

SOCIAL MEDIA TREASURE HUNT – PRACTICAL LESSONS USING TWITTER IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

by **Terrill Reid McLain**

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies 81 Oedae Ro,
Mohyeon-myeon, Cheoin-gu, Yongin-si Gyeonggi-do, 17035
reidmclain@hufs.ac.kr : Twitter @ReidMcLain

1. Introduction

Today's students – a generation electronically connected since birth – are trying new innovative technology before they reach university. Integrating technology tools in classes has never been more accessible. Research supports using social media in the classroom to boost student engagement and is a good idea for many different subjects (Rheingold, 2008). As Abe and Jordan point out, the creation of intentional instruction regarding social media is key to advancing student learning (Abe & Jordan, 2013, p. 17). Rheingold furthers this assertion by saying; “Moving from a private to a public voice can help students turn their self-expression into a form of public participation” (Rheingold, 2008, p. 25). As Joosten, Pasquini, and Harness note in their 2013 article referring to the book *Social Media for Educators: Strategies and Best Practices*, “technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have the potential to enhance learning and strengthen instructors’ pedagogical practices” (Joosten, Pasquini, and Harness, 2013, p. 126; see Joosten, 2012). Moreover, students also demand intercultural experience as a result of the formation of the “global village” (Gullekson, Tucker, & Coombs Jr., 2011).

Recent research has shown that implementing social media can help foster these types of international communication interactions for students and can boost their perceived improvement with English vocabulary (Dashtestani, 2018). This translates into an opportunity for English classes to encompass activities that include social media to promote intercultural competence and conversation practice. Instructors can introduce these tools to boost engagement by mirroring the tools used in global interactions with favorite channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.

This practical paper explains the rationale behind using Twitter in class, outlines a pilot program that was done in South Korea, and provides two lesson plans that instructors can adapt using Twitter as the primary technology tool.

2. Choosing Twitter for a class activity

Choosing Twitter may seem counter-intuitive as a class choice for social media use as Facebook and YouTube remain the most popular platforms (Smith & Anderson, 2018), and of course there are ways to incorporate those tools into class. However, Twitter is the platform that is known for keeping up-to-date with news, stories, and events in real time. Twitter is an interactive tool that also enhances collaboration (Taskiran, Gumusoglu, & Aydin, 2018). As Parmar noticed,

We used Twitter, which has the benefit of being the most transparent big social network today. It also encourages back-and-forth conversation, unlike Facebook which tends to be a broadcasting medium. Moreover, Twitter is used by virtually all big Western companies either for marketing or to respond to customers – and sometimes both (Parmar, 2015, para. 6).

It is exposure to this kind of interaction that is the appeal for using tweets as a way to challenge students to interact with the target languages using news and other interactions in real time.

The idea of using Twitter is twofold one to teach social media or 21st century skills and two for students to practise communication in English anywhere instead of having to wait to interact in person (Taskiran et al., 2018, p. 103). Implementing Web 2.0 tools such as Twitter is easy because students are quick to adapt to the new technology (if they are not already using the platform) and many have noted positive experiences after the classes were finished; as Andy Jones (2013) found by adding Twitter elements to his literature class. Jones used Twitter for a literature class to facilitate discussions outside the classroom and found that there were definite improvements to other class elements including improved in-class discussions and better class attendance (Jones, 2013, p. 97). Giving credence to his project advocating that “more than anything else, what distinguishes a great class from an adequate class is the attitude of the participants” (Jones, 2013, p. 92).

Other research supports the use of Twitter for academic purposes. One study showed how using Twitter with exit tickets to facilitate formative assessment for literacy classes provided real-time feedback to instructors and ensured that more student voices were heard no matter the class size (Amaro-Jiménez, Hungerford-Kresser, & Pole, 2016). With the encouragement of the background information on the use of Twitter in classes, a pilot assignment was designed and implemented in a Business English Writing Class in South Korea.

3. The pilot assignment

The Twitter pilot assignment was designed as a long-term activity for a University Business English Writing class in South Korea. The rationale behind this comes from the idea that social media are more than an engagement booster for students; they are also a powerful business tool. As Mikolaj Piskorski implied to Alistair Davidson in a 2014 interview about his book *A Social Strategy: How We Profit from Social Media*, some companies have achieved their success through the use of social media (Davidson, 2014; Piskorski, 2014). Successful companies have changed their social media strategies from broadcasting (talking at) to engaging (talking with) their customers (Davidson, 2014, p. 42). Thus, students would benefit from learning how to use these tools while still at school. This is also why business communication textbooks dedicate chapters to discussion of social media as an integral part of business communication. Understanding and applying social media in business contexts is essential for university business students and their English business communication competencies.

The simple goal was to find a 21st century tool that was new to some of the students and have a way to practise and engage them in using English between classes. This assignment focuses on the “how-to” of using Twitter by leveraging the many functions and media possible with the service while still using English (except for one task). The assignment was facilitated over a six-week period and designed as a treasure hunt. Ten tasks were completed outside of class time. Table 1 is a list of the tasks used for treasure hunt assignment.

Table 1. Tasks used for pilot assignment

Task Number	Tweeted Instructions	Task Familiarity	Assignment Attribute
#TASK 1	#Task1 for #UniqueClassTag Take a selfie with yourself and at least one other person (more people is okay) with flowers or near #cherryblossom trees or at a coffee shop and #tweet the image to the class. Remember to use the #UniqueClassTag in all the posts you use for class.	Familiar	introduction, discovery, creativity,
#TASK 2	#Task2 for #UniqueClassTag Find a current event article in our discipline – business, technology, leadership, management, etc. – from an English News Service (No Korean News Sites). Tweet a link to the article and comment as to how it relates to Business Communication.	Unfamiliar/ Familiar	search, critical thinking, news, English language use
#TASK 3	#Task3 for #UniqueClassTag 👉 • find a classmate & ask a question . Two 👈 •choices 1 •)Reply to the Tweet from #Task2 with a question about the article. OR 2 •) Ask a question about midterm week. Answer & respond to each other [in	Familiar	memory, response, class content, dialogue, peer-to-peer

Task Number	Tweeted Instructions	Task Familiarity	Assignment Attribute
	English] make dialogue		
#TASK 4	#Task 4 for #UniqueClassTag Take a break from English Tweets, find some amazing KOREAN accounts and #follow them. Choose a Tweet from 1 (or more) of these accounts and make a response (한국말로) BONUS if the professional account answers you on Twitter!	Familiar	inquiry, response, interaction, data, learning the tool further in native language.
#TASK 5	#Task 5 for #UniqueClassTag Ask a question (related to business, communication, coding, blockchain – anything from our discipline) using the poll feature on Twitter. Vote on your classmates polls & re-tweet the polls to others. Bonus points if you can get more than 250 votes!	Unfamiliar	personal interest, engagement
#TASK 6	#Task 6 for #UniqueClassTag GO LIVE! on Twitter broadcast something interesting that you are doing or watching. Answer questions that come up on your broadcast from live watchers – any language. Broadcast should be more than 5 mins. Bonus points if you get 100 or more live watchers.	Unfamiliar	early adopting, new technology, social media trend
#TASK 7	#Task 7 for #UniqueClassTag Search the word #earthquake on Twitter and find the most recent earthquake (within the hour). 📌 • Steps --> Step 1 •)reply to this tweet where the earthquake is & Step 2 •) retweet the tweet you found to your followers	Familiar	search, life relevance, news, data, research
#TASK 8	#Task 8 for #UniqueClassTag Watch this video on #persuasion https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2dEuMFR8kw ... and reply to this message about your main takeaway from watching it.	Unfamiliar	personal voice, business, customer, inquiry
#TASK 9	#Task 9 for #UniqueClassTag Make a post of 4 pictures (of anything) on the SAME tweet and say something about them (be creative).	Familiar	social, interaction, personal, dialogue
#TASK 10	#Task 10 for #UniqueClassTag Use “Threaded Tweets” (https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/create-a-thread ...) to tell us your opinion about the value of different social media tools in business communication and explain how you personally can use Twitter in the future for your benefit.	Familiar	conclusion, creativity, personal, engagement

4. Lesson procedure

4.1. Setting up Twitter for classroom use:

This section is to help instructors set up Twitter for lessons. Many of these elements are shared with students when they set up their accounts. This list includes optional attributes and tools

that may help with the implementation of the lessons and help instructors manage the information efficiently. A list of the exact tools that were used in the pilot assignment can be seen in Table 2.

Necessary elements

- **Account Set-up:** Twitter accounts can be created by going to the Twitter homepage <https://twitter.com/> and registering for an account. Students can use their native language register. If a student is already using Twitter and does not want to use their account for class, encourage them to create a new account just for class. A unique email is required for each account that is made.
- **Choose a unique user name:** Create a unique username or “handle” the “@” name that becomes the address people can find the account. By default, Twitter creates one that is long with a mismatched combination of letters and numbers, but it is only meant to be temporary.
- **Fill out a short bio:** Create a short and simple bio, place a quick bio of who you are and perhaps some interests and hobbies.
- **Upload a profile and background picture:** Use a profile picture and a background photo to personalize your profile.
- **Have students follow each other:** Twitter works best when accounts follow each other. Since many of the students are new to Twitter they will not have many followers or be following many accounts yet. Having students follow each other helps class collaboration. Students can always choose to “unfollow” when class is finished.
- **Custom Hashtag:** For all Tweets, create a unique class hashtag – a method of adding a “#” mark before a word for easy search – should be used (e.g. #Eng101HUFS). A hashtag for the task number should also be used (e.g. #Task). This will help students and instructors find the relevant Tweets for the assignment. Including the hashtag is necessary to find and keep the assignments organized.
- **Private Account Notes:** The pilot assignment was tested with university aged students and is most appropriate for older students (i.e. adults) because of the public nature of Twitter. Twitter is public by default and works best with a public account. If a student is adamant about a private account, make sure they are following everyone in class and allow everyone in class too see their Tweets at least during the semester or they will be unable to fully participate. Private accounts make Twitter behave more like Facebook, however, it is only one way to use Twitter with high school students.

Optional Elements

- **3rd Party Scheduling Tool:** Third party scheduling tools such as Buffer or Hootsuite can be helpful for allowing instructors to set up and schedule the desired Twitter tasks ahead of time so that focus can be on interacting and replying to students. The tool used for the pilot lesson was Hootsuite and all of the Tweets were scheduled in advance.
- **Lesson “Branding”:** This is also optional but using consistent images on the different tasks and questions can help students identify and find the tweets easier. Many professional Twitter chats use images to disseminate the questions. Use graphic software such as Canva or Photoshop to create images that are consistent and fit the class style. Examples shown in *Figures 2 and 3*.
- **Emoji Use:** Not for everyone but using emojis may help with engagement and one way to beat the character limitations of Twitter.
- **Gathering Data:** This is also optional but can be very helpful for keeping track of all the activities. Using a combination of the app IFTTT (If This Then That) and Google Sheets; create an “applet” that automatically adds Tweets with a specific hashtag to a Google Spreadsheet.

Table 2. Technology tools used in pilot assignment

Technology	Website	Used For	Who Used	Optional?
Twitter	http://twitter.com	Main assignment tool: Tweeting, searching, lists, live, photos, polls and other tools were used.	Instructor/Student	NO
Hootsuite (Or other scheduling tool)	http://hootsuite.com	Used to schedule the 10 tweets automatically over a 5 or 6-week period.	Instructor	YES
Google Sheets	https://www.google.com/sheets/about/	Used to collect tweets with the specific class hashtag.	Instructor	YES
IFTTT	https://ifttt.com	The tool that ties Twitter with Google sheets to collect the data. With the class hashtag	Instructor	YES
Adobe Spark (Or another graphic tool)	https://spark.adobe.com	Social graphic app for iPhone and Android that was used for assignment photos and branding	Instructor	YES
Note: All students in this particular class had their own mobile phones, with different operating systems and used them for the assignment.				NO

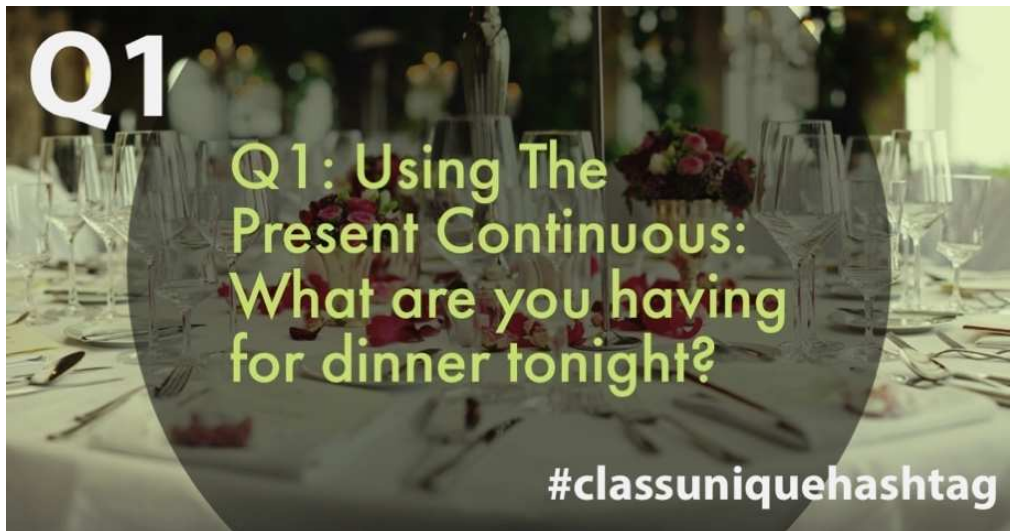


Figure 1. Branding example question in Graphic (Twitter Chats)



Figure 2. Branding Example - Question Number Graphic (Used in pilot assignment)

4.2. Using Twitter

If an instructor is new to Twitter, it is a good idea to “play” around with the service for a few weeks before implementing it with students to become familiar with how it works. Students will ask for help when they are setting up their own accounts and may need guidance with some of the basics. There are more instructions and help at Twitter website and a simple Google search will also help if confusion arises. The following are some basic terms to use with lessons.

Basic Tweeting Terms:

- **Feed** - Where the messages or “Tweets” appear

- **Tweet** - A message posted on Twitter that is a maximum of 280 characters (Originally 140). It can be text only, or include links, images, and videos.
- **Followers** - The accounts that follow a given account
- **Following** - The accounts that a given account is following
- **Reply** - A response to a tweet
- **Re-Tweet** - A forwarding of a specific tweet to a given account's followers, the account's followers see the original tweet from the original account
- **Re-Tweet with Quote** - A forwarding of a specific tweet to a given account's followers, the account's followers see the response before the nested original tweet
- **Likes** - A simple way to acknowledge a tweet without replying or retweeting
- **Search** - Twitter's powerful tool to find topics and interests
- **Polls** - A questionnaire that can be posted to followers to find out more information. At the time of this paper the polls can have up to four options and available for seven days.
- **Live** - A broadcasting tool that allows accounts to broadcast live video to followers
- **Twitter Threads** - This is a newer attribute (as of 2017) tool that Twitter implemented that allows longer threads of tweets to be tied together
- **Twitter Chats** - These are scheduled events where users are online answering and asking questions at the same time

4.3. Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan Outline 1: Treasure Hunt/Scavenger Hunt*

Language Level: Variable

Age: University/Adult Learners with Twitter accounts

Duration: Single class period duration (1-2 hours), up to a semester-long ongoing activity

Subject: Adaptable/Flexible

Objectives:

- To leverage the real-time genuine information available on Twitter for class English practice in relation to class topics.
- To add engaging English practice (reading, writing, and speaking) between class times

Materials needed:

- Mobile devices with cameras, microphones, access to the internet, and ability to download the Twitter app

Preparation:

- Instructors and students set up accounts on Twitter and complete profiles
- Establish unique class/lesson hashtag
- Create the tasks appropriate for the class ahead of time using word processing software (see task examples in Table 1 and Table 3)
- Inform students of the duration of the hunt and number of tasks that need to be completed. Suggested minimum of 5 tasks, maximum is up to the instructor and the time allotted for the activity and comfort level of the students.

Implementation:

- Tweet the tasks: Schedule the tweets ahead of time using a scheduler, or manually tweet the chosen tasks when ready.
- Students complete and respond to the tasks.
- When the activity is finished have students prepare a written reflection.

Table 3. Task examples

Twitter Functions	Task	Skills Used
Standard Tweet	[add task number hashtag] Take a picture of something beautiful, post it on Twitter and explain why you chose the subject [add your unique class hashtag]	Writing, creativity
Search and Re-Tweet with comment	[add task number hashtag] Find an article linked on Twitter, retweet with a comment about your main takeaway from your reading [add your unique class hashtag]	Reading, critical thinking.
Reply	[add task number hashtag] 1. Watch this video [add Video Link] 2. Reply to this Tweet about your favorite part of the video. [add your unique class hashtag]	Writing, listening
Live Video	[add task number hashtag] Find someone in class, and “Go Live” on Twitter and practice the dialogue from class [add your unique class hashtag]	Speaking and listening
Tweet and Reply	[add task number hashtag] Find a classmate on Twitter and ask them a question in English, respond to each other and have a written dialogue [add your unique class hashtag]	Writing

Lesson Plan Outline 2: Scheduled “Twitter Chat” ***Language Level:** Variable**Age:** University/adult Learners with Twitter accounts (Younger learners – high school – with protected Twitter accounts see Section 4.1)**Duration:** 1 hour scheduled – there may be responses outside of the schedule time.**Subject:** Adaptable/Flexible – questions can match what is asked in class.**Objectives:**

- To schedule English practice online using Twitter between classes

Materials needed:

- Computer with internet ability and access to Twitter or a mobile device access to the internet, and ability to download and use the Twitter app
- Graphic app or service to create the create the accompanying graphics for the question tweets.

Preparation:

- Instructors and students set up accounts on Twitter and complete profiles
- Establish a unique chat hashtag
- Create the questions and graphics for the chat
- If using a scheduling tool schedule the chat

Implementation:

- Begin tweeting the questions starting at the scheduled time and finish by the scheduled end time
- Respond, re-tweet, and like the answers from chat participants

Table 4. Twitter chat definitions

Twitter Chat Code	Definition	Location	Who Uses
Q	Symbol used to indicate a question for the chat	NA (needs to have a number)	Chat host (instructor)
Q1	Symbol used for a question, with the addition of a number that corresponds to a question.	Beginning of Tweet	Chat host (instructor)
A	Symbol used to indicate an answer for the chat	NA (Needs to have a number)	The participants (students)
A1	Symbol used for a question, with the addition of a	Beginning of	The participants

Twitter Chat Code	Definition	Location	Who Uses
	number that corresponds to	Tweet	(students)
#ChatHashTag	Unique identifier for the class chat (should be included in every tweet for the chat)	End of Tweet	Chat host (instructor) and the participants (students)

4. Student feedback

At the end of the pilot assignment students from the class were given a questionnaire using Google Forms and 33 students responded. Many of these students did not use Twitter before the class. Students' understanding of how to use Twitter gradually progressed from the majority not understanding very well it at the beginning of the assignment, to the majority understanding it very well end of the assignment. The class' perceptions of the value of Twitter was mixed, with some giving it high value and some giving low value. However, the majority (60.6%) placed a high value on learning via social media with most of the students feeling that learning about Twitter. The turning point for many students in their understanding of the value of the exercise in their own life was the live video activity; they were able to see real-time video from other students.

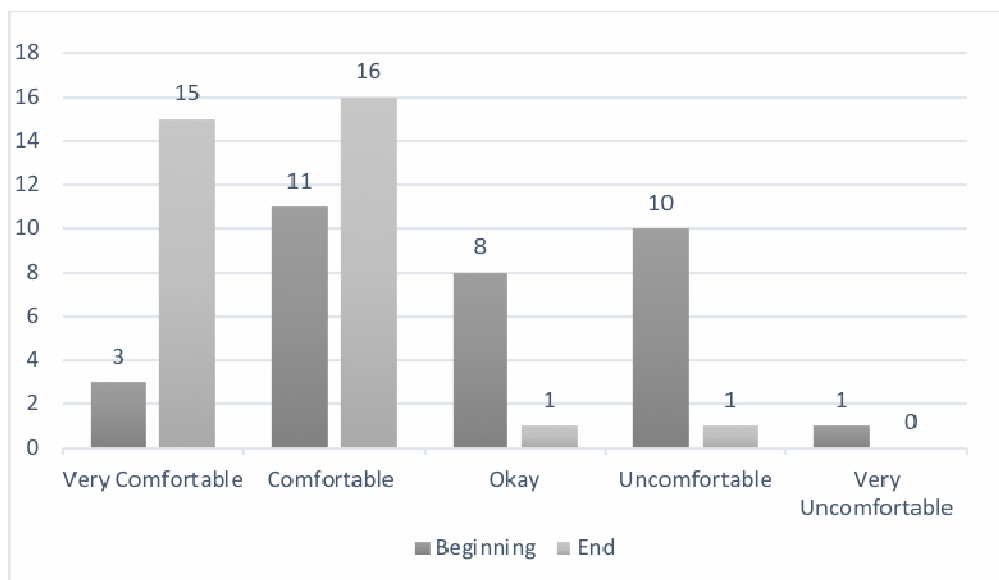


Figure 3. Twitter comfort level compared before and after assignment

5. Conclusion

The goals of the pilot program were to find a tool that was easy to use that students could practice using English between classes and relate them to class topics – outside a regular study

session. This simple evaluation is only the beginning. Looking further with Twitter and Social Media, these early results suggest that experiential and practical assignments that include learning a new technology may help students in other areas. More comprehensive studies that cover a more robust and diverse sample are needed; topics that can be looked at a range from language acquisition and English testing to cultural barriers and international communication. If more instructors are implementing social media-especially Twitter-in their classes, these research questions can be explored.

References

- Abe, P., & Jordan, N. A. (2013). Integrating social media into the classroom curriculum. *About Campus*, 18(1), 16-20. doi:10.1002/abc.21107
- Amaro-Jiménez, C., Hungerford-Kresser, H., & Pole, K. (2016). Teaching with a technological twist: Exit tickets via Twitter in literacy classrooms. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 60(3), 305-313. doi:10.1002/jaal.572
- Dashtestani, R. (2018). Collaborative academic projects on social network sites to socialize EAP students into academic communities of practice. *Teaching English with Technology*, 18(2), 3-20. Retrieved from <http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-1cd27fcc-3597-4da7-973c-04b8ca337fed/c/ARTICLE1.pdf>
- Davidson, A. (2014). Harvard professor Mikolaj Piskorski's research-based social media business development model. *Strategy & Leadership*, 42(4), 40-44. doi:10.1108/SL-06-2014-0043
- Gullekson, N. L., Tucker, M. L., & Coombs Jr, G. (2011). Examining intercultural growth for business students in short-term study abroad programs: Too good to be true? *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, 22(2), 91-106. doi:10.1080/08975930.2011.615672
- Jones, A. (2013). How Twitter saved my literature class: A case study with discussion. *Teaching Arts and Science with the New Social Media*, 3, 91-105. doi:10.1108/S2044-9968(2011)0000003008
- Joosten, T. (2012). *Social Media for Educators: Strategies and Best Practices*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Retrieved from <http://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=fdy-RQuLoSsC&oi=fnd&pg=PR11&dq=Social+Media+for+Educators&ots=LSIPGqmvly&sig=sFeOr49bJkPG8EPKbJi09HIIbgg>
- Joosten, T., Pasquini, L., & Harness, L. (2013). Guiding social media at our institutions. *Planning for Higher Education*, 41(2), 125-135. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/openview/9976f73a5a87c506843183dc884b0791/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=47536>
- Parmar, B. (2015). 50 companies that get Twitter – and 50 that don't. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2015/04/the-best-and-worst-corporate-tweeters>
- Piskorski, M. J. (2014). *A Social Strategy: How We Profit from Social Media*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Retrieved from <https://market.android.com/details?id=book-WY6rAgAAQBAJ>
- Rheingold, H. (2008). Using social media to teach social media. *New England Journal of Higher Education*, 23(1), 25-26.

- Smith, A., & Anderson, M. (2018). Social media use in 2018. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/>
- Taskiran, A., Gumusoglu, E. K., & Aydin, B. (2018). Fostering foreign language learning with Twitter: Reflections from English learners. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 19(1), 100-116. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1165854.pdf>