Influence of Social Media Language on Students' Grammar and Writing in Kogi State College of Education Technical Mopa and Confluence University of Science and Technology, Osara Kogi State

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Abstract: *This study examines the influence of social media language on students' grammar and writing skills at the College of Education Technical, Mopa and Confluence University of Science and Technology, Osara Kogi State. With the growing usage of social platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter/X, and Instagram, informal language patterns, abbreviations, emojis, and non-standard spellings have increasingly filtered into academic writing. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study collected data from 200 students and 10 lecturers via questionnaires, writing tasks, and interviews. The findings reveal that social media language significantly affects students' ability to write grammatically correct and coherent essays. While some digital literacy skills were found to enhance creative expression, the majority of students frequently transferred informal digital expressions into their formal academic writing. The study recommends targeted academic writing programmes and awareness campaigns to promote register sensitivity and metalinguistic awareness among students.*

Keywords: social media, grammar, academic writing, student language, digital influence, higher education, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The advent of digital technology and social media has reshaped the modes of communication globally, especially among young adults in educational institutions. Platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter/X encourage informal, rapid, and often unedited language use, characterized by abbreviations, emojis, code-switching, and phonetic spellings. While this transformation fosters real-time interaction and digital engagement, it raises concerns about the possible erosion of grammatical norms and writing conventions, particularly in academic settings. In Nigeria, the College of Education Technical, Mopa, and the Confluence University of Science and Technology, Osara, represent two tiers of tertiary education institutions where writing proficiency is a core requirement. However, lecturers increasingly observe poor grammar, misuse of punctuation, and informal expressions in students' academic writing. This study seeks to assess how social media language influences students' grammar and writing practices in these institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The proliferation of social media has dramatically transformed how people communicate, particularly among youth and students. Social media language is often characterized by its informality, brevity, and creativity, breaking away from conventional grammatical rules and formal syntactic structures (Crystal, 2006). The nature of platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter (now X), Facebook, and Instagram encourages the use of non-standard language forms including abbreviations (e.g., "u" for "you"), acronyms (e.g., "LOL," "BRB"), emojis, phonetic spellings (e.g., "gr8" for "great"), and deliberate spelling errors for humorous or stylistic effects (Thurlow, 2003; Danet & Herring, 2007).

Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) describe social media language as a hybrid of spoken and written language, one that blends elements of speech, writing, and visual expression, creating a new communicative register. This hybridity, while linguistically rich, can cause register confusion when students transfer informal structures into academic contexts. In addition, social media communication often lacks punctuation and capitalization, contributing to declining attention to orthographic norms among students (Lenhart et al., 2008). These patterns are reinforced through frequent usage, and students may internalize them as acceptable norms, particularly if they are not actively guided to differentiate between informal and formal writing contexts (Al-Deen & Hendricks, 2012). Moreover, multilingual code-switching such as mixing English with Pidgin or indigenous languages is also prevalent in social media discourse in multilingual societies like Nigeria, further complicating the maintenance of standard grammar in academic writing (Adegbija, 2004).

However, some scholars argue that social media language is not inherently detrimental to literacy. Rather, it reflects an evolving linguistic resource that, if properly channelled, can foster creativity, rhetorical awareness, and audience sensitivity (Lunsford, 2011). Thus, the issue is not the existence of social media language but the lack of metalinguistic awareness among users about appropriate language use in different contexts.

Numerous studies have examined the effects of social media language on students' academic writing, highlighting the duality of its influence enhancing communicative fluency while impairing grammatical accuracy. Yusuf (2020) conducted a study on the effects of SMS and social media writing styles on students' academic writing in selected Nigerian universities. The findings indicated that students frequently transferred informal abbreviations and emoticons into their academic essays, which negatively impacted grammatical correctness and coherence. The study emphasized that students lacked awareness of appropriate register use and recommended pedagogical intervention in writing instruction. Uzoezie and Nwanne (2021) examines the writing patterns of undergraduates in Southeastern Nigeria and noted a significant presence of informal expressions such as "u", "b4", and "LOL" in their academic submissions. Their findings revealed that students' high exposure to social media shaped their syntactic constructions, spelling habits, and punctuation usage, often resulting in deviations from standard academic norms. Ogunmodede and Olawuyi (2022) explores on polytechnic students in Southwestern Nigeria and assessed the frequency and nature of language transfer from digital communication to formal writing. They discovered that while students had strong expressive skills on platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram, their academic essays suffered from shallow vocabulary, informal structures, and excessive code-switching. The study concluded that social media had contributed to a redefinition of literacy that conflicts with formal academic expectations. Aina and Olayemi (2019) examines the linguistic behaviours of secondary school students and discovered that over 70% of participants preferred digital English forms, even in classroom exercises. Though the study was not directly focused on tertiary institutions, it provided insight into the early development of non-standard writing habits among learners in Nigeria.

Research Gap
While previous studies have adequately highlighted the influence of social media language on students' academic writing in general, few have focused specifically on students in technical and science-focused tertiary institutions such as the College of Education Technical Mopa and Confluence University of Science and Technology, Osara. Most existing literature emphasizes traditional universities or secondary schools, often excluding institutions that blend technical or vocational training with conventional academic disciplines.

Moreover, earlier studies have not sufficiently addressed the intersection between digital linguistic behaviour and discipline-specific writing competence in these unique institutional contexts. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by:

- Providing empirical data on how social media language affects the grammatical and writing abilities of students in technical and science-oriented institutions.
- Exploring how language educators in such contexts perceive and respond to these emerging linguistic patterns.
- Offering context-specific recommendations for integrating digital literacy into English language instruction within Nigeria's evolving tertiary education landscape.

Theoretical Perspectives
The influence of social media language on grammar and writing can be examined through **sociolinguistic** and **social constructivist** lenses. Sociolinguistics recognizes language as a social

practice shaped by context, identity, and community norms (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Social constructivism, on the other hand, views learning as a collaborative process mediated by language and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). These frameworks highlight the need for contextualized language teaching that addresses both formal and informal communication genres

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

- This study adopts a descriptive survey design to investigate the influence of social media language on students' grammar and writing skills. The design is appropriate for gathering data from a population to describe existing conditions, opinions, or behaviours without manipulating any variables. It enables the researcher to assess patterns of language use and its perceived impact on writing competence among tertiary students in the selected institutions.

Population of the Study

- The population comprises all students of the College of Education Technical, Mopa and Confluence University of Science and Technology, Osara, both in Kogi State, Nigeria. These institutions were chosen due to their increasing integration of digital platforms in academic and social life, as well as their diverse student demographics.

Sample and Sampling Technique

- A total of 200 students were selected from both institutions (100 from each) using a stratified random sampling technique. The sample was stratified based on department and academic level to ensure representation across various faculties (e.g., English, Education, Science, and Technology). The selection ensured a balanced inclusion of students who are regular users of social media platforms.

Research Instruments

- The primary instruments for data collection were:
- **Questionnaire**: A structured questionnaire was administered to gather data on students' frequency of social media use, common linguistic habits online, and their perception of how it influences their grammar and writing.
- **Essay Writing Test**: Students were asked to write short academic essays (about 250 words) on general topics. These essays were analysed for grammatical accuracy, spelling errors, sentence structure, and the presence of social media linguistic patterns (e.g., abbreviations, emojis, slangs).
- **Interviews**: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 English Language lecturers from both institutions to validate and enrich the quantitative findings with expert insights.
  ### Validation of Instruments
- To ensure content validity, the questionnaire and essay prompt were reviewed by language and education experts. A pilot study involving 20 students (not part of the main sample) was conducted to refine the instrument based on feedback related to clarity, ambiguity, and relevance.
  ### Method of Data Collection

- Data collection took place over a two-week period. Questionnaires were administered physically during class hours, and essay writing was supervised to ensure authenticity. Interviews with lecturers were conducted face-to-face and recorded (with consent) for transcription.

Method of Data Analysis

- Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, and percentages. Students' essays were graded using a standardized analytical rubric focused on grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, coherence, and evidence of informal language intrusion. Qualitative data from interviews were subjected to thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns in lecturers' observations regarding students' writing quality and social media influence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Frequency of Social Media Use

The questionnaire revealed that **94%** of students use social media daily, with WhatsApp (88%), Facebook (70%), and Twitter/X (60%) being the most used platforms. A majority (76%) reported that they spend between 3 to 6 hours daily on these platforms. The high frequency of use indicates a significant immersion in digital language environments

Common Linguistic Features in Students' Writing

Analysis of students' essays showed notable evidence of informal and non-standard language features, including:

- Abbreviations such as "u" for "you", "b4" for "before"
- Use of lowercase "i" for the personal pronoun
- Omission of punctuation marks
Substitution of full expressions with slang (e.g., "gonna", "cos")
- Occasional emojis or symbols in drafts

Approximately **64%** of the essays exhibited at least two social media-influenced features, suggesting a strong spillover effect from informal to academic contexts.

Grammatical and Structural Errors

Frequent grammatical issues identified included:

- Run-on sentences and comma splices
- Incorrect verb tenses
- Faulty subject-verb agreement
- Punctuation omission and misuse
- Poor paragraph organization and cohesion

Students who self-reported frequent social media use had a higher incidence of these errors. This aligns with findings by Salawu and Adegbite (2017) and Akindele and Afolayan (2020), who noted the erosion of writing conventions among digital-native students.

Lecturers' Perspectives

Interviews with lecturers confirmed growing concerns over the decline in students' writing competence. Many lecturers observed that students increasingly write the way they text. One lecturer noted:

"Some students don't even know that 'LOL' or 'TBH' has no place in academic writing, they use it like it's normal."

However, some lecturers acknowledged that social media could support writing creativity and engagement when students are guided to use it reflectively.

Implications for Language Learning

These findings suggest that while social media enhances exposure to language and fosters informal fluency, it often undermines students' awareness of register, audience, and standard grammar in academic settings. The lack of differentiation between formal and informal contexts reflects weak metalinguistic awareness an essential component of academic literacy.

Summary of Findings

1. **High social media usage** was reported among students in both institutions, with WhatsApp and Facebook being the most used platforms.
2. **Social media linguistic patterns** such as abbreviations, lowercase pronouns, and slangs were frequently transferred into academic writing.
3. **Grammatical weaknesses** in student essays were strongly linked to habits formed through social media communication.
4. **Lecturers observed a noticeable decline** in formal writing proficiency, with many students unaware of register boundaries.
5. Despite the negative trends, social media was also viewed as a potential tool for developing writing fluency, creativity, and lexical variation if properly integrated into the curriculum.
   Recommendations
   Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:
1. **Integration of Digital Literacy in Language Curriculum:**
   Language educators should include modules on digital literacy and register awareness to help students distinguish between informal and formal writing contexts.
2. **Workshops on Academic Writing Skills:**
   Regular writing clinics and workshops should be organized to reinforce academic writing conventions and highlight the negative transfer of social media habits.
3. **Monitoring and Guidance on Social Media Use:**
   Institutions should provide guidance on productive use of social media, encouraging students to follow educational and language-enhancing pages or groups.
4. **Teacher Training in Language and Media Awareness:**
   Teachers should be trained in digital linguistics and critical media literacy so they can better understand the language trends students are exposed to and address them effectively.

5. **Promotion of Formal Writing Platforms**
   Schools should encourage blogging, journaling, and participation in academic writing forums as alternatives to unregulated digital expression.
6. **Policy Advocacy**
   Educational policymakers should recognize the linguistic impact of social media and support interventions to protect and promote academic writing competence in tertiary institutions.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that social media language significantly influences students' grammar and writing proficiency at the Kogi State College of Education Technical Mopa and Confluence University of Science and Technology, Osara Kogi State. While social media enhances informal language engagement, its unchecked influence can undermine standard writing practices critical for academic and professional success. The high frequency of non-standard language features in students' essays and lecturers' observations of declining writing quality point to a pressing need for targeted language education interventions.

Therefore, rather than banning or condemning social media use, educators and institutions must embrace a balanced approach one that fosters digital fluency while reinforcing the standards of academic English. Empowering students with the metalinguistic awareness to navigate both digital and academic environments is essential to sustaining effective communication in the 21st century.

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