

Promoting the Equity of the Student Learning Experience

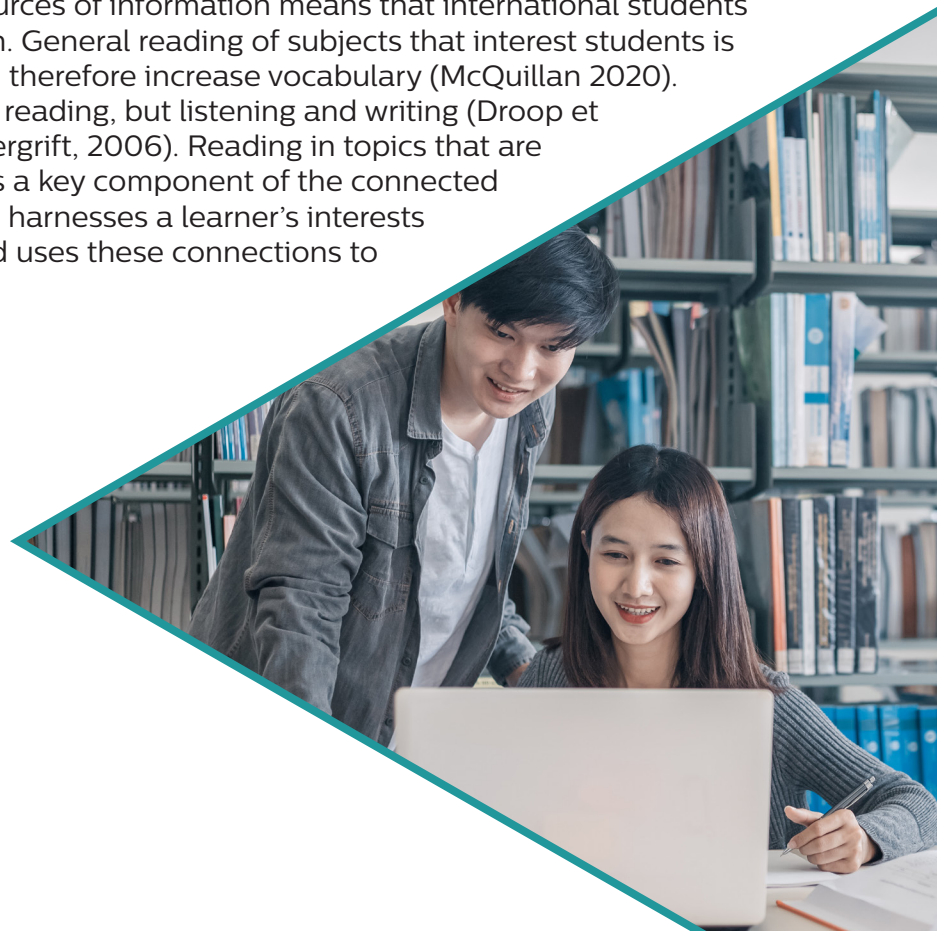
Case Study 9: Using Twitter to promote digital literacy

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What was the issue?

When students study internationally, most universities now have facilities that support students making this transition. One area often overlooked is providing assistance to students in adjust to their new digital environment. Studies show that many international students continue to use information sources in their first language, meaning they miss the opportunity to engage with the digital environment in their new country (Chang et al, 2021). Therefore, access to digital venues in their new country of study such as forums for professional communities of practice, which are an increasingly important aspect of academic belonging in subjects such as law, science and teaching, are not accessed by international learners (Barton & Potts, 2013).

In addition to missing the opportunity to participate with their target community of practice, continuing to use their first language sources of information means that international students miss valuable reading practice in English. General reading of subjects that interest students is an effective way to improve reading and therefore increase vocabulary (McQuillan 2020). Vocabulary size correlates with not only reading, but listening and writing (Droop et al, 2003) (Stoffelsma et al, 2020) (Vandergrift, 2006). Reading in topics that are of interest to students on social media is a key component of the connected learning approach (Ito et al 2020) which harnesses a learner's interests to connect to social networks online and uses these connections to support educational attainment.



How was it solved?

During Pre-session English for Academic Purposes courses at the Language Centre, a Twitter curated list is integrated into the Virtual Learning Environment. Worldwide, almost 30% of Twitter audience is 25–34 years old which is a similar age to the majority of the Pre-Session students in the Language Centre (Omnicores, 4 January 2022). Twitter articles are short and therefore easy to sort through, but often link to a more in-depth article on the topic. Both these factors are useful for a reader who do not have English as their first language. The advantage of using a curated list on Twitter is that the sources of information are controlled in the feed. The list used is a diverse range of reliable and authentic sources of information such as the New Scientist, The Economist and National Geographic, as well as general news sites such as the Guardian, Reuters, the Financial Times, and Al Jazeera English.

Research highlights that grey literature is increasingly used in academic contexts such as business, health and social science, and studies show that being able to find reliable sources of grey literature is an increasingly important academic skill (Bonato, 2018). By using a Twitter curated list on the pre-session course it is hoped that it gives students access to reliable sources of information in English that supports the students' integration into a digital information environment in English, and also to the communities of practice in their subject.

What comes next?

One way used to encourage students to access and use the Twitter feed is to task them to find a Twitter article connected to their discipline and to summarise it. To further exploit the Twitter feed in Blackboard, a curated bibliography on a topic could be created, or students could tweet using a hashtag. For the Language Centre, the use of Twitter is only practical for our face-to-face students as many online students are in China and so have no access to Twitter.



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Find out more

This case study is one of nine published as part of the 2021-22 Student-led Project from the Resilient Learning Communities Enhancement Theme.

The project in year 2 explored equity and inclusivity in the context of a more blended learning environment and how we can best develop representative systems and student/class representative skills to effectively support all the students they serve.

You can find further case studies and resources on the [Enhancement Themes website](#).

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