Students’ Perception on the Use of Twitter to Learn English: 
a Preliminary Study

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ABSTRACT
The advanced and continual technology development leads social media like Twitter as a daily life style. The implementation of it into language learning is a trend nowadays. This study attempts to examine students’ perception toward the use of Twitter to learn English. This research was conducted using qualitative method. The data were obtained through in-depth interview with students of English Education Department of Universitas Islam Indonesia, who are active users of Twitter. The findings showed that students have positive perception and attitude toward the use of Twitter to learn English. It also revealed that students believe that Twitter is an online platform which is helpful for English learning especially for vocabulary building, grammar, writing and reading skill. In addition, Twitter helps students increasing their confidence in using English in their daily life.

Keywords: social media, Twitter, English learning

I. INTRODUCTION

As an EFL (English as Foreign Language) country, students in Indonesia have learnt English for at least 6 years due to English was one of mandatory subjects in their previous higher school. Students have studied English skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing. Unfortunately, this situation does not guarantee that all students are having good skill of English afterwards. There is a gap between speaking ability and English competence of Indonesian students due to some factors such as imbalance between teaching and practicing, also the use of conventional method as teachers’ teaching style in the classroom for the majority of time [1]. English teachers in Indonesia may be hesitant to provide more various teaching style in the classroom as they were not aware of it.

Another problem of Indonesian English learners is that their writing competence in English was not excellent. When students are assigned to do some writing task like making a short descriptive paragraph, they tend to make mistakes easily in term of word spelling, grammar or sentence errors. The Indonesian English learners are having weakness in their writing skill [2].

Students also found difficulties on getting practice of their English in the classroom due to time limitation. The learning process was only about two hours to left once or two meetings weekly. Possibly, the limited allocated time for English learning becomes another challenges for both teacher and students. Some teachers may understand about it and have already used some strategies to overcome that situation. However, do all teachers in Indonesia aware about it and provide those kind of appropriate strategies? The answer may states no due to most Indonesian English teachers are in their age to retire. It is stated that old-English teachers tend to be bold, reluctant and strict to use lecturing method only instead of using fun way to learn English in the classroom.

Moreover, most of students especially in Universitas Islam Indonesia admitted that they have major problem in English in which relates to vocabulary. This information gained through a random unstructured interview to students in universitas Islam Indonesia. Surprisingly, the students who said it are majoring in English study program. English students supposed to be more familiar and understand numerous vocabularies ideally in order to perform better understanding in English skills. The real situation states it contrastly. Although students had already learnt English for couples of years and continue to learn English in the university, it seem that it does not guarantee their competence of English is in advanced level. It can be concluded that the majority of students have low level of English vocabulary.

Those problems above indicate that English learning process in Indonesian classroom were not running effectively for aiming competence as native-like users of English. In solving several problems stated before, as Indoensian learners of English in this 21st century era where technology such as gadget, laptop and internet connection become an obligatory thing in everyday life and social media is life-style, that can be a solution to implement social media like Twitter into language learning of English. It is stated that learning through online media like social media provides a real world learning experience for students. Some studies have proved that technology can help language learning in better way. Technology could make students to be more active in their learning [3].
Twitter as one of social media and part of product in technological development seems quite relevant to approach those problems in English learning because in accordance of familiarity and authenticity with students. It is claimed that there are around 70.0 million users of active social media users for total in Indonesia [4]. Students are a part of them. The use of Twitter in English language learning in Indonesia as an exposure beyond classroom wall is still in early stage and limited. There is no research focusing on it yet. Therefore it encourage the writers to conduct this study to give more insight about this topic.

Twitter as social media provides quick or real-time information and user-friendly platform for its users. This research focused on students’ perception on the use of Twitter to learn English. In this study, Twitter plays a role as a tool to help Indonesian learner of English to do studying outside the classroom and as a form of strategy implemented by students. Thus, the authors are aiming to answers two research questions: 1) how Twitter is used to learn English by English Education students at Universitas Islam Indonesia? and 2) What is students perception on the use of Twitter to learn English?

The authors hope to provide some knowledge and information to some parties like English teachers or lectures, other researchers, and English department through this study. It may be useful for English teachers or lectures to know that their students will be learn better when they implementing technology in language learning. Other researchers may also gain benefit from this research to conduct similar further study with different participant and context. Also, the English department may consider their English curriculum to make it be more technology-based after read the result of this research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The authors are going to explain about the related literature, studies and the theoretical framework of this research in this chapter.

a. Twitter as Web 2.0 technologies

There are many kinds of Web 2.0 technologies or social networking that are happening in recent times. Web 2.0 is a tool that allows people to gain or access information in second over the internet based on friendships [5]. Then, Twitter has definition as a Multiplatform Web 2.0, part of social networking and microblogging tool, freely accessibly on the Web [6].

Twitter is a microblogging system that limits its users to post no more than 140 characters, which translate into one or at most three sentences [7]. Twitter is also the youngest microblogging which is established around eleven years ago and considered as the most used microblogging nowadays [8]. In similar, Twitter also defines as a microblogging service to communicate with others by describing the current condition of the user through twitter posting called tweet [9]. Twitter is very popular [10]. As a consequence of its popularity and features, this social media platform has recently been incorporated in some learning environments to promote a fast exchange of ideas, brainstorming, or reflective thinking [11]. In this research the writers use the definition of Twitter as ‘one of the latest social networking that has been widely-adopted and used for additional resource to support language learning and teaching.

Twitter was created in March 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Evan William, Biz Stone and Noah Glass. The user of Twitter known as ‘twitterers’ and each post on Twitter called ‘Tweet’. Twitter enables its user to tweet in short but in real-time. The twitterers share and get information from other users based on what have they followed.

b. English learning in Indonesia

English is a second language for the majority people in Indonesia. It means that English is learned by Indonesian students. As a consequence of English as A foreign language (EFL) English is only used in learning process. For students, they learn English in the school from secondary level and up due to English become one of compulsory subject. Although the length of English study for students in range from three to six years, the real situation is not all of them have a good English competencies. Indonesian students can understand the written form of English well. In contrast, they tend to be hesitant when it comes to English speaking for communication in real-world situation. This is as a result of imbalance teaching English component and skills in which speaking used to left behind [12].

There some reasons that make Indonesian students having low of English competencies especially in the speaking and listening skill. First, English was learned by students in traditional way in which the English teacher stands in front of the class for the whole time and give explanation to students. This way of teaching called lecturing style. It is also called as teacher-centered teaching. Teacher is the main and only source of information for students when learning in the classroom. The students’ participation considered as less and limited. This kind of teaching style is the dominant mode in Indonesia for some years [13].

Second, sometimes the instructional language in the English classroom was mainly in Bahasa Indonesia or bilingual. There are not many teachers who used full English in the classroom as their language of teaching. Not
only English teachers in the school but also Indonesian English lectures perhaps more prefer to use Bahasa Indonesia instead of English. The English is used less than Indonesian in the classroom for possibly \[14\]. Therefore, the input for students in English was not maximal.

A. English learning in Indonesia

The implementation of Twitter in language learning of English seems provide potential uses. Twitter offers a platform for quick communication that could play a role as a catalyst for language learning by means of improving target language communicative ability \[15\]. It is claimed that Twitter has numerous benefits in educational use such as Twitter is able to be used as instructional tool in higher education \[16\]. It offers asynchronous interaction and learning for the users and followers \[17\]. Moreover, Twitter as a social networking allows high engagement, participatory. As in English language learning, Twitter could be used in the classroom or beyond. The role of Twitter may be various from a tool of input and practice of production while learning English language. There are four main advantage of using Twitter in the EFL classroom such as 1) communicating class content, 2) sending out small, timely pieces of information, 3) encouraging collaboration and feedback and 4) encouraging concise writing \[18\].

Some studies have proved that Twitter seems having usefulness in language teaching and learning. A study conducted by Mervat which examined the effect of Twitter on EFL learning has shown positive result \[19\]. The study investigated 60 female students in the Qassim University with using experimental methods. The finding showed that Twitter influenced students’ writing skill and some aspects of writing like ideas and content, organization, voice and style improved due to Twitter use as additional tool in learning.

A similar study done by Adam acar and Nanako kimura investigated the use of Twitter as a tool for English language learning of Japanese students \[20\]. The research used a quantitative method which analyzing and categorizing tweets from 70 students user of Twitter in Japan by using hashtag '#twinglelish'. The result of this research found that tweets about greeting is the most frequent tweet that students post due to it is simple and a trigger of communication. In addition, this study also identify that students’ motivation in learning English through Twitter is considerably as good.

III. METHOD

This section will explain about 1) scope of the study which includes participants, context and variables and 2) data collection and analysis.

A. Scope of the study

1. Participants

In the research, the participants are three students of English Education Department at Universitas Islam Indonesia who are in their third year of study in the university. The writers implement purposeful sampling on selecting the participants for this study. The purposeful sampling defines as the researcher selects a site or participant with intention for gaining understanding about the topic that has been studied \[21\]. The selection of participants for this study is based on some considerations. The first, all the participants are having account in Twitter and using it actively for learning English. This study investigates Students perception on the use of Twitter to learn English and the participants supposed to be the Twitter users for sure. There was also a consideration about the length of using Twitter for students who participate in this study. Second, the whole participants have good understanding of English in the classroom and recommended by their English lecturer. The three students who participate in this study have GPA more than 3.25 of 4.00. The third reason related to accessibility, time and permission. The whole participants are easy to access, to gain permission and to set the time for interview due to they are at the same department with the researchers.

2. Context

The research is conducted in English Education Department of Universitas Islam Indonesia in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This department offers ICT-based curriculum in their English learning process. There are three English students as the participants of this study. The age of students is in range of 19-20 years old. All of them are in their sixth semester this year. The participants are female English students who use twitter actively but having different length of time in using Twitter. The data are gained form in-depth interviews individually for each of them and through document analysis about their tweets.

3. Variables

This study constructs three main variables which are 1) student perception, 2) learning English become the dependent variables and 3) the use of Twitter as the independent variable.

B. Data Collection and analysis

This study proposed a qualitative study. The writers use two kinds of data collection techniques of qualitative study which are in-depth interview and document analysis. A qualitative study collection is
gathering data in form of word (text) or image (picture) with general from at least one individual [22]. The samples of this research are students of English Education Department of Universitas Islam Indonesia.

The main data of this research was achieved through in depth interview with the participants. The researchers used semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interview is less flexible that the writer predetermined the question and direct the interview more closely also enable to extend the questions during the interview [23]. The writers also used documents analysis to support the main data which are participants’ tweets and their score in Listening and Speaking for daily communication subject.

The researchers conduct three interviews with each participant in different time and location for aiming to reveal their perception on the use of Twitter to learn English in depth. All the interviews were delivered in Bahasa Indonesia. This is because the participant felt more comfortable in Bahasa Indonesia than speaking in English because they could more expressed their feelings. The questions asked during the interview are the adaptation version of interview questions from a study conducted by Ilker Yakin and Hasan Tinmaz [24]. However, the writers do some adaptations in order to make it more relevant with the context and participant of this study. The interview question consists of thirteen questions which reflect the variables of this research.

Thus, the gathered information and data are analyzed using qualitative approach. In the process of analysis, it includes collecting the data, coding the data, comparing the data, making interpretation and writing a report of findings. The authors do all process above simultaneously in the purpose to providing informative and reliable research findings.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The result of this study provided some knowledge and insight regarding the use of Twitter to learn English. The findings of this research explained into three themes for discussion. They are 1) Knowledge and use of Twitter, 2) perception on Twitter as English learning tool and 3) strategies on using Twitter to learn English. The explanation of each theme is below.

A. Knowledge and use of Twitter

In term of knowledge about Twitter, each participant of this study is having good understanding about Twitter due to they already known Twitter since in high school. They are active users of Twitter for some years back and still using it until right now. Regarding the features and how to use Twitter, all students are already familiar with it well. Two participants said that they knew Twitter from internet by their own and one student was introduced to twitter by her friend. The participants access twitter by using Twitter application that has been installed on their mobile phone with English as the language that they used in Twitter.

The purpose of participants in using Twitter focused on two major themes, communication and getting/sharing information. The participants of this study explained that they search and read news in Twitter to keep them update on information related to their interests. One student told that she interested to read about trending topic news in national or international for example news about the previous president election in the United Stated.

From the document analysis, the students’ activities in Twitter mostly are read tweets or article, make tweets and give comments on other tweets. All students particularly make tweets about their interests, daily activities, or expressing their feelings.

Generally, the participants like Twitter much. However, in specific, they still have some aspects of Twitter that they like and dislike as well. Regarding to aspects of twitter that they like, the students identified several positive aspects of Twitter. Students 1 indicates the aspects of twitter that they like as in term regarding the contents or information in Twitter which is always fresh and new. Twitter is more simple, user-friendly and eye-catching in the design and display. While the students 2 said that ‘write a tweet’ feature is what she like the most on Twitter as she love to express her opinion in form of writing. By simply answering the question ‘What’s happening?’ in Twitter could make her happy because she wants to tweet as much as possible she can. It is her main reason as she decided to use Twitter. Furthermore, student 3 focused more on the feature ‘retweet’. She described that retweet is simple and can indicate which tweet is important or not depending on the number of people who retweet that tweet. She also mentioned that she love the timeline of Twitter.

As for aspect that they dislike in Twitter, student 1 does not like some advertisements that appear in her timeline in Twitter. In similar, student 2 also does not like the feature of ‘friend recommendation’ and advertisement in Twitter. While for the student 3, she tends to have no feature that she dislike in Twitter.

The length of students’ use in Twitter varied from three years as the minimum to five years. This information is shown in table 1. Furthermore, the frequent of access in Twitter was various. The two students stated that they access Twitter more often at their leisure times like before bed-time or weekend while one student open twitter 2-6
times in a day. The students spend at least one hour in Twitter daily.

### TABLE 1. THE LENGTH OF TWITTER USAGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Duration of using</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### B. Perception on Twitter as English learning tool

In this research, students’ perceptions about Twitter as English learning tool were mostly positives. All the participants feel that Twitter is a good and helpful tool for learning English. They love to use twitter to learn English because it was fun and exciting way of learning yet simple enough.

Besides, the students also give support to the use of Twitter in order to learn English. One student stated that Twitter is good for learning English independently outside the school. It offers direct practice for the target language within the real world situation with friends or even English native speakers. So, she can get experience to communicate with foreigner friends. This is an example for students to use social media in wise and helpful way for learning as well as interacting with friends.

Also, the other student emphasized that it is interesting to use Twitter in English language learning. She added that Twitter is really helpful as the input of target language. The students 3 also had similar statement about the use of twitter to learn English. She explained that it is extremely good idea to implement Twitter in English learning. Twitter could be used as one of exposure especially for increasing reading and writing competencies. She gave rate of Twitter quality to learn Enlish in 8 point of 10.

Basically, they feel at easy and happy when to use twitter to learn English.

#### C. Strategies on using Twitter to learn English

There are several strategies used by the students founded in this research. Each of participants had their own different way of using Twitter to learn English.

The students 1 focused more on using Twitter as a tool for practicing writing skill and enhancing vocabulary. For vocabulary acquisition, she used to read other tweets and article in her timeline. When she finds a new word that she unfamiliar with, then, she open the dictionary to check the meaning of that word. She also tried to pronounce the word several times until she understands well. In order to be more familiar with the word, she makes tweet as practice using that word as the last effort of learning. She noticed that type of vocabulary in Twitter is the majority related to daily activities. In addition, she also learned about grammar when doing some tweets. Besides, she cited by posting tweets in English frequently, she gained more confidence to use English in her daily life.

Similarly, the student 2 used Twitter for developing vocabulary and writing skill comprehension. The strategy that she used is she followed only twitter users who considerate as native-like speaker of English in which the English skill is really good based on her observation and opinion. Next, she learned from those tweets about the grammar and vocabularies. She delivered that the vocabulary is not only about daily vocabulary but also academic vocabulary but in less number. She noticed that in Twitter she can do peer-learning and peer-review with their friends. As example, when she makes some grammatical errors in her tweets, sometimes her friend will correct it and give the right form or sentence. This student defined Twitter as free-writing platform.

As for the student 3, there is no much difference regarding the skill that she emphasized to be better through Twitter. It is vocabulary and reading skill. She revealed that from Twitter she know how to be critic and selective when reading articles.

Particularly, the students do not find impactful problems when using twitter to learn English. They realized that students should know how to filter some inappropriate words that may appear in their timeline. To do so, students are suggested to follow some educational twitterers only and be aware about slang or negative English words.

In the end of interview session, the interviewees admitted that their English developed significantly after using Twitter. Also, they wanted to keep using Twitter to learn English for the upcoming days due to Twitter is an easy tool for getting entertainment and learning English and the features are simple, interesting and real-time information.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The purposes of this research were to reveal students’ perception on the use of Twitter to learn English and to investigate how students used twitter to learn English. It has been confirmed by this study that students have positive perception and attitude toward the use of Twitter to learn English. It is believed that Twitter can be used as a tool for English learning.
Furthermore, students used Twitter only at their leisure time or outside the classroom. The findings of this research found that Twitter is helpful to increase vocabulary, learn grammar and writing, reading and confidence to use English.

REFERENCES