

## ***Tweeting The Disasters: A Sample From Geography Course***

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### **Abstract**

It has been a necessity to select and use popular information technologies depending on the content of the course in order to meet the learning needs. In this study, the following of up-to-date information about disasters was ensured in “Geography of Disasters” course during a semester by using Twitter, some information, precautions and news about the disasters both in Turkey and around the world were shared, the contributions and comments were done related to them in a variety of periods. Teacher candidates were asked to reply the tweets about the future of the earth shared by the lecturer. With the application of Twitter, it was aimed for teacher candidates to express their information or thoughts within 140 characters, to have knowledge about the information technologies; to raise awareness of disasters happened in Turkey, to find solutions related to them, and to share their solutions in-person. The study group was composed of 65 teacher candidates with 35 women and 30 men. In the data collection tool, there are questions about their twitter usage before/and in educational setting, and 23-item content-based test with 5-point likert type. As a result of the study, teacher candidates indicated that they had information about disasters both happened in the past and present, their motivation towards the lesson raised, their ability to comment on the disasters developed thanks to Twitter, they didn’t use Twitter in an educational setting before but when they became teachers, they would certainly use it, and finally the communication within the classroom improved.

Keywords: geography, geography education, twitter, disaster, geography of disasters

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Growing rapidly as a microblog since 2006, Twitter is one of the most popular social media tools which is reached effectively, easily and freely by the users through a variety of communication devices such as computers and cellphones. The users can share their opinions, photos, videos and web addresses within 140 characters, and other users Express their thoughts about those shares and re-share them with the people in their own networks (Yukselturk, 2013).

Twitter is an actively used platform in Turkey as well as the World. As a matter of fact, according to the Twitter usage figures, the country where the Twitter is most common is Turkey. Twitter user number is 11,337,505 in Turkey with 36,455,000 internet users. In other words, 31.1% of the internet users in Turkey also use Twitter (Webrazzi, 2013). Besides, the number of Twitter users in Turkey has been increasing in recent years. The share of Turkey in the World in 2012 was 1.7% on the basis of the number of Twitter users (Webrazzi, 2012). This share increased to 6% in 2013. Moreover, one out of three internet users in Turkey uses Twitter (Webrazzi, 2013).

Twitter, used in Turkey commonly, can be used for a variety of purposes. Some of them are (Kazanci, Donmez, 2013, 44);

- With a limitation of 140 characters, it can help the students improve their writing skills through the activities requiring the usage of reflection, feedback and opinion and summarizing techniques.
- It can be used in classroom activities.
- It can help shy students to participate in the activities.
- It makes it easier to create an environment where everyone can express his/her opinions, realize the different perspectives and improve his/her critical thinking skills.
- It can be used as a supportive course material instantly.

As already known, modern education supported by technology and novel technologies that can be selected in accordance with the course content make it possible to reach the *lifelong learning* goal in terms of both the improvement of the course and the personal development of the students.

With reference to the use of Twitter in education, the Disasters Geography course into which the Twitter integrated, has some goals such as introducing a variety of disasters occurred on earth, keeping students informed about the disasters occurred in a variety of countries through the human history, teaching the precautions against the disasters and help them understand the contributions of the geography discipline.

With the Twitter application in the Disasters Geography course, it is aimed for the candidate teachers to express their thoughts or knowledge briefly within the 140 characters, acknowledge the information technologies, increase their awareness by pointing out the disasters occurred in their geography and in the world with the help of the activities that they can participate effectively without getting bored, generate solutions to the problems related to the disasters and share them.

The defined sub problems within this context are as follows:

- 1- What are the opinions of the candidate teachers about the use of Twitter in an educational setting and Disasters Geography course in terms of the learning and motivation to the lesson?
- 2- What are the candidate teachers' opinions about the use of Twitter in the Disasters Geography course with regards to whether it creates awareness and knowledge about the disasters and current events in the world and Turkey?
- 3- What are the candidate teachers' opinions about whether the Twitter use in the course contributes to their skills on interpreting the disasters?

## 2. METHOD

**2.1. Research Design:** A descriptive method (Buyukozturk et al., 2013) was used in this study.

**2.2. Participants:** composed of 65 second grade candidate teachers currently studying at Gaziosmanpasa University Faculty of Education Department of Social Studies Teaching. 35 (54%) of the participants were female and 30 (46%) were male.

**2.3. Data Collection Procedure:** The Twitter was used for 14 weeks during the 2013-2014 academic year spring semester. At the end of the semester, the opinions of the students were gathered. The students were informed about the use of Twitter at the beginning of the semester. A Twitter account was created by the lecturer named as the Disasters Geography which was also the title of the course. Each student was asked create their own accounts. Each student added the Disasters Geography course account and other classmates, and they followed these accounts. The lecturer shared a sample related to the topics of the first week to be an example. Also, the list consisting of the names of the students that would share something weekly throughout the semester was shared with the students. In this list, there were the share topics and their weeks of the student groups composed of 6 or 7 people. The topics shared are as follows: the news about the major destructions in the world, the disasters in the world in the last six months, the disasters in Turkey in the last six months, the disasters in the world in the last month, the disasters in Turkey in the last month, the disasters in the world in the last week, the disasters in Turkey in the last week, the disaster prevention efforts in the world, the disaster prevention effects in Turkey.

The lecturer sometimes asked questions to the students after the lessons through her Twitter account and made the candidate teachers interpret the topics (Photo 1.). The lecturer also checked the shares of the student groups in the about the predetermined topics and time. The feedback was given to the students in the following week.



Photo 1. A capture from the tweets of the students.

#### 2.4. Data Collection Tool:

In the data collection tool with 22 items in 5 Likert type, there are items consisting of opinions about the effects of the Twitter use in educational setting and Disasters Geography course on the learning and motivation to the lesson, creation of awareness and knowledge about the disasters and current events in Turkey and the world and the skill to interpret the disasters. During the preparation of the data collection tool, the specialists were consulted.

#### 2.5. Data Analysis:

The data were examined by descriptive statistical analysis method and then interpreted. The findings about the items averages and standard deviations are demonstrated as a table.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data in this section was interpreted under the tables.

#### The Findings Related to the First Research Problem

**Table 1.** The candidate teachers' opinions about the use of Twitter in the educational setting and Disasters Geography course in terms of the learning and motivation to the lesson.

Item Number	Item	M	SD
7	It seemed boring because I am not interested in technological devices and social networks.	1.81	1.03
8	I don't think that Twitter is instructive.	2.17	1.26
9	I use Twitter normally. but I didn't follow much since it appeared to me as a lesson.	1.68	.89
10	I find Twitter really boring.	2.03	1.01
11	I think that the Twitter should be used in education.	4.02	.83
12	I can tell that it had a positive influence on my perception about the Geography course.	4.34	.71

13	Using Twitter in Disasters Geography course led me to be interested in the course.	4.09	1.08
18	I can tell that it is effective in increasing my motivation to the lesson.	4.08	1.02
19	I don't like Geography even if there are different applications.	1.57	.98
20	The shares in Twitter arouse interest in Geography course.	4.16	.89
21	I think that following anything about the Disasters Geography course in Twitter is a waste of time.	1.49	.79

Items 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 18, 19, 20 and 21 aim at determining the candidate teachers' opinions about the use of Twitter in education and Disasters Geography course in terms of the learning and motivation to the lesson. The following points were determined; the candidate teachers didn't agree with the opinion that this application about the disasters in Twitter was boring ( $M= 1.81$ ), they thought that the opinion that the Twitter wasn't instructive wasn't true ( $M= 2.17$ ) and they didn't agree with the opinion that even though they use Twitter normally, they didn't follow it much since it appeared to them as a lesson ( $M= 1.68$ ).

Moreover, it was determined that they didn't find Twitter boring ( $M= 2.03$ ), the application had a positive effect on their perception about the Geography course ( $M= 4.34$ ), the use of Twitter in Disasters Geography course led them to be interested in the course ( $M= 4.09$ ), it had an effect in increasing their motivation towards the course ( $M= 4.08$ ) and the shares in Twitter aroused interest in Geography course ( $M= 4.16$ ). Besides, it was determined that they didn't agree with the opinion that despite the different activities, they didn't like the Geography course ( $M= 1.57$ ) and following anything about the Disasters Geography course in Twitter was a waste of time ( $M=1.49$ ). It was determined that the candidate teachers thought that Twitter should be used in educational settings ( $M= 4.02$ ).

### Findings Related to the Second Research Problem

**Table 2.** The candidate teachers' opinions about the use of Twitter in the Disasters Geography course with regards to whether it creates awareness and knowledge about the disasters and current events in the world and Turkey.

Item Number	Item	M	SD
1	I became aware of many current events.	4.45	.68
2	I became aware of the disasters in the worlds.	4.43	.73
3	It drew my attention to hear many disasters immediately after they occurred in the world.	4.58	.73
5	By this means, current disaster news started to draw my attention more.	4.34	.78
15	I learnt much about the disasters geography thanks to Twitter.	4.28	.80
16	I get bored in Geography course; but thanks to this application, I learnt something.	3.05	1.23
22	I think that the things we learnt in the lesson may be helpful	4.34	.73

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in real life with this application.

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Items 1, 2, 3, 5, 16 and 22 aim at determining the candidate teachers' opinions about the use of Twitter in the Disasters Geography course with regards to whether it creates awareness and knowledge about the disasters and current events in the world and Turkey. The following points were determined; candidate teachers became aware of many current events (M= 4.45), they became aware of the disasters in the world (M= 4.43), It drew their attention to hear many disasters immediately after they occurred in the world (M= 4.58) and therefore, current disaster news started to draw their attention more (M= 4.34). Moreover, the use of Twitter helps candidate teachers learn much about disasters geography (M= 4.28) and, although they get bored in geography course, they learnt something thanks to Twitter (M= 3.05). In addition to this, it was determined that the candidate teachers believed that the things they learnt in the course might help them in real life thanks to this application (M= 4.34).

### Findings Related to the Third Research Problem

**Table 3.** Candidate teachers' opinions about whether the Twitter use in the course contributes to their skills on interpreting the disasters.

Item number	Item	M	SD
4	I think that I became skillful about interpreting the natural events.	4.11	.85
6	Sometimes, we had the chance to discuss the things we heard about in Twitter with friends.	3.91	1.07
14	I interpreted easily in the forthcoming weeks thanks to Twitter.	3.83	1.08
17	Thanks to this application, I was able to express my opinions briefly.	3.94	.97

Items 4, 6, 14 and 17 aim at determining candidate teachers' opinions about whether the Twitter use in the course contributes to their skills on interpreting the disasters. It was determined that the candidate teachers became skillful about interpreting the natural events thanks to Twitter (M= 4.11) and they were able to interpret more easily in the forthcoming weeks thanks to Twitter (M= 3.83).

Moreover, the candidate teachers sometimes had the chance to discuss the things they heard about in Twitter with their friends (M= 3.91), and therefore, they were able to express their opinions briefly (M= 3.94).

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the study, it was determined that candidate teachers became aware of many current events and disasters around the world thanks to Twitter. It was also determined that the Twitter application drew their attention to the current disasters and by this means, it helped them learn much about the disasters geography. Moreover, it was determined that the use of Twitter makes the candidate teachers skillful about interpreting the natural events and they can interpret more easily.

Although the candidate teachers get bored during the geography course, they learnt much about the course thanks to the Twitter and their perceptions, motivations and interest in the course was increased through the Twitter application. Also, they thought that Twitter should be used in educational settings.

It was determined that the use of Twitter in education and in disasters geography course increased the candidate teachers' learning and motivation towards the lesson, increased their awareness and knowledge about the disasters and current events in Turkey and in the world and improved their skills about interpreting the disasters.

Choosing instruction methods in accordance with the needs and interests of younger generation students and making use of information Technologies have been an inevitable necessity to reach the educational goals and equip the students with the knowledge and skills that prepare them for the life.

Social networks such as Twitter give an opportunity to enhance the learning environment, to increase the motivation towards the lesson, to socialize, to think, to express the thoughts, to interpret and to make comparisons when used appropriately. As for the students, these applications make it easier to participate in the lesson. As for the communication between the teacher and the students and among the students, it may be useful in conducting the lesson in a plan during the semester.

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