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INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE WRITING SKILLS AND LANGUAGE USE OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

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Abstract

The study determined the influence of social media on the language use and writing skills of English and literature students at the University of Benin. A descriptive research design was employed. The 400 level students in English and literature from the Department of Educational Foundations at the University of Benin comprised the study's population. 100 students were chosen at random from the population. Using a questionnaire that the researchers had developed; three English lecturers at the university validated the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was tested with thirty (30) students who did

not participate in the main study. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.713 indicated that the instrument was reliable. The frequency count, mean, and standard deviation were used to address the issues raised by the investigation. The results show that University of Benin English and literature students' writing skills are influenced by social media. Therefore, it was advised that students utilize social media platforms sensibly, take periodic "digital detox" periods, and engage in online forums or communities devoted to writing, reading, or language acquisition.

Keywords: Social Media, Writing Skills, Language, University

Introduction

The world has transformed into a digital era with the emergence of technological devices and telecommunication. Billions of

individuals worldwide are connecting through social networks and establishing local and global communities to exchange diverse knowledge, learn, interact, and

disseminate information. Social media seems to have impacted the writing skills of students in Standard English, which is the official communication language in Nigeria. While mass media and new media are influential communication systems that effectively fulfill contemporary society's communication and information requirements, there are certain concerns regarding their effects on human populations, especially the youth (Meribe, 2015).

Young people's preferred method of communication is quickly evolving to social media. While other communication channels, like newspapers, seem to be losing traction, platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, Tiktok, and most recently, threads, are growing a sizable online following (Reilly, 2020). Kullrich (2018) argued that Web 2.0 technologies have made it possible for these social media platforms to offer services that appeal to users from a wide range of backgrounds. Among many uses are news sharing, idea expression, thought

journaling, initiating political campaigns, and forming business or personal ties.

Studies confirm that Web 2.0 functionalities empower consumers or ordinary individuals to publish their own websites or weblogs, or contribute content to the mainstream media among many other functionalities (Ahmad et al., 2022). In actuality, the Web 2.0 platform has unique characteristics that facilitate several phenomena, such as "citizen journalism," "I-report," "global instant messaging," and "short message service" (SMS). Izunaso (2018). underline that "among other things, blogging, chatting, and content creation are some of the features of Web 2.0 that are frequently seen. Indeed, the Web 2.0 platform, which serves as the foundation for phenomena such as ' citizen journalism,' 'I-report,' 'global instant messaging,' 'short message service' (SMS) and others, possesses distinct features. Izunaso (2018). highlight that "some of the commonly observed characteristics of Web 2.0 include blogging,

The increasing proliferation and availability of social media to English language students at the University of Benin just as in other Universities appear to be impacting their writing skills. Many social media posts are poorly written and do not reflect positively on young people. Recent research has shown that ‘certain posts encountered in online social spaces fail to showcase the writing skills or expressive abilities of the individuals who share them. The negative impact caused by such errors on how others perceive the writer, as well as the image projected through grammatically flawed content is immeasurable’ (Briones et al., 2024). Due to the influence of social media, many students have adopted slangs as representations of proper English language structure. While this trend is commonly observed among non-native speakers of English, it also extends to native speakers, as social media has a global influence.

Recent studies examining the impact of digital communication observe that: “The frequent use of abbreviations, emotions and

non-standard grammar in text messaging and social media can erode traditional language skills. Students often carried these informal habits into their academic writing, leading to issues with grammar, spelling and formal writing proficiency” (Al-Rashidi, 2018). However, the purpose of communication is greatly hindered as not everyone can comprehend such obscure expressions. When used among English and Literature Students in higher education institutions, it could be described as detrimental to the future learners who may come under the guidance of these students. Many students employ abbreviations, even in academic assignments like essays, letters, and other written works. Words such as 'The' are now written as 'D,' 'Because' as 'becuz' or 'cuz,' 'Love' as 'Luv,' 'Come' as 'Cum,' and so on. Although these abbreviations may be intended to save time or simplify writing, they ultimately result in ambiguity and difficulty in comprehension for those unfamiliar with the meaning behind the abbreviated words.

The recipient of such abbreviated messages could spend several minutes attempting to decipher the meaning of the message when it could have been easily understood if written clearly. A properly written language should be readily understood. A situation where the English language is filled with complex or ambiguous words creates a barrier. For instance, many students believe that LOL means 'love of my life,' when it actually means 'laugh out loud.' This demonstrates how easily errors can occur.

Undergraduates in universities today have immersed themselves into the virtual world, especially with the convenience provided by smartphones, unlike the previous era where internet access was primarily through large computers located in organizations. While this has its advantages as it ensures that our youth are not left behind in the pursuit of digitalization, its detrimental effects on the academic activities offered by certain examination bodies are discouraging.

The inadequate mastery of the English language and spelling errors has been

associated with the widespread failure of Nigerian students in WAEC examination in recent years. Part of the reason for this predicament could be because more and more of these young people spend hours every day on social networking sites where they converse with one another using "special forms" of English (Omoera, Aiwuyo, Edemode and Anyanwu, 2018). However, recent research asserts that the techniques of text messaging (SMS) and electronic mail showcase a captivating new range in accordance with a "techno linguistic" dimension. (Manurung et al.,2022). This range pertains to the inventive adaptation of existing language principles and components, as limited by the dynamics of technological or mechanical devices, which should be recognized and taught as such in Standard English, or Educated Nigerian English in this instance. It is crucial to examine how social media usage affects students' competence in written expression, their comprehension of grammar, vocabulary, and their capacity to articulate intricate ideas cohesively.

Additionally, it is important to comprehend the specific linguistic characteristics and writing practices prevalent in social media platforms that might impede or improve students' academic writing abilities.

Research Questions

1. How does social media influence the writing proficiency of students?
2. How does social media influence the language utilization of students?
3. What is the influence of male and female students on writing Proficiency?
4. What is the influence of male and female students on students' language utilization?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between male and female influence of social media on students writing proficiency.
2. There is no significant difference between male and female influence of

social media on students' language utilization.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was selected as the research approach for this study. All 400 level English and literature students from the University of Benin's Department of Educational Foundations made up the study's population. According to information available, there are 245 English and literature students enrolled in the University of Benin's 400-level Department of Educational Foundations at this time. The basic random sample technique was used in the investigation. Of the student body, 100 were chosen at random. The instrument used in this investigation was a questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions concerning the impact of social media on English and literature students' writing abilities and language usage. The questionnaire was validated by three professors at the University of Benin. After any necessary revisions, it was rewritten and given to the researchers. The instrument for reliability testing was

distributed to thirty (30) students who were not involved in the main study. The data collected from the students were subjected to Cronbach alpha reliability statistics, and the results showed that the instrument is reliable

with a reliability co-efficient of 0.713. In order to determine the research's findings, the researcher analyzed the data using the frequency count, mean, and standard deviation.

Results

Research Question 1: How does social media influence the writing proficiency of students?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondent on the Influence of Social Media on the Writing Proficiency of Students

S/N	Questionnaire Items	N	Mean	St. Div.	Decision
1.	I love using slangs in my writing due to social media usage	100	2.76	1.06	Agree
2.	I often result to using abbreviations in my writing as a result of social media usage.	100	2.83	.98	Agree
3.	My writing tone and vocabulary tend to mimic the informal patterns I encounter on social media.	100	2.79	.90	Agree
4.	Due to an increase in the use of social media, I now use emoji and emoticons in my writing.	100	2.49	1.08	Agree
5.	Constant use of social media has impacted my writing habits, leading me to incorporate hashtags in my academic work.	100	2.02	1.03	Disagree

Tables one shows the different opinions of students on the writing proficiency of students. Analysis of table one indicates that Items 1, 2, 3, and 4 show agreement among respondents, indicating that a significant number of students agreed that social media usage influences their writing style. They use

slangs, abbreviations, mimic informal patterns, and incorporate emojis or emoticons into their writing. The majority of respondents agree that they use slangs (Item 1), abbreviations (Item 2), mimic informal patterns (Item 3), and incorporate emojis or

emoticons (Item 4) in their writing as a result of social media usage.

Item 5, on the other hand, reveals disagreement among respondents. A majority of them disagree with the statement related to using emojis or emoticons in their writing due

to social media usage. However, respondents seem to disagree regarding the use of emojis or emoticons (Item 5), indicating that they do not frequently use these symbols in their writing despite social media influence.

Research Question 2: How does social media influence the language utilization of students?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondent on the Influence of Social Media on the Language Utilization of Students

S/N	Questionnaire Items	N	Mean	St. Div.	Decision
1.	I use slangs when speaking because of my exposure to social media.	100	2.82	.947	Agree
2.	I tend to use body language and gesture to communicate due to my exposure to emojis on social media.	100	2.53	.979	Agreed
3.	I often use vulgar words in my language use.	100	2.19	1.001	Disagree
4.	Most times, I address older persons the way I talk to my peers on social media.	100	2.12	1.103	Disagree
5.	I tend to shorten greetings, for example instead of good morning, I say "Gm".	100	2.15	1.122	Disagree

Table two shows the response given by students on the influence of social media on their language utilization. Items 1 and 2 show agreement among respondents, indicating that a significant number of them agree that social media exposure influences their

language utilization. They use slangs when speaking and tend to use body language and gestures to communicate. The majority of respondents agree that they use slangs when speaking (Item 1) and tend to use body language and gestures (Item 2) as a result of

their exposure to social media. Items 3, 4, and 5 reveal disagreement among respondents. Most of them disagree with statements related to using vulgar words, addressing older persons the way they talk to peers on social media, and shortening greetings.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between male and female influence of social media on students writing proficiency

Table 3: Independent sample t-test on the Difference the Influence of Social Media on Students Writing Proficiency by Gender

Variable	No Exp.	\bar{X}	SD	df	t-Cal.	t-Critical	Sig (2-tailed)	Decision
Male	42	52.55	.71	77.6	1.613	1.960	.698	H ₀₁ Accepted
Female	68	51.22	.69	74.5			.756	

Table 3 shows that there is no difference in the influence of social media on students writing proficiency by gender. The table shows that the calculated value is 1.613 while the critical value is 1.960 at 0.05 alpha level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between male and female influence of social media on students' language utilization

Table 4: Independent sample t-test on the difference the influence of social media on students' language Utilization by gender

Variable	No Exp.	\bar{X}	SD	df	t-Cal.	t-Critical	Sig (2-tailed)	Decision
Male	42	48.41	.64	54.4	1.489	1.960	.514	H ₀₂ Accepted
Female	68	46.12	.54	61.2			.475	

Table 4 shows that there is no difference in writing proficiency by gender. The table the influence of social media on students shows that the calculated value is 1.489 while

the critical value is 1.960 at 0.05 alpha level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the study in table one indicates that social media affects the writing proficiency of students. Majority of the students agreed that they use abbreviations in their writing due to the influence of social media. This agrees with Omoera, Aiwuyo, Edemode and Anyanwu (2018) while examining students in Ekpoma posited that the coming of social media has influenced the writing proficiency of students they observed students are getting use to abbreviations just like using: "u" for "you" among other common abbreviations. Also, a significant number of students agreed that social media has a great Influence on their writing skills. This simply implies that social media play a major role when it comes to the writing proficiency of students in English and Literature department. These findings align with that of (Izunaso, 2018). Furthermore, the study revealed that there is no significant

difference in the influence of social media on students' language utilization as well as students writing proficiency by gender.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social media have more negative influence on the writing proficiency of English and Literature students in the University of Benin and less negative influence on their language use. Also, that gender is not a factor in the influence of social media on students, writing proficiency as well as use of appropriate languages.

Recommendations

In view of the findings and conclusion drawn from the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. students should manage their time on social media platforms wisely. Setting limits on daily usage and designating specific times for social media can help

- prevent excessive distraction.
2. Students should have occasional "digital detox" periods where students disconnect from social.
 3. media for a day or weekend as it helps them refocus on other activities, including reading and writing.
 4. Students should follow educational accounts, pages, or groups on social media platforms exposing them to content that promotes learning and intellectual growth. Students should be taught how to critically evaluate information they encounter on social media, encourage fact-checking and critical analysis to ensure they are exposed to accurate and reliable content.
 5. Students should be encouraged to participate in online communities or forums focused on writing, literature, or language learning. These communities can provide a supportive and constructive environment for improving their skills.
 6. The use of grammar and writing improvement apps or tools should be recommended. These can assist students in proofreading and enhancing their writing, helping them maintain proper language usage.

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