

The Effect of Social Media Usage on English Writing Pattern of Undergraduate Students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education

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Abstract

The advent and use of social media in the field of education has undoubtedly brought about many advantages and disadvantages to students and the educational system. In the midst of the numerous advantages of social media usage to student's academic performance, there is an outcry on its extreme effect on the students writing skills in English. The aim of this paper is to find out how social media affect the English writing pattern of students in the faculty of humanities and faculty of sciences in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education giving specific attention to misspelt words, the extreme use of substitutions, shorthand, and abbreviations in both formal and informal writing. A total population of 138 students' workbooks from the two faculties were used as the study population and also 75 Facebook and 55 WhatsApp messages. A sample of 138 students' workbooks were purposive selected and analyzed. Students general studies' workbook, Facebook and WhatsApp were used as the research instrument for the study. The data was analyzed using frequency and percentage table. Findings of the study revealed that social media has greatly impacted on the writing skills of students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. It was recommended that the students should the effects of social media on their English writing skills and readjust in their level of usage.

I. Introduction

It is clear that youths of this digital era are tremendously attached to Internet and social networking sites. They spend most of their time on social networking and text messaging in their daily communication. Their dependency on technology has gone viral and

their use of social media has resulted in both positive as well as negative effects. To put it differently, these young generations use social media in a variety of ways ranging from entertainment, socializing and information-seeking.

In the words of Skenazy (2009) when he posits that we think of phones as communication tools, but the reality is they may be just the contrary. The view of Davidson (2011) propose that people are adapting to fresh communication norms in an increasing digital world, learning to hastily attend to, process, and react to multiple and sometimes concurrent message. Given the several possible means that digital communication outfits will continue to impact practices of teaching and learning, instructional communication scholars should perform programmatic research to comprehend how these tools influence classroom communication and consequent learning outcomes (Schuck & Aubusson, 2010).

Social media includes all the available internet-based tools and services that are designed to advance community development through relationships and information distribution (Arnold and Paulus, 2010). They further state that the tools offer opportunities for personal manifestation as well as connections with other users. Junco, Helbergert and Loken (2011) as cited in MounimLakhal(2021) state that social media encourages teamwork and information sharing.Social media can be used in academic settings to prop up student commitment and expedite better student learning (Kabilan, Ahmad and Abidin, 2010).

Junco, Helbergert and Loken (2011) stated that social media involves a variety of the network tools and services that are intended to encourage community development through collaboration and exchanging ideas.They alsostate that social media encourages teamwork and information sharing. Also, Kabilan, Ahmad and Abidin (2010) recognizedthat social media can be used in academic settings to prop up student commitment and facilitate better student learning. At the present time, most scholars agree that knowledge not only exists in individual minds but also in discourse and connections between individuals (Kristen, Jessica and Hua, 2013).

To Freeman (2016), social media can be a useful tool for educational activities when approached in the right way. Bright (2014) submits that social networks are resource centres for teaching of English language. Akinjobi (2013) is also of the opinion that social network sites should be explored as supplements to classroom activities while Yunus&Salehi (2012) opine that Facebook page enables proficiency in students' use of English.

In the same vein, Fatimayin (2015) asserts that social media can be used to accommodate both the social and educational aspects. They can be tools for supporting teaching/learning on one hand and a means of socializing on the other. She, however went on to state that social media has both advantages and disadvantages. One of its disadvantages is its impact on the way secondary students spell words and write. Secondly, is the negative influence on students' time management, study behaviour and copying of wrong concepts?

In the digital age, the young generations use some popular terms like LOL (for “laugh out loud”) which is developed into unique words. It has a meaning greater than their original abbreviation. LOL is now used like a type of punctuation to add a joking or cheerful intonation to messages. It doesn’t always indicate literal laughter. Though the young people are using it with their friends informally, unintentionally they are acquiring these languages, and they use it in their formal writing and speaking. This type of text shorthand is now becoming a language all its own which is in a way affecting the writing pattern of the students in the classroom.

From a wide observation, social media language is gradually impacting on the students writing formal English writing exercises and impacting it negatively. According to Selwyn’s (2009), Facebook use must be seen as identity politics of being a student rather than enhancing students’ engagement with formal studies. During classroom interaction with students, one finds that most of the students write using incorrect spelling, grammar and punctuation marks. Many use abbreviations profusely, while others have formed the habit of using textspeak. This affects the structure of sentences used as well as their spellings.

Will (2017) asserts that 73% of teachers in a survey conducted by YouGov on behalf of Dictionary.com, think that social media and texting negatively affect their students’ grammar and spelling skills. The survey also found that students often struggle with grammar, meaning and comprehension and that 75% of the teachers are bothered when students use popular slang or “text speak” in their work while most teachers do not prioritise grammar and spelling when grading students work. In a report published by Clarion University in 2010 shows that social media language is mostly informal and allows non-standard orthography and grammatical errors.

II. Statement of the Problem

Social media usage is one of the major factors for poor writing skills among school students in Nigeria. University School students tend to fail to master the writing skill due the influence of social media. The advent of social media and student’s gross engagement in social networking has negatively impact of the writing skills in terms of correct sentence structure, spellings and word vocabulary development. It has been discovered that most of the students in Ignatius Ajuru University Education in Rivers State write formal document such as official letters and examination using incorrect spelling, wrong grammatical structures and improper application of the punctuation marks. Many use abbreviations profusely, while others have formed the habit of using text speak. This affects the structure of sentences used as well as their spellings. This in turn has spells a great setback for student in their quest for vocabulary acquisition and writing proficiency among others. It is against this background that this paper is carried out to examine the effect of social media and the English writing ability of the students in the university.

III. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main goal of this study is to determine the usage and the effect of social media on English writing among Ignatius Ajuru University Education students in Rivers State. This paper sort:

To examine the English writing pattern on social media as used by students of Ignatius Ajuru university of Education.

To investigate the evident of social media English writing pattern in students' formal writing.

IV. Literature Review

The meaning of the word social media is elusive and has lends itself to numerous definitions from different scholars. Social Media according to Junco, Helbergat and Loken (2011) denotes the internet-based devices that encourage relationship and communication. This agrees with Davis et al (2012) who asserted that Social Media refers to technology of web-based application that permits people and associations to generate, connect and share content in a digital environment via a multi-way communication. This presence of social media has made it possible for young people to communicate thoughts, feelings, personal information, and exchange photos and videos. Social media has come from distant to influence the construction of the global culture and identity. As much as international societies continue to relate with each other, technology is at the same time disadvantaging and disempowering some societies and shifting power to some actors. The United States of America, for example, is attempting and it is on the winning side in transforming the world into its own reflection. What we are evidencing is the 'Americanization' of the world (Berger, 2005). What is significant here is a facet of cultural supremacy and it is seen by the third world as a means of cultural imperialism.

Some studies found positive influence of social media on students' academic performance. For example Kabilan, Ahmad and Abidin (2010) found positive influence of social media on the academic performance because it promotes student engagement and facilitates better student learning. Social media also promotes collaboration and information sharing (Junco, Helbergert and Loken, 2011).According to Ahn (2011) social media encourages students' learning and practicing skills within a particular knowledge area. This is supported by Alloway and Alloway (2012) claimed that social media improves students' working memory and learning skills.In addition Van-Vooren & Bess (2013) assert that social media improve students' English Language learning through tweeting.

Student's Language Usage in Social Media

The use of language on social media sites is characterized by aspects of the language, to name a few, emoticons, acronyms, and vocabulary alteration. Acronym is a feature of language popularly used on social media. It is in which the initial letters of different words are put together and pronounced as a whole sentence in an abbreviated form. Will (2014)

states that the use of acronyms (abbreviation formed from the initial letters of other words are pronounced as a word) are now commonplace substitutes to whole sentence, e.g., lol (Laugh out loud and TGIF (thank God it's Friday). English Language used on social media is a variety that is undeniably different from Standard English language of everyday use.

While Standard English is based on grammatical rules and accordance, language use on social media is indeed a complete opposite where it does not abide by any grammatical rules or accordance. Language use on social media is open to just any word for use as far as it makes meaning to the recipient. Nevertheless, language use on social media is in fact posturing a lot of threat to Standard English language usage as students nowadays don't take the writing of Standard English as seriously as they should.

The Impact of Social Media on Students' Writing

As it has been highlighted thus far, it is noticeable that with the introduction of social media onto the scene, the effect it has on students' writing is gradually but surely manifesting. The effect of social media language is seen mostly in these areas: grammar and spelling errors and the usage of text language. Grammar and spelling errors are the common errors social media language has brought on to the English Language. As important as it has been as one of the key features in good Standard Language, abbreviations, wrong spelling, and omission of rules of grammar seem to be acceptable on social media.

This has brought conflicts to writing as students use these inappropriate and incorrect grammar and spellings in their writings at school. Adding on, abbreviations that are common in social media are frowned upon in formal writing. Students should spell words completely and not use 'text speak' or 'slang'. It is vital to note that students' academic writing is now marked by social media abbreviated words (text speak) and slang.

Writing Performance of Students in University

Writing is a medium used by humans to communicate emotion and language. It is often accompanied by the recording of signs and symbols. Writing depends on many of the similar structures of a speech. To name a few, use of vocabulary, grammar, and semantics, with the added dependency on a system of signs and symbols usually in the form of the alphabet (Fatimayin, 2015). Nowadays, as we go through our students' written work, we realize the non-existent aspects of capitalization and punctuation becoming quite a norm. Voegtlin (2010) state her claims that her students' writing changed as their social media use increased and has noticed the use of abbreviated text spellings. She further emphasizes that her students are more likely to write phrases that they see in text messages, such as "smthng" or 'smbdy' in their writing rather than learn to spell the word correctly.

V. Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory was used as the theoretical foundation of the study. This theory was introduced by Albert Bandura (1977). Social Learning theory posits that people learn and imitate behaviors they have observed in other people. According to Bandura

(1977), “man’s superior cognitive capacity is another factor that determines, not only how he will be affected by his experience, but the further direction his action may take”. In social learning system people acquire new pattern of behavior through direct experience or by observing the others behavior. To Bandura (1977) people can represent external influences symbolically and later use such representation to guide their actions.

VI. Methodology

In this paper, the researcher adopts an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach consisting of quantitative and qualitative design. The qualitative data was used to explain, interpret or back up the quantitative data results. This design enables the researcher to link the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods. However, to address the issue of social media use and its effects on student’s writing ability, the objectives of the study can only be achieved with the use of both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative method was used to collect some sample of written essay texts in workbook on Communication Skills in English 1 & 2 given to the students by lecturers in Department of English and Communication Art, Faculty of humanities. The workbook was basically design for students in year one and two across all departments offering general course commonly called GNS 111 and 112 in the university. These essays were selected since they are official letter, therefore demands that students should write using the standard Nigeria English varieties or formal writing. On the other hand, a sample of social media language (texts) was collected on Facebook (75 selections) and WhatsApp (55 selections), as well as expressions and spellings taken from the essay written in the workbooks were analyzed.

Population

A total of 138 students’ workbooks from the two faculties were used as the study population and also 75 Facebook and 55 WhatsApp messages were also used. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 138 workbooks on Communication Skills in English 1 & 2 to examine the student’s expression, spellings and writing ability. The workbooks were randomly selected from students from two faculties: faculty of humanities and faculty of sciences. Also, texts collated from samples of social media language (texts) on Facebook (75 selections) and WhatsApp (55 selections) were examine.

This paper employed two sources of primary data as means for data collection. These sources are: non-participatory observation method, and data from students’ English workbook, and samples from social media platforms (texts) collected on Facebook and WhatsApp. These platforms were used based on the fact that students mostly used these two platforms for social interaction.

Data Analysis

In this section of the paper, the researcher analyzed texts taken from social media

platforms and the errors found in students' essays written in the English workbook for year one and two students. The frequency and percent distribution were equally used to present the data.

Table 1. Text-chats English Writing Pattern used by Students on Social Media

S/N	Texts used	Source	frequency	Percentage	Meaning	Features
1	lol	FB/ WhatsApp	10	8	Laughing out loud	Abbreviation
2	Wl, giv	WhatsApp	4	3	Will, give	Deletion of last letter
3	ttyl	WhatsApp	5	4	Talk to you later	Abbreviation
4	Gd gt/	WhatsApp	8	6	Good Night	Numerals
5	G2G	FB	4	3	Got to go	Single letter spelling and numbers
6	Llnp,	FB/ WhatsApp	10	8	Long life and prosperity	Abbreviation
7	Bcos	WhatsApp	6	5	Because	Shorthand
8	dat	WhatsApp	7	6	That	Shorthand
9	2morrow	WhatsApp/ FB	9	7	tomorrow	Substitution of letter with numbers/symbols
10	IMU	FB/ WhatsApp	3	2	I miss you	Abbreviation
11	TNTL	FB/ WhatsApp	4	3	Trying not to laugh	Abbreviation
12	BBS	FB/ WhatsApp	3	2	Be back soon	Abbreviation
13	TGIF	FB/ WhatsApp	4	3	Thank God it's Friday	Abbreviation
14	HBD	FB/ WhatsApp	14	11	Happy Birthday	Abbreviation

15	Tnx	FB/ WhatsApp	11	8	Thanks	Abbreviation
16	dsame		3	2	The same	Shorthand
17	beta	WhatsApp	4	3	better	Using alphabets for word
18	U	FB/ WhatsApp	12	9	You	Using alphabets for word
19	Gr8t	FB/ WhatsApp	4	3	Great	Substitution of numbers for letters
20	Gd ngt	WhatsApp	5	4	Good night	Substitution of numbers for letters

The above table 1, revealed the language mostly used by social media users as their conversational code. These words are intelligible among social media users. They are adequately decoded and encode by the sender of the message and the receiver who decode the code and give feedback to the sender of the message. These are deviation from the standard English variety used in formal situation.

Table 2. Shows Evident of Non-Standard English (Social Media English Writing Pattern) Used in Students' Essay Workbook

N	Identified non-standard English expression	Number of students who use it	Frequency	Standard English version	Features
	... The price of PMS is not expensive			The price of premium Motor Spirit is expensive	Abbreviation
	sn't	5	5	is not	English contraction
	m	3	3	am	English contraction
	m			am	omission of pronoun "I"
	ov't			overnment	Shorthand

	o%				Eightpercent	ubstitution of word with numbers/sy mbols
	t's	3	3	.4	is	nglishcontra ction
	ejim				egime	wrong spelling/ shorthand
	oesn't	4	4	0.	oes not	nglishcontra ction
	cos			.1	ecause	hort hand /wrong spelling. Social media text
0				.1	ou	horthand/us e of alphabet in place of word
	at			.	hat	
2	hey've	0	0	.	hey have	nglishcontrac tion
3	ve've	4	4	0.	ve have...	nglishcontrac tion
4	he okada man				he commercial motorcyclist	igeria pidgin English
5	wasn't propa				was not proper	nglishcontrac tion/ wrong spellings. SNS
5	same			.1	he same	horthand.SN S
7	5yrs			4	ifteen years	NS Shorthand
8	5-30mins			4	fteento	Substitutio n of words

					thirtyminutes	with numbers. SNS shorthand
9	hey'll giv u				hey will give you	English contraction/ wrong spelling and Social media shorthand
10	he gov't & the masses			.1	he government and the masses	English contraction/ 23 wrong spelling and Social media shorthand
11	ometimes, 'd' people are week...			4	ometimes the people are weak	Social media shorthand/ Wrong spelling
12	lig. still remain the giant of africa				igeria remains the giant of Africa	Abbreviation/wrong spelling of the proper noun "Africa"
13	he youths are the leaders of 2morrow			.	he youths are leaders of tomorrow	Substitution of letter with numbers/symbols
14	t is beta we do rite now				t is better we do right now	Social media shorthand and Wrong spelling/wrong use of homophones
	total	36		100%		

Source: English GNS Essay Workbook 2022

From table 2, it is clear that students are caught up in the spirit of social media language even in a formal context. The words, letters and abbreviation identified in the above table are taken from the essays given to students in their first and second year of studies in the faculty of humanities and faculty of social sciences. The texts were extracted from the essay given to the students in their various workbook provided by the Department of English and Communication Art for student's continuous assessment. The students were required to use the standard form of English to write the essay. From the table, words like, "beta" for better, "rite" for "right", "u" for "you", "2morrow" for "tomorrow" "giv", for "give", "they'll" for "they will", etc. were discovered from some students workbooks.

VII. Discussion for Findings

From the above table 2, the student's expressions, spellings and used of nonstandard English were identified. From the essay the questions given to the students, they were not required to write long essay given that the context is a formal domain. Hence, they were expected to use formal English particularly with regards to the choice and spelling of words. Consequently, the appropriate variety of English that ought to have been used is the Standard British English which is the institutionalized variety for academic purposes. This variety is devoid of contracted forms of words, abbreviations and other forms of unconventional shorthand.

From the one hundred and thirty-eight (138) workbooks sampled, the nonstandard English form items presented in the above table were identified. There is an interesting discovery in the pattern of occurrence of the nonstandard English items identified in the essay written by students in these two faculties. Most of these items are derived from the English numbers used to substitute words mostly used by the students on social media during conversation.

Findings of this study revealed that social media language is making ways into the writing of students in formal context. These texts are informal and full of errors.

It is also interesting to know that the students are so familiar with these words, letters, abbreviations, shorthand and substitutions system of writing commonly used by social media users during conversation among peers and friends. In this regard, it is imperative to say that the students are consciously using these words in examination scripts. To this end, it is safe to state that social media serves as the motivation behind the use of the above lexical items and nonstandard English variety in a formal context. Applying the Labovian framework to explain the motivations behind this usage; a variations from the Standard English variety spellings despite the formal context, it can therefore be opined from the pattern of occurrence that, social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook are the major motivation for the use and application of the identified nonstandard English lexical items among students in the two faculties under study. The findings or this

work is in agreement with work of Fatimayin F. F (2015) which revealed that social media language (text speak) is making in-roads into the writing of students in formal classroom situations. These text speak are informal and full of errors. It also revealed that this variety has no concord, does not follow grammatical and spelling rules and is mainly concerned with communicating in the social language way.

Social networking sites or platforms are conversational platforms where there are no editors or a platform that demand standard English variety, therefore, acronyms, substitution, shorthand words, abbreviations and other forms of writing are used without consciousness of its implication.

The examined workbooks were full of grammatical errors such as use of wrong tense, dropping of articles, abbreviations, shorthand and contractions of words and many others. This social media language, which is intelligible among users on social media, is nonstandard and unacceptable for Standard English usage in a formal context. The errors can be termed to be another variety of English which is a combination of Nigerian languages, pidgin and bits of English language.

VIII. Conclusion

This paper has clearly revealed that social media has greatly affected university students in their English writing ability. The advent of social media is an introduction of a new system of writing which is a clear deviation from the Standard English varieties in the society. This language is mutually intelligible among social media users as they share their feelings, opinion and desires through the use of this language.

IX. Recommendation

Based on the findings of these work, I recommended that:

Students should be encouraged and reminded to stick to using the standard variety of English in formal writing.

The use of social media language should be discouraged among students in the university.

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