

The Uses of X/Twitter by Members of the TESOL Community Les utilisations de X/Twitter par les membres de la communauté TESOL

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Résumé de l'article

Un manque de dialogue et de collaboration entre les chercheurs et les praticiens a été reconnu dans le domaine de l'enseignement des langues secondes. Les plateformes de médias sociaux comme X/Twitter ont un potentiel pour connecter les professionnels de la communauté d'enseignement de l'anglais aux locuteurs d'autres langues (TESOL) et soutenir l'apprentissage professionnel et la recherche ; cependant, les études sur les usages de X/Twitter par les professionnels du TESOL n'ont examiné que les postes/tweets provenant d'un nombre limité de communautés marquées par des hashtags/mots-clés. Nous avons identifié 23 hashtags pertinents pour l'enseignement du TESOL aux adultes dans le contexte canadien et nous les avons utilisés comme paramètres de recherche pour extraire un ensemble de données de 4833 postes/tweets. Ensuite, nous avons sélectionné 82 professeurs d'université nord-américains qui avaient publié dans le domaine du TESOL, nous les avons recherchés sur X/Twitter, localisé 15 comptes X/Twitter, et extrait tous les 272 postes/tweets qu'ils avaient postés sur un an. Deux analyses de contenu ont été menées pour déduire le but des postes/tweets et identifier les hashtags utilisés par les professeurs. Les résultats ont révélé une variation considérable dans les usages de X/Twitter par les professeurs et les autres membres de la communauté TESOL et suggèrent que les deux groupes participent à des communautés X/Twitter plutôt séparées. Des recommandations pour maximiser X/Twitter comme outil d'apprentissage professionnel et de recherche et favoriser le lien entre la recherche et la pratique sont fournies.

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The Uses of X/Twitter by Members of the TESOL Community

Les utilisations de X/Twitter par les membres de la communauté TESOL

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Abstract

A lack of dialogue and collaboration between researchers and practitioners has been recognized in the field of second language education. Social media platforms such as X/Twitter have potential for connecting professionals in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) community and supporting professional learning and research; however, studies of TESOL professionals' uses of X/Twitter have only examined posts/tweets from a limited number of communities marked by hashtags/keywords. This study identified 23 hashtags relevant to TESOL instruction for adults in the Canadian context and used them as search parameters to extract a data set of 4,833 posts/tweets. Eighty-two North American university professors who had published in the field of TESOL, were selected and searched for on X/Twitter. Upon locating 15 X/Twitter professor accounts, all 272 posts/tweets posted over the one-year period, were extracted. Two content analyses were conducted to infer the purpose of the posts/tweets and identify the hashtags used by the professors. Results reveal considerable variation in the professors' and other TESOL community members' uses of X/Twitter and suggest that the two groups participate in rather separate X/Twitter communities. Recommendations for maximizing X/Twitter as a tool for professional learning and research and fostering the research-practice link are provided.

Keywords: affinity spaces, community of practice, researchers' and practitioners' uses of Twitter, social media, X

Résumé

Un manque de dialogue et de collaboration entre les chercheurs et les praticiens a été reconnu dans le domaine de l'enseignement des langues secondes. Les plateformes de médias sociaux comme

X/Twitter ont un potentiel pour connecter les professionnels de la communauté d'enseignement de l'anglais aux locuteurs d'autres langues (TESOL) et soutenir l'apprentissage professionnel et la recherche ; cependant, les études sur les usages de X/Twitter par les professionnels du TESOL n'ont examiné que les postes/tweets provenant d'un nombre limité de communautés marquées par des hashtags/mots-clés. Nous avons identifié 23 hashtags pertinents pour l'enseignement du TESOL aux adultes dans le contexte canadien et nous les avons utilisés comme paramètres de recherche pour extraire un ensemble de données de 4833 postes/tweets. Ensuite, nous avons sélectionné 82 professeurs d'université nord-américains qui avaient publié dans le domaine du TESOL, nous les avons recherchés sur X/Twitter, localisé 15 comptes X/Twitter, et extrait tous les 272 postes/tweets qu'ils avaient postés sur un an. Deux analyses de contenu ont été menées pour déduire le but des postes/tweets et identifier les hashtags utilisés par les professeurs. Les résultats ont révélé une variation considérable dans les usages de X/Twitter par les professeurs et les autres membres de la communauté TESOL et suggèrent que les deux groupes participent à des communautés X/Twitter plutôt séparées. Des recommandations pour maximiser X/Twitter comme outil d'apprentissage professionnel et de recherche et favoriser le lien entre la recherche et la pratique sont fournies.

Mots-clés: communauté de pratique, espaces d'affinité, les usages de Twitter par les chercheurs et les praticiens, médias sociaux, X

Introduction

Social media tools and platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, X/Twitter) play an integral role in North Americans' lives. Approximately 89% of Canadians use at least one form of social media, spending an average of 113 minutes on these tools daily (Dixon, 2024), and as many as seven-in-ten social media users in the United States visit social media sites on a daily basis (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Social media has been defined as “internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others” (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p. 50). Microblogging is one social media activity in which users can openly share their ideas as short text messages online accompanied by other multimedia content (e.g., images, videos) and hyperlinks. Users can post, comment on posts, and engage in interactive dialogues with other microbloggers. These dialogues can contribute to online professional development (Beach et al., 2021) and scholarly communication (e.g., Holmberg & Thelwall, 2014). If practitioners (e.g., teachers) and researchers have increased opportunities to participate in reciprocal dialogues about practice-related issues through microblogging, these dialogues may foster new collaborations between the two professional communities. This can result in new innovative practices that are informed by research as well as the production of additional research that contributes to meaningful practice. One of the most widely recognized microblogging platforms that has the potential to promote this type of dialogue is X, formerly known as Twitter. This social media platform is referred to as X/Twitter throughout this study as the data collection occurred before the rebranding and most of the prior research on the platform was also conducted before the rebranding.

Although researchers have examined the differential uses of X/Twitter in scholarly communication across a number of disciplines (e.g., Holmberg & Thelwall, 2014; Malik et al., 2019; Sugimoto et al., 2017; Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2016), applied linguistics was not identified as one of the disciplines. While the benefits of X/Twitter in promoting second language (L2) learning and the development of online L2 learning communities have been recognized (Lomicka, 2017), a comparison of X/Twitter use by applied linguists and other members of the TESOL community remains to be explored. An increased understanding of the current uses of X/Twitter in the field of TESOL may apprise practitioners and applied linguists/university professors of the affordances or the constraints of X/Twitter as a professional development and research tool. As such, maximizing the utility of X/Twitter might also provide direction for ways to connect these two professional communities.

Venues for “the bidirectional flow of knowledge” (Sato & Loewen, 2022, p. 512) between L2 researchers (e.g., applied linguistic professors) and practitioners are needed to generate “practice informed by theory and theory informed by practice” (la Velle, 2019, p. 369). X/Twitter can serve as a venue that facilitates this knowledge exchange. Therefore, the purpose of this study, which is part of a larger project addressing online professional learning and development in TESOL, is to identify (a) the professional uses of X/Twitter by university professors and other members of the TESOL community (e.g., practitioners), and (b) the extent of the dialogue between the two communities on X/Twitter. From this point forward, the terms researchers/professors and TESOL community members/practitioners are used to refer to these two groups. Researchers “are those who belong to universities and who are expected—to different degrees, implicitly or explicitly—to disseminate their research in the academic community” (Sato & Loewen, 2022, p. 511). Practitioners include teachers and those in related “professions and roles, such as policy makers, program directors, textbook writers, educational bloggers, and media content producers” (Sato & Loewen, 2022, p. 511). It is recognized that the categorization of TESOL community members as researchers or practitioners may present a false dichotomy, as some researchers/professors are L2 practitioners, and some classroom teachers are researchers. However, as Sato and Loewen (2022) implied, this dichotomy is useful for examining researcher-practitioner communication; therefore, it was used to examine the differences in X/Twitter use and the extent to which X/Twitter acts as a venue facilitating knowledge sharing across the two communities.

Literature Review

Dialogue Between TESOL Practitioners and Researchers

A gap between research and practice is well-recognized in the field of applied linguistics; a gap which is attributable to differences in researchers’ and teachers’ orientations—practical vs theoretical compounded by a lack of dialogue and collaboration between the two communities (Spada & Lightbown, 2022). Even though knowledge gleaned from research increases our understanding of the world and is crucial for constructing theories and solving real-world problems, the relevance and value of empirical research for language teachers has been questioned and the argument that teachers would be “better off” relying on intuition and professional experience and disregarding input from researchers (Medgyes, 2017) contributes to the research-practice gap. Although not all L2 studies have direct

relevance to real-world classroom issues faced by teachers, reliance on intuition and experience alone may result in the recycling of ineffective pedagogical practices (Paran, 2017). Teacher engagement with research has the potential to offset such a result. Research conducted with TESOL practitioners has demonstrated that teachers can combine knowledge gleaned from research articles with their practice-based knowledge to co-construct contextually appropriate innovative practices (Abbott & Lee, 2022; Lee & Abbott, 2021). If practitioners engage in discussions about research to address real-world issues in their practice, and researchers engage practitioners in collaborative research partnerships and reciprocal dialogues about practice-related issues, research-practice relationships may be fostered (Sato & Loewen, 2022). Social media platforms can serve as venues for dialogue between practitioners and researchers that may reduce the research-pedagogy divide in the applied linguistics community.

Theoretical Framework

Community of practice has been a common framework used to explore English language teaching educators' professional learning and development (PLD) (e.g., Abbott & Lee, 2022), including those with a focus on X/Twitter as a tool for PLD (e.g., Rosell-Aguilar, 2018; Slogoski, 2019). Communities of practice emerge when “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2). As summarized by Hanson-Smith (2016), online communities of practice are characterized by a shared domain (e.g., language education), collaborative praxis (e.g., building and sharing domain-related knowledge and practice), ongoing social support (e.g., peer mentoring), and tools for collaborating at a distance (e.g., Zoom, LinkedIn, Facebook, X/Twitter).

Social Media and Education

In the context of language education, “social media usually refers to any application or technology through which users participate in, create, and share media resources and practices with other users by means of digital networking” (Reinhardt, 2019, p. 3). Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Reddit, Snapchat, TikTok, X/Twitter, YouTube) are powerful tools for communicating current information and facilitating interactions among online users for different purposes, including maintaining personal relationships, professional networking, media sharing, and learning. Social media tools allow users to share information individually and co-construct ideas collaboratively, making them useful tools for learning through the sharing and creation of content that may combine images, text, audio, and/or video. Teachers interested in PLD might participate in and form communities on social media platforms such as Reddit (e.g., Bret Staudt Willet & Carpenter, 2020), Instagram (e.g., Richter et al., 2022), TikTok (e.g., Hartung et al., 2023), WeChat (e.g., Xue et al., 2021) and X/Twitter (e.g., Carpenter & Krupka, 2015).

X/Twitter and Hashtags

Social media platforms such as X/Twitter can build communities of practice (e.g., Davis, 2015; Lord & Lomicka, 2014) by attracting users to affinity spaces (e.g., Carpenter & Krutka, 2014, 2015; Rosenberg et al., 2016) “where people affiliate with others based primarily on shared activities, interests, and goals” (Gee, 2004, p. 67). Affinity spaces on X/Twitter and other social media platforms, like

Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok, are demarcated by hashtags that are optional in the short messages posted on X/Twitter which are called posts/tweets. Hashtags begin with the # symbol and are followed by a keyword(s), short phrase, or acronym (without any spaces between the # and the words, phrase, or acronym). Some hashtags may be commonly used acronyms and understood by members of a professional community but may be somewhat cryptic for non-members (e.g., #ELT represents English language teaching when it is used by professionals in the English language teaching community). Since 2017, posts/tweets can contain up to 280 characters of text and other content including links, photos, and/or videos. Some posts/tweets may also contain the @ symbol followed by a username (@username) as a way to mention or communicate with a particular user. Posts/tweets are posted under a user's profile and users can control whether their posts/tweets are viewable publicly or only by their followers. The use of hashtags can connect X/Twitter users to communities of practice (Wesely, 2013) in which community members explore specific topics and develop collaborative knowledge and best practices surrounding those topics (Wenger et al., 2002). Because hashtags serve as a mechanism for categorizing content and forming and identifying communities across a variety of social media platforms (Potnis & Tahamtan, 2021), the same hashtags used by X/Twitter users can be used to connect with community members on other platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube).

Although Elon Musk bought Twitter in April 2022 and rebranded the platform as X that July, the functions described above remain and are still accessible for free. Due to the controversial nature of Musk's policies regarding the need for freedom of expression on the platform (Valero, 2023), there was speculation that some academics would refrain from posting on X (e.g., Kupferschmidt, 2022) and that this would have a negative impact on Twitter's existing communities of practice. However, a survey of scientists' use of X revealed that only 6.7% of approximately 9,200 respondents had stopped using the platform (Valero, 2023). As of March 2024, the platform still had 250 million daily users (Syed, 2024), indicating that the impact was not as drastic as anticipated. Members of the academic community have emphasized the importance of continuing to engage on X "to prevent the rise of false narratives and misinformation" (Lordan & Devkota, 2023, p. 6) and those who continue to post on X do so to "post sensible scientific tweets" (Stokel-Walker, 2023, p. 21).

Affordances of X/Twitter for Scholarly Communication and Professional Learning

Evidence of formal and informal scholarly communication via X/Twitter exists across different academic disciplines (Holmberg & Thelwall, 2014). Studies of X/Twitter conducted in fields such as health sciences have reported some novel findings not found in X/Twitter-based research in TESOL. For example, X/Twitter has been used as a practical professional tool for recruiting participants for research studies and for delivering interventions (Sinnenberg et al., 2017). Hawkins et al. (2014) noted that X/Twitter was helpful for connecting specialists with the public and for increasing the readership of peer-reviewed articles discussed in the posts/tweets. Zheng et al. (2022) indicated that X/Twitter allowed health educators to engage in effective weekly online synchronous professional development using the hashtag #MedEdChat. X/Twitter has also been used by educational researchers to examine backchanneling by conference attendees (Greenhow et al., 2019; Lemay et al., 2019); to disseminate surveys (Visser et al., 2014); to build digital identities (Li & Greenhow, 2015); to share professionally-relevant ideas, information, resources, media, and professional events (Veletsianos, 2012; Veletsianos &

Kimmons, 2016); to publicize university activities and events (Knight & Kaye, 2016); to seek answers to education-related questions (Holmberg & Thelwall, 2014); and to engage in self-directed PLD (Carpenter et al., 2020).

In the field of applied linguistics, X/Twitter research has predominantly focused on language learners' use of X/Twitter (see review in Hattem & Lomicka, 2016; Lomicka, 2017). More recently, researchers have devoted greater attention to language teacher PLD via X/Twitter. Findings suggest that X/Twitter can promote virtual communities of practice in a university course (Lord & Lomicka, 2014) or among teachers of second and foreign languages (Bartosik, 2022; Lupasco, 2017; Nicholas et al., 2018; Rosell-Aguilar, 2018; Slogoski, 2019; Wesely, 2013).

In these online communities, the use of specific hashtags can connect language teachers and facilitate their communication on X/Twitter. Rosell-Aguilar's (2018) examination of #MFLtwitterati revealed that a majority of participants who used this hashtag identified themselves as primary or secondary school language teachers working in the United Kingdom. These teachers reported using teaching practices and ideas shared by other #MFLtwitterati members. In a study of hashtag chats on #langchat or #edchat, Wesely (2013) found that the use of these X/Twitter hashtags promoted self-directed professional learning by connecting K-12 foreign language teachers throughout the world. Other studies that focused specifically on the context of English language teaching (ELT) have shown similar results. Lupasco (2017) interviewed four Canadian ELT practitioners to explore their experiences of learning and networking through #LINCchat. Findings from this master's thesis showed that participation in the #LINCchat community fostered professional learning and networking. Four teachers, documented in Nicholas et al. (2018), provided anecdotal evidence of the value of X/Twitter to support TESOL professionals via both synchronous and asynchronous chats using #CdnELTchat (formerly #LINCchat). They viewed self-directed PLD on X/Twitter as an effective alternative to traditional forms of PLD such as attending conferences. Findings from Bartosik's (2022) doctoral dissertation provided additional evidence that hashtags such as #CdnELTchat are "channels for sharing information" (p. 118) among language teachers in virtual communities. Slogoski (2019) compared the advantages of an online ELT professional learning network with those of more traditional forms of professional learning. Key advantages of professional learning via social media such as X/Twitter included greater accessibility, lower cost, and succinctness of information shared. In a review of the use of technology in English language teaching, Hockly (2017) noted that X/Twitter can provide teachers "with the opportunity to interact with researchers and academics, and to keep up to date with their research interests and work" (p. 371).

Barriers to X/Twitter Use Among Academics

In addition to the affordances of X/Twitter for fostering scholarly communication and PLD, barriers to the use of X/Twitter by academics have been reported (Donelan, 2016). As part of a larger study of social media use by academics, Donelan conducted a thematic analysis of academics' comments about X/Twitter to identify the main reasons for their lack of use for work-related purposes. The main themes associated with barriers to academics' use of X/Twitter were reported as having no interest, negative perceptions, a lack of skills, a lack of time, and safety concerns.

Research Questions

Given the potential of X/Twitter for bridging the research-practice gap in L2 education (Sato & Loewen, 2022; Spada & Lightbown, 2022), the purpose of this study was to compare the professional uses of X/Twitter by TESOL researchers and practitioners (i.e., teachers and those in related “professions and roles, such as policy makers, program directors, textbook writers, educational bloggers, and media content producers” [Sato & Loewen, 2022, p. 511]) in order to better understand the role of X/Twitter in connecting and supporting TESOL PLD and research. The following research questions (RQ) were addressed:

RQ1: What hashtags are most directly related to TESOL for adult learners in Canada?

RQ2: What are the uses of X/Twitter by TESOL community members who use the directly related hashtags in their posts/tweets?

RQ3: What are the uses of X/Twitter by TESOL professors employed in North American universities?

RQ4: To what extent do TESOL professors use the TESOL-related hashtags in their posts/tweets?

This exploration allowed us to determine if X/Twitter was being used to connect these two groups and support the members’ PLD.

Method

The study was conducted in three stages. In stage 1, hashtags most directly related to TESOL for adult learners in Canada were identified. Stage 2 focused on the uses of X/Twitter by TESOL community members who used the directly related hashtags. Researchers’ use of X/Twitter was examined in Stage 3. This study followed research ethics policies established by the Government of Canada (2022) in their *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* and by the University of Alberta’s research ethics board. Because this study “uses exclusively information in the public domain that may contain identifiable information, and for which there is no reasonable expectation of privacy” (Government of Canada, 2022, p. 17), it did not require ethics approval. Furthermore, according to the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office (2020), “non-intrusive research relying exclusively on publicly available information is exempted from REB review... . An example might involve information posted publicly online via Twitter” (Para 2). X/Twitter users agree to the platform’s privacy policy: “Twitter is public and tweets are immediately viewable and searchable by anyone... . You can also use Twitter under a pseudonym if you prefer not to use your name” (Twitter, 2020, Para 1). To protect the anonymity of the X/Twitter users whose posts/tweets were included in our data set, all personal identifiers were excluded.

Data Collection and Analysis

Stage 1

To collect a sample of posts/tweets relevant to TESOL for adult learners, first hashtags from TESOL-related articles were identified and a search conducted for TESOL-related hashtags on Google. Then the hashtags were used as search parameters to gather an initial 500 posts/tweets from Twitter. Next, the 500 posts/tweets were examined to identify additional TESOL-related hashtags. The hashtags were categorized into two lists: 23 hashtags that all four members of the research team agreed were the most directly related to TESOL for adult learners in Canada and 46 that were indirectly related to TESOL for adults. Hashtags were deemed as directly related if the majority of the posts/tweets contained information that instructors of adult ESL learners in Canada would likely find relevant for their PLD; whereas the majority of the posts/tweets with indirectly related hashtags were not deemed relevant. For example, #pronunciation was classified as an indirectly related hashtag because posts/tweets with this hashtag were related to the pronunciation of many different languages. Directly related hashtags included #AUSELT; #BBClearnEnglish; #BCTEAL; #CATESOL; #CdnELTchat; #CLIL; #CoTESOL; #EAL; #EALchat; #ELL; #ELLchat; #ELLS; #ELT; #ELTChat; #ELTdiscussion; #ESL; #ESOL; #LINCchat; #TESOL; #TESL; #TESLCanada; #tleap; #PBLA. Professional acronyms included in these hashtags are as follows: Australian English language teaching (#AUSELT); British Broadcasting Corporation learn English (#BBClearnEnglish); British Columbia Teachers of English as an Additional Language (#BCTEAL); California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (#CATESOL); Canadian English language teachers chat (#CdnELTchat); content and language integrated learning (#CLIL); Colorado Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (#CoTESOL); English as an additional language (#EAL); English as an additional language chat (#EALchat); English language learning (#ELL); English language learning chat (#ELLchat); English language learners (#ELLS); English language teaching (#ELT); English language teaching chat (#ELTChat); English language teaching discussion (#ELTdiscussion); English as a second language (#ESL); English for speakers of other languages (#ESOL); Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada chat (#LINCchat); teaching English to speakers of other language (#TESOL); teaching English as a second language (#TESL); teaching English as a second language in Canada (#TESLCanada); Teaching and Learning in English for Academic Purposes (#tleap); portfolio-based language assessment (#PBLA).

Stage 2

The related hashtags were entered as search parameters into a free software program called Twitter Archiving Google Sheet (TAGS; Hawksey, 2020, V6.1.9.1) to create our TESOL-related hashtag tweet data set ($n = 4,833$) of posts/tweets posted between October 2020 and January 2021, which is when we collected the data. TAGS has been used by other researchers (e.g., Awan et al., 2023; Greenhalgh & Koehler, 2017; Park et al., 2018; Qian et al., 2020) to access Twitter's application programming interface (API) to retrieve posts/tweets and is then used to parse the data from the API into a spreadsheet format (i.e., a Google Sheet). Prior to February 2023, Twitter provided researchers with free access to Twitter's API; however, X now charges a minimum of \$100 USD per month to access its

API. Although X/Twitter as a conference backchannel can enrich the dissemination of research because we were interested in PLD beyond the social networking and PLD that is fostered by conferences, we decided to exclude the 1,336 posts/tweets that emanated from conference attendance. A content analysis of the remaining 3,497 posts/tweets in the hashtag tweet data set was conducted to infer how and why TESOL community members used X/Twitter in the affinity spaces marked by the 23 directly related hashtags identified in Stage 1. According to Krippendorff (2019), content analysis can be used to make “valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p. 24). In the current study, individual posts/tweets (i.e., texts) served as the unit of analysis that our inferences regarding the uses of X/Twitter were based upon.

In the first stage of the analysis, two members of the research team independently open-coded one third of the posts/tweets to develop categories that captured the communicative purpose of the posts/tweets. The researchers met to discuss their coding and reach a consensus on the coding categories. At the end of this first stage of coding, three categories and eight subcategories were established (Table 1). In the second stage of coding, two members of the research team used the established coding categories to independently code the entire dataset. Interrater agreement was 94%. A team meeting was held to discuss the discrepancies and reach consensus.

All user accounts associated with the posts/tweets were examined in an attempt to isolate a subset of posts/tweets posted by North American TESOL professors; however, posts/tweets from this group of users in our dataset were not found. Therefore, to compare the TESOL community members’ uses of X/Twitter identified in the hashtag data set with the uses of X/Twitter by North American TESOL professors, an additional data set of professors’ posts/tweets were extracted (described in stage three).

Stage 3

We purposively sampled 82 tenure-track and tenured professors who held faculty positions at North American universities, had published in the field of TESOL, and had presented at the 2021 American Association for Applied Linguists Conference. To determine whether these researchers held public X/Twitter accounts, we searched for them on X/Twitter using their full names and searched their university profile webpages for links to their X/Twitter accounts in the event that they did not use their full name in their X/Twitter profile. We collected all their posts/tweets between April 2020 and April 2021 ($n = 272$) and then searched for these professors’ usernames in the data collected in Stage 2 because they may have used a different X/Twitter name. This search ensured that the posts/tweets were not duplicated across the two data sets. A content analysis of the professors’ posts/tweets was then conducted to infer their uses of X/Twitter. We also examined the professor dataset to identify the hashtags they used and to determine whether they used any of the same hashtags that appeared in our data set gathered in Stage 2. This analysis allowed us to infer whether any public dialogue occurred between the two groups.

Results

Uses of X/Twitter by TESOL Community Members Who Used One or More of the 23 Directly Related Hashtags

Table 1 shows the uses of TESOL community members' posts/tweets in data collected in Stage 2. Approximately half of the posts/tweets were posted to share or publicize materials that were developed for students to use independently or that teachers could incorporate into their lessons. Of the posts/tweets, 28% were used to promote or comment on professional development opportunities, including sharing information about conferences and webinars, promoting synchronous X/Twitter meetings, and sharing publications. The remaining 22% of the posts/tweets involved practitioners sharing their own or their learners' experiences, commenting on issues related to their employment such as wages, and acknowledging colleagues' achievements.

Table 1

TESOL Community Members' Uses of X/Twitter

Category and sub-categories	<i>f</i>	%	Total %
Sharing learning and teaching materials			50.50
Sharing self-explanatory materials learners could use (e.g., acronyms, word lists, quizzes, word definitions, videos)	1,641	46.93	
Sharing free materials that could be used by practitioners with adaptations (e.g., lesson plans, teaching tips, resources)	125	3.57	
Promoting professional learning and development			27.94
Promoting articles and books	316	9.04	
Advertising resources for sale	305	8.72	
Promoting webinars, panel discussions, conferences	276	7.89	
Promoting programs for ESL-related certificates/degrees	80	2.29	
Sharing experiences and networking			21.56
Sharing practitioners' professional experiences (not teaching materials)	572	16.36	
Commenting on employment-related issues (wages, contracts, discrimination)	102	2.92	

Category and sub-categories	<i>f</i>	%	Total %
Total	3,497	100.00	100.00

Professors' Uses of X/Twitter

Of the 82 North American TESOL researchers searched for on X/Twitter and in the Stage 2 data, 15 had public X/Twitter accounts, 11 were active on X/Twitter between April 2020 and April 2021, and none were represented in the Stage 2 data (i.e., the TESOL-related hashtag data set). Researchers were considered active if they made at least one post/tweet. Throughout the year, the 11 researchers posted a total of 272 posts/tweets. Approximately 65% of their posts/tweets were posted to promote research knowledge mobilization, 33% were used to share professional experiences and to network with others, and the remaining were used to share teaching and learning resources (Table 2).

Table 2

TESOL Professors' Uses of X/Twitter

Categories and sub-categories	<i>f</i>	%	Total %
Promoting research knowledge mobilization			64.71
Promoting webinars, panel discussions, conferences	94	34.56	
Promoting academic articles and books	73	26.83	
Promoting university programs	5	1.84	
Promoting research participation	4	1.47	
Sharing experiences and networking			32.72
Sharing researchers' professional experiences (not teaching materials)	68	25.00	
Acknowledging colleagues' achievements/awards	18	6.62	
Commenting on employment-related issues (wages, contracts, discrimination)	3	1.10	
Sharing learning and teaching materials			2.57
Sharing resources for learners	7	2.57	
Total	272	100.00	100.00

Hashtag Use

Professors in the sample used 47 different hashtags in 54 of the 272 posts/tweets in Stage 3 data; therefore, they only used hashtags in 20% of their posts/tweets. We also compared the hashtags used by the professors with those in the hashtag data set and found that none of the professors used any of the same hashtags. The hashtags used by the professors were related to research conferences (e.g., #AAAL2021), specific research topics (e.g., #corpuslinguistics), and teaching and advising students at university (e.g., #phdadvising).

Discussion

This study examined the professional uses of X/Twitter by members of the TESOL community to explore the potential of X/Twitter for sharing resources, research, PLD, networking, and building community. Although both researchers and practitioners are members of the broader TESOL community, the lack of overlap between the professor and TESOL community member data in our study supports our use of the researcher-practitioner dichotomy when examining their communication on X/Twitter, which has the potential to contribute to knowledge sharing across the two communities. In general, TESOL practitioners and the North American university professors captured in our data used X/Twitter for similar purposes, but the frequency to which they engaged in these uses was different across the two groups. There were some unique uses in each of the groups. Practitioners mainly used X/Twitter for sharing resources whereas researchers predominantly used it for research knowledge mobilization. Given that research knowledge mobilization is an expectation of tenure-track and tenured professors that is not typically expected of practitioners, this finding is not surprising, as career progression, which is connected to the extent of a researcher's knowledge mobilization, appears to influence the uptake of X/Twitter by academics (Donelan, 2016). Job responsibilities clearly contribute to the differential uses of X/Twitter between researchers and practitioners.

Finding that the majority of the practitioners' posts/tweets involved sharing of learning and teaching resources supports the results from studies of educators' self-reported uses of X/Twitter. For example, Carpenter and Krutka's (2014) survey results indicated that resource sharing was the most popular use reported by K-12 teachers and teacher educators. The participants in their study also indicated that access to resources and ideas on X/Twitter enhanced their abilities to network with others and this networking facilitated their professional development. Consistent with Nicholas and colleagues' (2018) reported use of X/Twitter as a platform to connect with TESOL professionals and promote self-directed professional learning, the professional uses of X/Twitter by practitioners in our data confirmed the value of X/Twitter for professional development and networking with others.

Respecting researchers' uses of X/Twitter, other studies conducted in the fields of K-12 education and health sciences have reported the effectiveness of X/Twitter as a research tool. For instance, X/Twitter has facilitated survey dissemination (Visser et al., 2014), research participant recruitment (Sinnenberg et al., 2017; Visser et al., 2014), and the delivery of health interventions (Sinnenberg et al., 2017). However, we only found one instance of research facilitation for the purpose of participant recruitment in our researcher data, which was retweeted three times. The purpose of

almost two-thirds of the researchers' posts/tweets was to promote research knowledge mobilization events such as research conferences and webinars, and to disseminate academic readings. In a similar study of 42 college and university professors' posts/tweets, Veletsianos (2012) reported that *sharing information, media and resources* was the most frequent purpose (39%). Veletsianos and Kimmons (2016) also suggested that "many scholars use Twitter to share their work with a broader audience" (p. 9).

Given the potential of X/Twitter for bridging the research-practice gap in TESOL, only 11 of the 82 professors in our study posted posts/tweets over a 12-month period. Because the professors posted less frequently (approximately 13 times) than the practitioners, the disparity in usage between the two groups is a factor that limits the interactions between the two groups rather than bridging the research-practice gap. It is speculated that the lack of professional uses of X/Twitter by the professors is related to the barriers identified by Donelan (2016), such as a lack of interest/time. Furthermore, given that none of the researchers in our study used the same hashtags as the broader TESOL practitioner community, the researchers' posts/tweets may not be reaching as broad an audience as they could. It is possible that influential researchers in TESOL may rely on their followers to distribute their posts/tweets on X/Twitter and beyond, but the addition of hashtags could optimize the reach of their research, particularly to newcomers to the field of TESOL who are unfamiliar with the researchers' work. Although education-related hashtags have the potential to support communities of practice by facilitating the creation of "affinity spaces for interactions" (Carpenter et al., 2020, p. 18), the lack of commonly used hashtags among TESOL researchers and practitioners suggests that these two groups are relatively separate communities on X/Twitter.

The following suggestions for ways in which practitioners and researchers could be more strategic in their use of X/Twitter and hashtags may help users to locate affinity spaces and bridge the gap between these two communities.

- When searching X/Twitter for information on specific PLD topics, include hashtags in the search terms (e.g., *#pronunciation* instead of *pronunciation*) to increase the probability of finding relevant affinity spaces.
- Combine directly-related TESOL hashtags with other keywords in X/Twitter searches (e.g., *#TESL AND #pronunciation* or *#TESL AND pronunciation*) to increase the likelihood of locating TESOL-related affinity spaces.
- Note the other hashtags used in TESOL-related posts/tweets to locate additional affinity spaces of interest (e.g., *#RefugeesWelcome*, *#ChatGPT*).
- Follow specific users' accounts (e.g., researchers' accounts) to reap the full potential of X/Twitter as a PLD resource. Because users do not always add hashtags to their posts/tweets, these posts/tweets exist outside of affinity spaces marked by hashtags.
- Always tag posts/tweets with hashtags to increase the likelihood of their discovery by the broader/targeted community (e.g., add the # symbol in front of keywords that represent shared affinity spaces such as *#TESL*).

- Agree upon and consistently use the same hashtags when posting/tweeting to cement affinity spaces that support interactions among TESOL practitioners and researchers and to build communities of practice. For example, professional associations and conference organizers could promote and encourage the use of specific hashtags.

In our study, we established that hashtags were not being used to their full potential by the users to connect and interact with one another in shared TESOL affinity spaces. Therefore, these suggestions might promote a more principled approach to using hashtags for connecting the practitioner and researcher X/Twitter communities. Our recommendations for hashtag use may also be applied to other popular social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, TikTok, YouTube) in which hashtags may be used to categorize content and identify communities.

Limitations and Future Research

A number of methodological limitations exist in this study. By using publicly accessible posts/tweets to infer how and why TESOL community members use X/Twitter, the focus narrowed to members who actively tweet. It is likely that some members read but do not post (i.e., lurk), which may be considered a form of legitimate peripheral participation within a community of practice. We also focused on North American professors and may have missed some of their X/Twitter accounts if they did not use their full names in their profiles or include their X/Twitter names on their university webpages. Similar to other studies of social media platforms, we captured snapshots of posts/tweets within a specific timeframe and this impacted our ability to examine X/Twitter hashtags as fluid networks of people and technology that change over time (e.g., new hashtags can be created while old ones are retired/abandoned) and are also impacted by the shifting landscape of English language teaching (e.g., championing social justice).

Avenues for future research include an analysis of a wider sample of posts/tweets by TESOL researchers worldwide, the impact of researchers' posts/tweets on practitioner PLD, the contributions of single hashtags such as #ELTchat to TESOL practitioners' PLD, and the processes of practitioner knowledge co-construction via X/Twitter and other social media platforms. Other research methods, such as social network analysis, may also offer novel insights into TESOL X/Twitter hashtag networks. In addition to examining hashtags on an individual basis, a mixed-methods approach involving the use of interviews and/or social network analysis could be conducted to examine how hashtag networks are linked to one another, the power dynamics that influence participation by members of the networks, and who acts as a bridge between these networks. Because TESOL researchers and practitioners might also be posting or sharing ideas on other social media platforms, analyses of their use across the platforms may provide additional insights regarding the potential of these tools for strengthening the research-practice link.

Conclusion

Social media platforms are prominent sources of information for educator PLD (e.g., Bret Staudt Willet, 2024), including those in TESOL contexts (Abbott et al., 2017). Previous work on the use of X/Twitter in L2 learning has outlined how X/Twitter can be used to support learning and foster communities of practice that interact in social networks; however, there has been a lack of research examining TESOL professors' and practitioners' professional uses of X/Twitter. This gap was addressed by collecting TESOL-related posts/tweets through both hashtag-based and username search strategies to form two tweet data sets for analysis. Findings indicate that practitioners predominately use X/Twitter for instructional resource sharing whereas professors mainly use it for research knowledge mobilization. However, the extent of professors' research knowledge mobilization via X/Twitter, may be limited due to their absence of engagement with practitioners in shared hashtag-demarcated affinity spaces where the research-practice divide could be bridged. This study suggests that it is possible to extend the professional uses of X/Twitter in the field of TESOL and better connect TESOL researchers and practitioners. By implementing our recommendations for strategic X/Twitter and hashtag use, professors may expand their social and personal learning networks, engage with current professional issues in the field, share their work with a wider audience, and potentially foster additional PLD.

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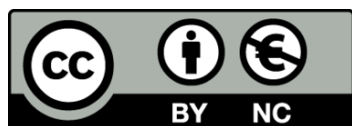
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