The Impact of English Urban Slang from Social Media on Verbal and Written Communication among Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

English Urban Slang refers to informal words and expression which usually use by the younger generations especially on digital platforms. This slang is influenced by the popular culture, peers' interaction and online media. Thus, this study focused on the impacts of English urban slang from social media towards verbal and written communication among undergraduate students. Quantitative research designed was employed using online survey questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 12 statements regarding the perception, habits, and experience of the respondents on using slang in academic writings. 60 respondents from LG240 participated in this study. Data were collected using online Google Forms and were analysed using SPSS for descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations. The findings show that slang has become a normal part of everyday speech, but its presence in academic writing raises concerns, especially around grammar and maintaining a formal tone. The study concludes that while slang fosters social connectedness, it poses challenges for maintaining academic norms. These findings offer valuable insights not only for language educators and students in higher education but also for the general public, highlighting the importance of language appropriateness and its role in sociolinguistic contexts.

Keywords: English urban slang, written communication, oral communication, academic writing, undergraduate students

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Slang is common among younger generations, who navigate online spaces where language changes rapidly. Teenagers spend much of their time on platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram, where abbreviated forms and playful phrasing are normalised for everyday interaction (Pew Research Center, 2023). When posts are shared, new terms spread across peer networks and become embedded in their speech. Nevertheless, usage remains situational, as students often adjust their style when the context demands greater formality. Ultimately, youth slang thrives because it signals belonging while facilitating connection.

In Malaysia, English urban slang shapes daily communication through both creativity and practicality. Studies on bilingual Malaysian youths highlight that internet slang supports identity, solidarity, and self-expression (Shing, 2025). On social media, English-based slang often co-occurs with Malay, encouraging informality and reshaping norms of spelling and brevity (Zulkifli & Tengku Mahadi, 2020). Consequently, students adjust their registers according to context, although traces of online phrasing occasionally appear in academic work. This

blending reflects Malaysia's multilingual environment, which can broaden expressive resources but also complicate expectations of formality. Hence, this study investigated how English urban slang from social media affects LG240 students' spoken and written communication.

Problem Statement

As a matter of fact, overdependence on slang can make it harder for students to switch into more formal styles

of communication, especially when they have to switch from casual talk into other settings.

Research with adolescents shows that using 'textese' often makes writers seem less professional and less careful when addressing authority figures (Kemp et al., 2021). Although many students are capable of code-switching, the line between casual and formal language can be blurred under time pressure or with constant exposure to social media. The real challenge, then, is not slang itself, but the growing mismatch between audience expectations and the way students actually express themselves.

To make it worst, the rise of social media further complicates this issue. Platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram constantly expose young people to shortened forms, emojis, and other casual features (Pew Research Center, 2023). Classroom-based studies confirm that social media slang sometimes appears in essays, emails, and notes, even when students aim for a formal style (Matias, 2023). Over time, convenience and familiarity may take precedence over careful editing, causing small slips to evolve into recurring features in graded work.

Many existing researches have approached slang from a sociolinguistic perspective, focusing on its types, functions, and meanings rather than its impact on formal communication (Dwi et al., 2020). Malaysian studies, for instance, emphasise the creativity, identity-building, and social functions of internet slang (Shing, 2025). Yet these studies also point to the need for further investigate how internet slang affect students' formal accuracy and control of register. In short, the literature explains what slang is and how it works socially, but rarely tests its implications for academic or professional discourse. Due to that, many students remain uncertain about when and how to maintain formal English in academic and professional contexts. There is still limited research that examines these dynamics among Malaysian undergraduates in a structured way. To address this gap, the present study investigates how English urban slang from social media influences the spoken and written communication of LG240 students at UiTM Shah Alam.

Research Objective

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To examine LG240 students' perceptions of how using slang affects verbal communication.
2. To identify how the use of slang, influence the formality of LG240 students' written communication in academic contexts.

Research Questions

1. What are UiTM Shah Alam LG240 students' perceptions of how using slang affects verbal communication?
2. How does the use of slang influence the formality of LG240 students' written communication in academic contexts?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communicative Competence (Hymes, 1972)

Hymes (1972) reframed language as a form of social action rooted in communities and situations. In other words,

to be competent does not only knowing what can be said, but also when, to whom, and in what manner. Hymes further explained that utterances are judged by whether they are possible, feasible, appropriate, and actually performed in use. More recent scholarship extends this perspective to digital spaces, highlighting the importance of critical digital literacy, the negotiation of power online (Dooly & Darvin, 2022), and the concept of "digital communicative competence," which combines communicative and digital skills (Gutiérrez Santiuste et al., 2023). In this study, the framework was applied to LG240 students, who need to learn to align slang with audience, purpose, and context. Competence, therefore, does not mean rejecting slang altogether, but using it in a disciplined, context-sensitive way in which it is a task made more difficult by the normalisation of informality on social media.

Several studies highlight slang as a dominant trend among young people, closely linked to identity and peer relationships. Social media platforms such as TikTok, Twitter, and Instagram have accelerated this shift by normalising informal expressions and embedding them into everyday conversations even in situations where formal language might be more appropriate. While slang fosters creativity, belonging, and solidarity, its influence on academic contexts is more complicated. For example, Matias (2023) found that frequent exposure to internet slang can weaken vocabulary growth and reduce the level of formality in academic writing, even though it seems to have less effect on coherence and content.

In Indonesia, research shows a clear negative link between slang use and formal literacy, with students reporting difficulties in maintaining academic standards when relying heavily on informal speech (Paino et al., 2024). A similar picture emerges in Malaysia, where urban slang is widely used and strongly shaped by social media trends. Young people adopt these expressions to build identity and solidarity, which works well in peer interaction but does not work well when it comes to formal tasks (Shing, 2025). Other studies raise concern that frequent use of slang may lower students' performance in formal communication (Derioh et al., 2023). To support this, research on Malay-language social media highlights common practices such as shortening words and phonetic spelling, showing how platform features encourage non-standard forms that can easily spill into everyday writing (Zulkifli & Tengku Mahadi, 2020).

Internet Slang and Vocabulary Decline in Academic Contexts

The impact of internet slang on academic vocabulary remains controversial. According to Matias (2023), based on his descriptive study involving 30 computer science undergraduates, he found that occasional slang was used in timed essays, but overall writing quality remained stable, suggesting limited short-term effects. Similarly, a systematic review of 62 studies reported inconsistent associations between 'textisms' and literacy outcomes, reflecting variations in research methods and measures (Fernández Juliá & Gómez Camacho, 2023). In contrast, Kemp et al. 2021) argued that experimental evidence shows that heavy reliance on 'textese' can reduce perceptions of appropriateness and attention to detail in communication with authority figures, highlighting risks when students write in formal contexts.

Despite these concerns, many students demonstrate effective code-switching, adapting language use to different settings. However, routine exposure to online shortcuts may normalise informal forms that occasionally seep into academic writing, particularly under time pressure. In Malaysia, qualitative findings illustrate how bilingual youth employ creative abbreviation strategies that enhance expressive flexibility but complicate adherence to academic standards (Shing, 2025). One common challenge in the research is that "vocabulary decline" is defined in different ways. This inconsistency often produces mixed results and makes it difficult to compare studies (Fernández Juliá & Gómez Camacho, 2023). Apart from that, many studies rely on small groups from specific disciplines. This somehow limits how far the findings can be applied. Hence, in order to get clearer answers, broader studies with more controlled tasks are needed to see whether everyday use of slang truly narrows students' vocabulary in academic writing (Matias, 2023).

Urban Slang as a Dominant Youth Linguistic Trend

Urban slang has emerged as a dominant youth practice, sustained by intensive social media use and peer norms.

To elaborate, Tufail et al. (2024) found that Gen Z employed slang on WhatsApp and Instagram to build intimacy and efficiency, identifying five types and seven communicative functions based on their qualitative content analysis with 30 university students in Pakistan. Similarly, a cross-context conceptual analysis argued that youth slang operates as a form of social coding that conveys emotion, fosters creativity, and drives continual neologism growth (Pesina et al., 2024). Not to mention, high rates of teen social platform use, as reported in a nationally representative U.S. survey (n=1,453), further illustrate the conditions that sustain these practices (Pew Research Center, 2023).

In addition, a study of Malaysian Twitter data (2,500 makan tweets) documented widespread use of informal variants such as shortenings and phonetic replacements reflecting comfort with non-standard forms in daily interaction (Zulkifli & Tengku Mahadi, 2020). Likewise, a qualitative analysis of naturally occurring posts found that Malaysian bilingual youth routinely use phrase and word abbreviations across platforms to signal identity and solidarity (Shing, 2025).

To sum up, these studies highlight a consistent pattern in which slang functions as a tool for identity formation and social bonding but raises concerns when transferred into formal contexts (Tufail et al., 2024). While Malaysian evidence emphasises creative adaptation, global studies link heavy slang use to perceived declines in appropriateness and lexical range. Nevertheless, most existing research is constrained by small samples, descriptive approaches, or focus on specific platforms, which limits the generalisation. Thus, this gap points to the need for the researchers to examine how social media-driven slang influences both spoken and written communication in higher education, where formal competence is crucial.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a quantitative research design to examine how slang influences students' verbal and written communication. The participants were 60 students from the Bachelor of English for Professional Communication (LG240) program at UiTM Shah Alam. Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure the participants shared similar academic and social backgrounds, making them relevant to the objectives of the study. Data was collected using survey questionnaire created in the Google Form. The questionnaire was adopted and adapted from Wong (2020). It consisted of four sections with 15 items altogether. The sections focused on demographic background, students' perceptions of slang in verbal and written communication, and the role of social media. All the items were measured using five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was distributed online using Google Forms from 1st April 2025 until 10th June 2025. The data was analysed using SPSS to examine the descriptive analysis such as means and standard deviations to identify patterns and variations in how students viewed the impact of slang.

Sample Size

60 respondents were involved in this study. They were from Bachelor of English for Professional Communication (LG240) program at UiTM Shah Alam.60 respondents were considered as reliable because it aligned with previous language-related research, such as Chanderan and Hashim's (2022) work on ESL learners' communication strategies and Hashim et al.'s (2024) study on language learning strategies among Malaysian undergraduates, both of which used similar numbers of participants for practical and analytical reasons. Hence, the sample is considered sufficient to represent the target group and provide meaningful understandings for analysis.

Sampling Method

This study used purposive sampling. The inclusive criteria where the participants must be from LG240 program at UiTM Shah Alam. Lim et al. (2023) said that purposive sampling is commonly applied in language research to ensure participants shared the same characteristics which relevant to the study's objectives. For example, Alias

and Abdullah (2024) used this method to explore parental involvement in ESL learning. In this study, purposive sampling was suitable because only LG240 students who were experiencing specific academic and social contexts being examined. This helps to ensure the data is more relevant and align with the research objectives.

Instrument to Collect the Data

The instrument used in this study was survey questionnaire. It was adopted and adapted from Wong (2020). The survey questionnaire was created using Google Forms because it is easy to access and easy to be distributed via online. Questionnaires are widely used in language research as they provide a systematic way to collect large-scale data on attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours (Zhang & Aryadoust, 2022). This instrument consisted of four sections with 15 items. Section One was about demographic background such as gender, age, and year of study. Sections Two and Three explored about the effects of slang on verbal and written communication with five items each. Section Four examining students' use of social media and its link to slang usage with two items. Likert-scale statements (ranging from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree") were used for Section Two, Three, and Four.

Data Collection Procedure

In this study, the data was collected using online Google Forms valid from 1st April 2025 until 10th June 2025. Previous studies have found that Google Form is a platform with advantages, including secure storage and smooth integration with spreadsheets for data management (Hsu & Wang, 2023). Not only that, Google Form is also practical for large-scale educational surveys (Ruliyanti et al., 2021). All responses were kept in the Google Drive of the researchers. The questionnaire was distributed using LG240 programme channels and popular platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and email. Basically, the survey took about 5 to 7 minutes to complete. The collected data were then analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Data Analysis Procedure

The data was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). It is a well-established tool for quantitative research in education and language studies. SPSS can calculate descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, which help to identify patterns and variations in responses. For instance, Guo et al. (2023) used SPSS to explore exam performance and learning outcomes, indicating its reliability in educational research. In this study, SPSS was applied to summarise the responses from 60 participants, it helps to provide a clear picture of slang usage and its impact on both verbal and written communication.

Validity and Reliability

Pilot study was applied to ensure the questionnaire appeared relevant and appropriate. It involves expert or participant review to confirm clarity and suitability, making it a practical first step in validating instruments (Bhandari, 2023; Zhang & Aryadoust, 2022). Thus, in this study, a pilot study was conducted to identify potential issues in survey administration and to assess the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Ten participants from LG240 students were chosen. Participants were given one week to complete the questionnaire and provide feedback on the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the items. This was to confirm the instrument's suitability to be used for this study. The feedbacks from participants were then used to improvise the survey. There were several unclear or less relevant items revised to improve clarity, focus, and overall effectiveness.

As for reliability, the data collected from the pilot questionnaires were entered into IBM SPSS Statistics for analysis. The internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The resulting Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.774, which indicated a good level of internal consistency and confirmed that the items were reliable in measuring the intended constructs.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.774	12

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RQ1: What are UiTM Shah Alam LG240 students' perceptions of how using slang affects verbal communication?

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for RQ1

Num	Statement (5-point)	M	SD
1	Slang helps me communicate more effectively with peers.	4.33	0.857
2	I often use English urban slang with friends on social media.	4.13	0.929
3	Slang makes my conversations with professors/academic staff less formal.	4.15	0.860
4	Slang sometimes causes misunderstandings during verbal communication.	3.92	1.109
5	Slang enhances my ability to relate and bond with friends verbally.	4.32	0.873
6	Social media influences me to use slang in daily communication.	4.50	0.930
	Overall	**4.22**	**0.926**

The sixth statement "*Social media influences me to use slang in daily communication*" has the highest mean score (M = 4.50, SD = 0.930), confirming that digital platforms strongly shape students' language use. This was followed by first statement "*Slang helps me communicate more effectively with peers*" (M = 4.33, SD = 0.857), showing that slang is viewed as a tool for clarity and effectiveness in peer interactions. Rather than serving merely as a linguistic shortcut, slang is perceived as a flexible and expressive means of communication that resonates within their social group. Similarly, the fifth statement "*Slang enhances my ability to relate and bond with friends verbally*" (M = 4.32, SD = 0.873) highlights its role in building rapport and reinforcing group identity. The third statement "*Slang makes my conversations with professors/academic staff less formal*" received a mean of 4.15 (SD = 0.860), indicating students' awareness of shifts in tone and formality. In other words, they recognise that slang can reduce the level of formality expected in such interactions, demonstrating an ability to evaluate the social boundaries of their language choices. Close to this, the second statement "*I often use English urban slang with friends on social media*" (M = 4.13, SD = 0.929) reflects frequent slang use in digital spaces, reinforcing the overlap between online and offline communication. Lastly, the fourth statement "*Slang sometimes causes misunderstandings during verbal communication*" recorded the lowest mean in this section (M = 3.92, SD = 1.109), suggesting that while slang is largely valued, it may occasionally hinder understanding due to unfamiliar or context-specific terms. This variation in responses suggests that while many students value slang for its expressiveness, others have encountered miscommunication, especially when slang terms are unfamiliar or highly context-specific.

RQ2: How does the use of slang influence the formality of LG240 students' written communication in academic contexts?

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for RQ2

Num	Statement (5-point)	M	SD
1	I frequently use slang in academic writing	3.25	1.323
2	Slang in my academic writing reduces formality	3.75	1.114
3	It is difficult to switch from slang to formal language when writing	3.48	1.157
4	Slang affects the grammatical accuracy of my academic writing	3.72	1.106
5	I consciously avoid using slang in formal assignments	4.05	1.048
6	Slang from social media appears unintentionally in my academic/professional writing	3.63	1.221
	Overall	**3.64**	**1.162**

Table 2 reports descriptive statistics (Likert 1–5) for six statements (N = 60) on academic writing. The fifth statement *"I consciously avoid using slang in formal assignments*" received the highest agreement (M = 4.05, SD = 1.048). This indicates that most students actively monitor their language use and try to maintain a formal tone in academic writing. However, the second statement, "*Slang in my academic writing reduces formality*", with a mean score of 3.75 (SD = 1.114), suggesting that students are generally aware of how slang undermines the academic tone of their writing. Next, the fourth statement "*Slang affects the grammatical accuracy of my academic writing*" scored a mean of 3.72 (SD = 1.106). This shows that many students believe their exposure to slang affects more than just tone. It also disrupts their ability to apply correct grammar. Not only that the sixth statement "*Slang from social media appears unintentionally in my academic/professional writing*" had a mean score of 3.63 (SD = 1.221). This finding highlights an important issue, as the unintentional transfer of slang from informal digital platforms into formal writing remains a common occurrence. Students may consciously try to avoid using slang, but frequent exposure to informal language can still lead to unintended shifts in tone or word choice. The third statement, "*It is difficult to switch from slang to formal language when writing*", received a moderate mean score of 3.48 (SD = 1.157), reflecting challenges with code-switching. This suggests that constant engagement with informal communication, particularly on social media, may interfere with students' ability to transition smoothly into a more formal register. The first statement, "*I frequently use slang in academic writing*", had the lowest mean score (M = 3.25, SD = 1.323), indicating mixed responses. While some students admitted to using slang in formal assignments, the overall response reflects a relatively low frequency.

Overall, the means range from 3.25 to 4.05, indicating mixed perceptions. While students are aware of slang's negative impact on formality and grammar, they make conscious efforts to avoid it in academic work. Standard deviations (1.048–1.323) suggest varied experiences among students. That is to say, slang does influence academic writing, but students actively try to maintain formality. The challenge lies in unintentional usage and difficulty transitioning from informal to formal language.

CONCLUSION

Slang in Verbal Communication

The findings suggest that students perceive English urban slang as a meaningful component of their verbal communication, especially in peer interactions where it is viewed as both effective and socially engaging. This aligns with studies showing that Malaysian bilingual youths use internet slang to signal identity and solidarity across platforms, thereby enhancing intimacy and facilitating faster interaction (Shing, 2025; Tufail et al., 2024). Its use is largely shaped by digital media, which reinforces its prominence in everyday conversation. At the same

time, students demonstrate an awareness of its limitations, especially in formal contexts and situations where slang may lead to misunderstanding. By way of example, the risk of misalignment with authority figures reflects evidence that "textese" diminishes perceived appropriateness and attentiveness in interactions with teachers (Kemp et al., 2021).

As for illustration, the sixth statement, "*Social media influences me to use slang in daily communication*," received the highest mean score (M = 4.50, SD = 0.930). This finding is consistent with Derioh et al. (2023), who identified social media as a key driver in the dissemination and normalisation of slang among Malaysian youth. They stated that the integration of these digital language trends into everyday conversation highlights the increasing convergence of online and offline communication practices. Moreover, this finding confirms that students are not merely passive recipients of slang but actively engage with and adopt it as an integral part of their everyday speech practices. In addition, the statement "*Slang makes my conversations with professors/academic staff less formal*" (M = 4.15) reflects a high level of agreement among students. This finding aligns with Paino et al. (2024), who observed that frequent slang users often face difficulties in adjusting their language within formal environments. However, the present study extends this view by showing that many LG240 students not only recognise these challenges but also demonstrate an ability to regulate their language use according to context.

In conclusion, these results indicate that while slang enhances self-expression and peer communication, its use remains highly context-dependent. Among students in a professional communication programme, this reflects a developing metalinguistic awareness, as they demonstrate not only the ability to employ slang effectively but also to switch it when necessary. Thus, slang use among LG240 students is neither careless nor random; rather, it is thoughtful, strategic, and guided by a clear understanding of audience, purpose, and platform. Overall, the findings confirm that for digitally fluent and academically trained youth, slang functions as a dynamic tool in shaping contemporary verbal interaction.

Slang in Academic Writing

Based on the findings, students reported consciously avoiding slang in assignments, yet they still perceived reduced formality, occasional grammatical disruption, and influence of social media. This mixed profile reflects recent syntheses that highlight inconsistent links between textisms and literacy outcomes, often due to varied measures and tasks (Fernández Juliá & Gómez Camacho, 2023).

For example, the fifth statement "*I consciously avoid using slang in formal assignments*" received the highest agreement (M = 4.05, SD = 1.048). This aligned with Matias (2023) found that slang markers appeared in essays but core writing components remained relatively stable, suggesting that students are able to safeguard formal performance through revision. Apart from that, the findings suggest that students adopt a more cautious stance toward the use of slang in academic writing. The lowest reported mean (M = 3.25) for the first statement "*I frequently use slang in academic writing*" indicates that students rarely use slang in academic writing. This reflects a clear awareness of academic expectations and is consistent with the findings of Matias (2023), who noted that while students are frequently exposed to internet slang, they typically aim to maintain a formal tone in academic contexts. Besides that, Shing (2025) argued that young people employ internet slang as a means of constructing identity and fostering solidarity, highlighting its functional value in peer interactions, although these benefits do not necessarily extend to formal contexts. Additionally, slang was perceived as influencing grammatical accuracy. The grammar-related in fourth statement recorded a mean score of 3.72, suggesting that some students believed their exposure to slang could affect the structure and clarity of their writing. This finding supports Matias' (2023) observation that frequent use of internet slang may undermine students' mechanics and sentence formation skills.

This study has achieved its objectives by examining the perceptions of LG240 students regarding the influence of English urban slang on their verbal and written communication. The findings reveal that while slang is widely regarded as an asset for fostering interpersonal relationships and enhancing fluency in informal contexts, its use also raises significant challenges in academic writing, particularly with respect to grammatical accuracy, and

formality. Theoretically, the results reinforce Hymes' Communicative Competence framework by highlighting the continued importance of appropriateness, even in digital environments where slang dominates. Students' ability to shift between informal and formal registers demonstrates the need for adaptive competence, echoing recent calls to incorporate digital communicative competence into language education (Dooly & Darvin, 2022). Future research could further develop Hymes' framework by integrating constructs from digital literacy models to account for evolving online norms. Ultimately, bridging sociolinguistic perspectives with measurable academic outcomes will provide a more holistic understanding of slang's role in shaping communication practices in higher education. In addition, future study could be extended by proposing language awareness programs that train students in code-switching strategies, helping them maintain a balance between informal creativity and academic formality. Finally, a comparative cross-cultural perspective would position Malaysian findings within broader global trends, enhancing the study's impact in the field of sociolinguistics and education.

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