

The Negative Influence of Social Media Language on Academic English Writing among University Students in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the impact of social media exposure on Malaysian university students' academic writing, with emphasis on how informal digital language influences their grammar, spelling, and overall writing competence. The use of abbreviations, slangs as well as informal structures of the language in this powerful communication tool has become common in academic contexts. Previous studies have shown that this 'encroachment' undermine vocabulary richness, grammatical accuracy, and eventually affect learners' ability in elaborating idea and as a result weaken writing performance.

Nevertheless, students' perceptions remain mixed—many recognize that platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp can boost confidence, grammatical awareness, and access to learning materials, yet also acknowledge that informal habits hinder formal writing. The study highlights that educators can mitigate these negative effects by integrating social media into structured academic activities, providing continuous feedback, and monitoring student writing practices. Ultimately, effective guidance can transform social media from a distraction into a supportive tool for academic writing development.

Keywords: Social Media, Academic Writing Language Influence, University Students, Writing Competence.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media has become an integral part of university students' daily lives, shaping not only how they communicate but also how they express themselves in writing. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and

Twitter have introduced a culture of brevity, informality, and abbreviation, where slang expressions like "u," "gr8," or "b4" are widely used. While these forms of communication facilitate quick exchanges, their habitual use poses challenges for academic writing, which demands clarity, grammatical accuracy, and formal tone. Academic writing, by definition, requires the structured presentation of ideas to ensure coherence, critical engagement, and intellectual rigor. However, research shows that prolonged exposure to informal digital language can weaken spelling, sentence structure, and grammar, resulting in deteriorating writing skills.

Malaysian university students, in particular, face this issue as they navigate between social media communication and academic expectations. Although some perceive social media as helpful for building confidence and increasing grammatical awareness, others admit that it reinforces casual writing styles unsuitable for academic contexts. This duality necessitates critical examination of how social media influences writing practices. Moreover, it calls for educators to identify practical strategies—such as structured integration of social platforms, scaffolding, and regular feedback—to help students balance both worlds effectively.

Aim & Research Questions

To examine the influence of social media language on Malaysian university students' academic writing and to explore effective strategies that educators can implement to minimize its negative impact while enhancing students' writing skills. The leading questions in this paper are:

RQ 1: What are the drawbacks of excessive social media exposure has on academic writing?

RQ2: How do University students perceive the influence of social media language on their academic writing?

RQ3: What strategies can be implemented by educators to help students to overcome the influence of social media language in academic writing?

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a qualitative paper that relies mainly on a thorough review of existing literature. Relevant information, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and other scholarly works were sourced from academic databases using keywords related to AI-based speech coaching, presentation anxiety, and ESL learning. The literature was then examined thematically to uncover common patterns. This process helps to build a deeper understanding of the topic and provides a foundation for answering the research questions posed in this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysian university students frequently use informal language from social media, such as slang and abbreviations, which is not suitable for academic purposes and may hinder the development of strong writing skills. Social media is recognized as a digital space that enables users with various backgrounds to communicate, interact, and share ideas with each other who share similar interests (Damio et al. 2024; Mirza et al., 2022; Chukwuere, 2021). In parallel, academic writing is defined as an orderly way of transferring ideas to make the point understood. The findings of Mirza et al., (2022) indicate that writing is a complicated experience in itself-even in the first language, and it is therefore more complicated when done in a foreign language. Recent studies have explored how the media affects writing among students in both positive and negative aspects. While some researchers argue that social media can be useful when applied under proper supervision (Mirza, et al., 2022), much of the existing literature emphasizes on detrimental effects, particularly on academic writing.

The negative impact of excessive social media exposure on academic writing is that students' ability to use formal academic writing is deteriorating. This happens because habitual use of social media has led students to become accustomed to using informal abbreviated language such as "u", "b4", and "gr8" (Omoera et al., 2018; Toryuha et al., 2023). This social media language has led to poor spelling habits, making students' writing to be weak, resulting in incompetence in formal writing (Savitri, 2018; Bovill, 2010 as cited in Nutakor and Israel, 2023).

Subsequently, it affects students' grammatical accuracy and writing mechanics. The constant exposure to social media language has eroded students' ability in grammar, short form, and spelling, which leads to the loss of written language competence. (Asare et al., 2022; Amin et al., 2020; Zainal and Rahmat, 2020; Toryuha et al., 2023; Omoera et al., 2018; Javed et al; Guardaquivil and Matalines, 2023). For example, "I asked him 2 (cm) 2 (mi)". Evidence from research reveals that poor sentences, simple vocabulary, and repetitive sentence structure have been found in the assignments and tests completed by students (Javed et al., 2020). A different perspective was offered by Hamat and Hassan (2019), who affirmed that social media can improve students' grammar and help their listening and speaking skills.

Additionally, it has caused students' ability to elaborate and develop ideas to be limited. The dependence on social media has led students to be lazy in writing; as a result, they are unable to gain long-term knowledge, which is important for students (Guardaquivil and Matalines, 2023; Nanda and Panda, 2024). However, Crystal (2008) as cited in Asare et al., (2022) argues that with frequent writing even though just a short post can boost writing confidence and fluency overtime and 66.0% (60) respondent had agreed that English writing can be improved by interacting in social media (Hashim et al., 2018 as cited in Azlan and Yunus, 2020).

Students' perception towards the use of social media language in academic writing also plays a vital role in this habit. According to several studies, Malaysian university students perceive that social networking sites (SNSs) can be helpful for them to write better in English. Afendi and Haslinda (2019) discovered that 97.4% of 6804 students thought SNSs had a beneficial impact on their language skills, with writing making the highest mean score. Similar findings were made by Nurul Afifah and Melor (2020), who found that students felt confident writing in English on social networking sites and showed awareness of their grammatical and spelling in academic writing. Many of them also believed that these SNS platforms improved their academic writing performance.

Notwithstanding these positive results, students also perceive that there are negative effects of social media to their academic writing. Arif and Tasnim (2024) found that students inadvertently employed informal linguistic elements such as acronyms and slang in their academic writing. Although they changed their language to suit the context, many acknowledge the importance of informal habits. These findings are also supported by Mirza et al., (2022), who found that 86% of students perceived that their WhatsApp texting habits negatively affect their academics due to grammar and spelling mistakes, and 78% of students acknowledged that they ignored the mistakes when texting. In line with these, social media is also perceived to affect students' academics, especially in writing and speaking skills, and lead to unhealthy usage patterns (Nanda & Panda, 2024).

Interestingly, some studies emphasize both positive and negative perceptions. According to Guardaquivil and Matalines (2023), they found that students loved the way social media helps them in increasing their grammatical awareness, access to materials, and writing confidence. At the same time, they raised concerns about the frequent use of informal digital language fostering casual writing styles, abbreviating the language, and increasing the risk of plagiarism in academic writing.

After going through all the impacts and perceptions, there are several strategies that can be implemented by teachers to help students to overcome the influence of social media language in academic writing. Firstly, teachers can turn common social media platforms like Facebook or YouTube into structured spaces for academic writing practices. As suggested in previous research, (Amin et al., 2020; Shahzadi & Kausar, 2020), language learning can be facilitated by creating interesting interactive learning environments that are parked on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Wikis. In fact, these findings reaffirm the capacity and suitability of social media to serve as a useful platform for academic writing language development when managed effectively by teachers (Amin et al., 2020; Haidari et al., 2020; Guardaquivil & Matalines, 2023; Asafo-Adjei et al., 2023; Shahzadi & Kausar, 2020).

Teachers, who are also known to be major players in using Wikis and social media to develop students' academic writing, should take advantage of using them to enhance engagement and provide efficient feedback. AlMarwani (2020); Shahzadi and Kausar (2020) emphasized that through collaborative group assignments and learning on social media like Facebook, it enables students to actively learn from their teachers and peers. This allows students to be argumentative and share their perspective and develop content knowledge, vocabulary choice, language style, and mechanisms that will help enhance their academic writing (Haidari et al., 2020; AlMarwani, 2020). The effective use of social media writing tools by the teacher will provide students with quick responses and improve their writing.

Lastly, regular feedback and monitoring from teachers guide students in correcting informal writing habits. AlMarwani (2020) addressed that teachers need to intervene and provide constructive, scaffolded feedback, as utilizing technology does not guarantee improvement, even if they are using collaborative and interactive technology platforms such as Google Classroom. Similarly, Asafo-Adjei, R. et al. (2023) added that quality feedback from teachers allows students to stay alert to the solecisms made due to the negative influence of social media. Therefore, paired with teachers' close monitoring and scaffolded feedback on students' posts, social media supports students' writing academically (AlMarwani, 2020; Asafo-Adjei et al., 2023; Shahzadi & Kausar, 2020).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the literature review, there are several crucial points that can be highlighted as important findings that also serve as answers to the research questions raised in this paper. There are several key findings on the

relationship between social media use and academic writing among Malaysian university students. Overall, students frequently adopt informal language from social media, such as slang and abbreviations, which negatively affects their ability to write in formal academic contexts. This habitual use of informal expressions leads to poor spelling, limited vocabulary, and repetitive sentence structures. It also weakens grammar and writing mechanics, contributing to a gradual decline in students' competence in academic writing. These are the drawbacks of excessive social media exposure has on academic writing commonly raised in many studies.

Despite these drawbacks, some studies reveal that social media can play a constructive role when used purposefully. Many students perceive social networking platforms as helpful for improving their language skills, particularly grammar awareness and writing confidence. However, they also acknowledge the risk of adopting casual writing styles and informal linguistic habits in academic tasks. In general, university students have strong perception that social media can have positive effects on their academic writing but at the same time are not oblivious to the negatives impacts that they bring.

The review further indicates that teachers play a crucial role in addressing these challenges. By integrating social media into structured learning activities, providing timely feedback, and closely monitoring students' writing, teachers can guide learners to use these platforms productively. When managed effectively, these strategies of utilizing social media can be transformed from a source of distraction into a supportive tool for developing students' academic writing skills.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, it can be observed that the potential contribution of social media to language learning is far outweighed by the concern that it has negative effects on students' academic writing. While students perceive it as something that can help in language development when properly utilized, concurrently, some acknowledge its contribution towards reinforcing casual habits that may affect their academic writing. This necessitates identifying promising strategies that educators can adopt to enhance students' writing skills. Thus, this study aims to explore how excessive exposure to informal language on social media can negatively affect Malaysian students' academic writing and shape their perceptions in various ways; therefore, understanding this can be a strategy for educators to help students overcome this issue.

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