Review of Research in Education*, 43(1), 277–303. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X18821125>
- Greenhalgh, S. P., Rosenberg, J. M., Willet, K. B. S., Koehler, M. J., & Akcaoglu, M. (2020). Identifying multiple learning spaces within a single teacher-focused Twitter hashtag. *Computers & Education*, 148, 103809.
- Hyland, K. (2020). The communication of expertise: changes in academic writing. In Gotti, M., Maci, S& Sala, M. (eds). *Scholarly pathways: Knowledge transfer and knowledge exchange in academia*. Bern: Peter Lang. pp 33-56.
- James, C. (2013). *Errors in language learning and use: Exploring error analysis*. Routledge.
- Jiménez-Muñoz, A. (2014). Quantity and quality: using Twitter in the ESP classroom. Paper presented at the TISLID'14 - Second International Workshop on Technological Innovation for Specialized Linguistic Domains: Lifelong Learning on the Move Conference, Ávila, Spain, 7-9 May, 2014.
- Kartal, G., & Korucu-Kis, S. (2020). The use of Twitter and Youglish for the learning and retention of commonly mispronounced English words. *Education and Information Technologies*, 25(1), 193-221.
- Kroll, B. M., & Schafer, J. C. (1978). Error-analysis and the teaching of composition. *College composition and communication*, 29(3), 242-248.
- Lackovic, N., Kerry, R., Lowe, R., & Lowe, T. (2017). Being knowledge, power and profession subordinates: Students' perceptions of Twitter for learning. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 33, 41–48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2016.12.002>.
- Leis, A. (2014). Encouraging autonomy through the use of a social networking system. *JALT CALL Journal*, 10(1), 69–80.

- Mompean, J. A., & Fouz-González, J. (2016). Twitter-based EFL pronunciation instruction. *Language Learning & Technology*, 20(1), 166–190.
- Morgan, H. (2014). Focus on Technology: Enhancing instruction and communication with Twitter: Hani Morgan. *Childhood Education*, 90(1), 75-76.
- Mukherjee, S., & Bhattacharyya, P. (2012). Sentiment analysis in Twitter with lightweight discourse analysis. In *Proceedings of COLING 2012* (pp. 1847-1864).
- Nasrullah, S., & Firdouse Rahman Khan, M. (2019). EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCES OF SAUDI STUDENTS - CASE STUDY: PRINCE SATTAM BIN ABDUL AZIZ UNIVERSITY. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, 7(5), 851-861. doi:10.18510/hssr.2019.75111
- Pratiwi, I. D., & Marlina, L. (2020). An analysis of abbreviation in Twitter status of Hollywood pop singers. *E-Journal English Language and Literature*, 9(1).
- Rosell-Aguilar, F. (2018). Twitter as a formal and informal language learning tool: From potential to evidence. *Innovative language teaching and learning at university: integrating informal learning into formal language education*, 99-106.
- Saaty, A. (2020). The rhetoric of Twitter in terms of the Aristotelian appeals (“Logos, Ethos, and Pathos”) in ESL/EFL educational settings. *English Language Teaching*, 13(5), 115-124.
- Saudi Vision 2030. (2020). *Vision of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia [Ebook]* (1st ed.). Riyadh. Retrieved 18 August 2020, from https://vision2030.gov.sa/sites/default/files/report/Saudi_Vision2030_EN_2017.pdf
- Schreiber, B. R., & Worden, D. (2019). “Nameless, faceless people”: How other teachers’ expectations influence our pedagogy. *Composition Studies*, 47(1), 57-72,219. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.sdl.idm.oclc.org/docview/2218165536?accountid=142908>
- Shin, Y. K., Cortes, V., & Yoo, I. W. (2018). Using lexical bundles as a tool to analyze definite article use in L2 academic writing: An exploratory study. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 39, 29-41.
- Signorini, A., Segre, A. M., & Polgreen, P. M. (2011). The use of Twitter to track levels of disease activity and public concern in the US during the influenza A H1N1 pandemic. *PloS one*, 6(5), e19467.
- Statista (2020). *Twitter: Most users by country | Statista*. [online] Statista. Retrieved 9 August 2020, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/242606/number-of-active-twitter-users-in-selected-countries/>
- Taif University (2020). *Faculty of Arts mission*. Retrieved 18 August 2020, from <https://www.tu.edu.sa/Ar/%D9%83%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A2%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A8/93/Pages/20379/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9>

- TUGA. (2020). Deanship of Supportive Studies - Taif University graduates' attributes. Retrieved 18 August 2020, from <https://www.tu.edu.sa/En/%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%A9/108/Pages/21941/%D8%B3%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AC%D9%8A-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%81>
- Twitter (2020). About Twitter. Retrieved 10 June 2020, from <https://about.twitter.com/company>
- Watkins, D. C. (2017). Rapid and rigorous qualitative data analysis: The "RADaR" technique for applied research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917712131>
- Wu, Z. (2020). Tracing EFL writers' digital literacy practices in asynchronous communication: A multiple-case study. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 50, 100754.
- Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Sage publications.
- Zhang, M. (2019). Understanding L1 and L2 interaction in collaborative writing: A lexicogrammatical analysis. *Language Teaching Research*, 1362168819859911.

Appendix 1

Group Discussion Session

Place: Seminar Room, Third Floor, Teaching Arabic for Nor-Arabic Speakers Institute, Taif University

Time: 11:00 am to 1:00 pm

Day: Tuesday

Week: 3

Prompt questions:

- 1- What are the problems you have faced in the writing course?
- 2- What are the solutions for these problems?

Attendees:

Dr. Naif Althobaiti

Academic Affairs Coordinator

Three Teachers at the institute

Fifty-nine non-Arabic speaking students representing 9 nationalities: Somalia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippine, Senegal, Afghanistan, United Kingdom, India, Australia.

Appendix 2 written production examples

The students written productions were in Arabic. The tweets were copied and pasted to Microsoft word document and read carefully several times for the purpose of finding common themes. Thus, they were read, summarized, and translated into English, specifically the representative examples. The data analysis and coding process resulted in many tables showing the types and the frequency of the specified data. The data analysis and coding revealed many categories and types: words, sentences, discourses, and errors.

The students' written production started as they the researcher initiated the hashtag. Then students started writing consecutively. Screenshot 1 shows the researcher's initiation tweet and Screenshot 2 shows selected students' tweets.

Screenshot 1: The researcher's initiation of the hashtag



Screenshot 2: Some selected tweets by the students

٢٥٠٠ سبتمبر ٢٠١٨ @
 لا شك في أن الطائف هو مدينة جميلة . وكانت جمالاته لا تنتهي . والجو في الطائف معتدلا. وبيئة هنا في السلامة والامان والمطمئنة. لأجل هؤلاء الأسباب، شكرا لأن يعطيني فرصة للمواصلة الدروس هنا. طبعاً، سوف أجتهد في الدراسة. #أنا_أتعلم_العربية

١٣٠ أكتوبر ٢٠١٨ @
 #أنا_أتعلم_العربية/ فلاشك إن اللغة العربية هي لغة القرآن والقرآن كلام الله فهدوستور لسائر المسلمين ويستحق أن يكون شرفاً عندنا وينبغي للمسلم أن يتعلم العربية كما أنها لغة الرسل أجمعين، والأحاديث... وكيف يجهل عن هذه اللغة المحمدية؟؟؟
 أسأل الله تعالى أن يوفقنا جميعاً لتعلم...

٢٦٠ أكتوبر ٢٠١٨ @
 #أنا_أتعلم_العربية
 كثيرا ما نقضي أوقاتنا في الأحلام ولا نسعى أبداً لتحقيقها ، فالحياة هذه أكبر من أن نحس أنفسنا داخل كهوف الخيال والحلم .
 طرق النجاح محجوزة بالأشواك ، ولا بد أن نعبثها بدماء الشباب وقوة الأبطال ، ولا نلتفت إلى تلك السدود والأشواك .
 لا مستحيل تحت الشمس

١٥٠ أكتوبر ٢٠١٨ @
 عجبت من طلبة اليوم
 يتكاسلون في الدراسة* ومنشطون في النزول
 يتنافسون في العودة* ولا يتسابقون في الغدوة
 ينامون في الفصل* ويركزون في التلفاز
 #أنا_أتعلم_العربية
 وأقول للمجتهدين والمستجدين صبرا فلکم النجاح في المستقبل
 وقد أوصاني شيخ عن العلم وأنا في صغر
 تعب له في صغرك تستريح له للأبد

زرنّا اليوم حديقة الورد تحت إشراف كلية الآداب بجامعة الطائف. @١٠٠ أبريل ٢٠١٩

هذه الحديقة تقام عملية إنتاج المسك و أدوات التجميل المستفأة من الورد. وقد استعدت من هذا اللقاء بشكل كبير، واستمعت مع زملائي الطلاب. أشكر كل من شارك في هذا البرنامج المفيد، الذي سعدت به كثيرا.

#أنا_أتعلم_العربية



👤 ❤️ 🔄 ١

كل بلد تشتهر بأكلات ومشروبات معينة، و أفغانستان من البلدان التي تشتهر بالأكلات الشعبية المميّزة، عندما نساغر إلى ولاية معينة لا بد وأن نحرض على تناول أكلات معينة، وهنا عليكم أن تذكروا لنا أكلات الشعبية لا بد أن يتناوله الزائر عند زيارتكم. @٤٠ ديسمبر ٢٠١٩

#أنا_أتعلم_العربية



👤 ❤️ 🔄

Appendix 3 post interview

The post interview took place at the end of the semester. It had been sent via WhatsApp and emails to all the students who participated in the writing activity via Twitter.

The post interview investigated students' views on the use of Twitter in the Arabic writing course. They were asked these questions:

1. In your opinion, how do you see the use of Twitter in your writing course?
2. What are the advantages you obtained as result of using Twitter in your writing?
3. What are the hindrances that detain your benefit from using Twitter in writing?
4. What do you suggest in the future for the use of Twitter in writing course?

Appendix 4: Data analysis (codes and themes)

The errors, discourses, and sentences were written and highlighted in different colours to facilitate locating and counting them.

Simple sentences (Red)

Compound sentences (Dark Blue)

Complex sentences (Dark Red)

Semantic errors (Yellow highlighted)

Grammatical errors (Green highlighted)

Spelling errors (Red highlighted)

Punctuation errors (Purple highlighted)

إذا أنت كنت في قوم فالحب في إنائهم. هذا المثل يضرب على المقترب يعني إذا أنت في أنا أتعلم العربية#
مكان جديد
كيف معهم الناس

لا شك في أن الطائف هو مدينة جميلة . وكانت جمالاته لا تنتهي . والجو في الطائف معتدلاً . وبينه هنا في
السلامة والامان والمطمئنة؛ لأجل هؤلاء الأسباب، شكرا لأن يعطيني فرصة للمواصلة الدروس هنا. طبعاً، سوف أجتهد
أنا أتعلم العربية#. في الدراسة

فلاشك إن اللغة العربية هي لغة القرآن. والقرآن كلام الله فهو دستور لسائر المسلمين /أنا أتعلم العربية#
ويستحق أن يكون شرفاً عندنا وينبغي للمسلم أن يتعلم العربية كما أنها لغة الرسل أجمعين، والأحاديث... وكيف جهل عن
.. هذه اللغة المحمدية؟؟!! أسأل الله تعالى أن يوفقنا جميعاً لتعلم

نحن الان في أوان الاختبارات، أشعر بالتعب لأنني أحتاج أن اراجع عن جميع الكتاب . وبالرغم عن هذا،
أنا أتعلم العربية# سأجتهد؛ لأنني أثق أن من سلك طريقاً يلتمس فيه علماً سهل الله له طريقاً إلى الجنة

عجبت من طلبية اليوم ينكاسلون في الدراسة ومنشطون في النزول يتنافسون في العودة ولا يتسابقون في
وأقول للمجتهدين والمستجدين صبراً؛ فلکم النجاح أنا أتعلم العربية# الغدوة ينامون في الفصل ويركزون في التلفاز
في المستقبل وقد أوصاني شيخ عن العلم وأنا في صغر تعب له في صغرك تستريح له للأبد

بارك الله يا أباي الكريم، موضوع مهم جداً، ولا كن ممكن هذا الطلاب جديد في حياه السفر. او ممكن
مريض.

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته اسمي نعمان احمد و اسم ابي افتخار احمد، أنا من أنا أتعلم العربية#
افغانستان و الأن طالب في جامعه طائف، و نشكر كثير من المملكه العربيه السعوديه و خصوصاً من الجامعه طائف
الذي قبلنا في جامعه طائف، او تحترم كثير. جزاكم الله خير

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته، فالطائف مكان أمين وواقر وكذلك الجو معتدل اليوم يكون الجو بارداً لأن
أنا أتعلم العربية#. فصل الشتاء اقترب، وأشكر الله عزوجل قبلت بجامعة الطائف. الطالب: داود أسامة أمبولاً فليبيني