

THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ENGLISH ON STUDENTS' SPELLING ABILITY: A STUDY OF REDEEMER'S UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract

Communication is a vital tool that enables interaction among people. The information and communication technology revolution has resulted in easy and free access to various social media sites that allow users to receive and send messages. However, because this revolution has altered the information world, it also threatens effective communication. This study examined the effect of social media English on students' spelling ability. The objectives examined the effect of social media English on the spelling ability amongst Redeemer's university undergraduates, the extent to which abridged spellings are used and the attitude of respondents toward using social media English for communication. Cultivation and Dependency theories were adopted, and focus group discussion was used for data gathering, with thirty-one (31) participants selected purposively from each department in the eight faculties to serve the purpose of this study. Also, eight (8) focus group interviews were conducted at Redeemer's University Findings revealed that the students were involved in using social media English and even did in formal settings. Further research revealed that the use of social media English is preferred for communication among undergraduates, indicating that they have positive attitudes toward the use of social media English. Based on the findings, it was concluded that social media English is prevalent among

undergraduates and that if usage is not limited, graduates who do not know how to spell correctly even in formal settings will be produced. The researchers recommended that for students to achieve effective communication, they should maintain the habit of clarity in their written communication and not rely on social media English.

Keywords: Social media English, abridged spellings, English Language, Effect, Undergraduates.

Introduction

Alassiri (2014) posits that people become more dependent on media that satisfy their needs than on media that provide only a few. When people find pleasure in that particular medium that provides their needs, they will be more inclined to continue to use that medium. As the media and social system overlap, the media, therefore, have a substantial effect on its users who wholly depend on it to derive satisfaction.

According to Asad and Mamun (2012), people live in a world where technologies evolve daily, and people adopt new information, lifestyles, languages, et cetera. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Yahoo Messenger, Google Plus, Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, and others are prevalent among young people and significantly influence them (Asad and Mamun) (2012). Young people believe that what they do on social media is a trend; if they follow those trends, people will think they are smart. However, there is evidence that social media impacts the language acquisition of young learners. Young people are now mostly connected with people through social media, so they are unintentionally or intentionally following the trend of language acquisition.

Thus, Alassiri (2014) argued in communication skills that spelling is a form of communication that falls under the written form of communication and also requires a combination of letters to form words, which then form sentences to pass across a message or exchange meaning. According to Alassiri (2014), spelling is the selection and arrangement of letters that form a word. Spelling is critical in communication because it creates words that aid in sharing meaning. The significance of correct spelling cannot be overstated, as correct spelling completes the communication circle through the meaning embedded in the correctly spelt word.

Most students today use different social media platforms to communicate, and incomplete or unpopular spelling seems to form the most common means of communication as it is an informal communication style. For instance, 'Lol' (Laugh Out Loud), 'I Luv U' (I Love You), 'Cum' (Come), 'Hbd' (Happy Birthday), 'Llnp' (Long Life And Prosperity) 'U' (You), 'Ijn' (In Jesus Name), 'Omg' (Oh My God), 'Tok 2 Me' (Talk To Me), 'Twimc' (To Whom It May Concern). Other examples are 'Winer' (Winner) 'Brb' (I Will Be Right Back), 'Kising' (Kissing), 'Helo' (Hello), and 'Ppl' (People). The concern is that students who frequently use the abbreviated method of writing when online tend to practise the same method during formal writing in the classroom. To this effect, social media spelling is gradually taking over written communication and indirectly jeopardizing students' usage of the Standard English language. Therefore, this paper examined the effect of social media English on students' spelling ability and the pros and cons of the effect of social media English on students' writing ability.

Statement of the problem

Communication is a vital tool that people use to interact with one another. The information and communication technology revolution has resulted in easy and free access to various social media sites that allow users to receive and send messages. However, because this revolution has altered the information world, it also threatens effective communication. Communicators on social media use language that is pleasing or appealing to them at random. Many students are well-versed in social media, and because they are so immersed in it, they use languages that appeal to them, one of which is abridged spellings.

Abridged spellings on social media can sometimes cause the intended messages meaning distorted, resulting in communication failure. According to Mahmoud (2013), some researchers are concerned that abbreviations, word shortening, and other violations of grammar rules may cause unintentional meaning to standard English, resulting in future communication barriers. The communication cycle becomes distorted when there is a communication barrier, and the meaning is completely lost. One major issue with using abridged spellings in communication is the limited number of characters per message.

This limitation has impacted many undergraduates' written communication due to the need to be compacted to fit within this limit while communicating effectively on social media. Given that the use of social media language is common and prone to misunderstanding, there is a need to empirically investigate the effect of social media English on undergraduate spelling ability.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. examine the extent to which Redeemer's university undergraduates use abridged spellings to communicate on social media.
2. determine the effect of social media English on the spelling ability amongst Redeemer's university undergraduates
3. ascertain the attitude of Redeemer's university undergraduates on using social media English for communication.

Literature Review

Salaudeen and Lawal (2019) investigated the impact of social media on the traditional writing skills of mass communication students at a private university in southwestern Nigeria. The study employed a multilevel sampling strategy that included purposive, stratification, and total population sampling. A total of 143 answer scripts from a first-year writing course in the Department of Mass Communication were examined using content analysis. The study discovered that, in the case of mass communication students, social media does not have the same overwhelming negative impact on writing competence as it does on undergraduate students. According to the findings, other factors, such as writing training, interplayed with social media to cause poor writing competence among university undergraduates.

Osakue, Oluranti et al. (2018) investigated the impact of social media on the English writing abilities of Nigerian youths. Data was collected using 110 copies of a survey questionnaire distributed to selected students. FGDs with students, in-depth interviews with some tertiary institution lecturers, and the researchers' direct observation of the issue under investigation

provided additional information. The study discovered that most youths adopted an English variant that cannot be found in the Standard English (SE) matrix or even the popular Nigerian English variant known as Pidgin English (PE). The study also discovered that expressions like 'u' for 'you' are incorrect. 'gr8t' for 'great,' 'ur/urs' for 'your/yours,' and other deviational patterns have crept into students' writing consciousness in classes and examinations, making a lot of 'sense' in informal settings among youths but smacking of sub-literacy in formal.

Belal (2014) investigated the influence of digital social media on the writing and speaking of the tertiary level student. The study was conducted at eight private and public universities in Bangladesh. Sixteen teachers and 160 students were chosen from five private and three public universities in Bangladesh. The findings indicated that digital social media influences tertiary level students' writing and speaking, with the positive effects outweighing the adverse effects. The findings confirmed that students and teachers could create group discussions to exchange ideas, share course-related materials, and appeal to their students about assignments, which helps the students improve their writing and speaking skills. However, the findings confirmed that digital social media has a negative impact. Students unconsciously use short-form words, incorrect grammar, and sentence structure in their formal writing and speaking, which is a result of their increased familiarity with those types of language through digital social media.

Leman and Adamu (2021) also investigated the impact of social media English on the communication patterns of university undergraduates in Nigeria's North-Central Zone. The study used a sample size of 383 students. The findings revealed that the students were engaged in using social media English, even in formal settings. Further research revealed that social media English is preferred for communication among undergraduates. It was also discovered that the undergraduates are quite addicted to the use of social media English, which appears to have negatively impacted their communication patterns. The findings imply that social media English is prevalent among undergraduates and that if usage is not limited, graduates who do not know how to spell correctly or use proper English expressions, even in formal situations, will be produced.

The contributions of social media in students' academic performance

Students can use social media to connect and improve their learning experience. It can also promote cooperation and communication. A study by Al-Rahmi and Awadeh (2020) on the effects of social media on students' academic performance revealed that social media integration facilitates and aids students' academic experience. Furthermore, social media integration increases interaction between students and teachers in the classroom, indirectly increasing student participation and improving collaborative learning. Social media improves student learning by enhancing communication outside the traditional classroom setting. However, when reviewing students' academic writing skills, it is concerning to observe the influence that too much social media has on students' written work. Influence too much social media has on students' written work.

The usage of English language 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. Tayo, Adebola., and Yahya(2019), 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.

Negative effects of social media English on writing habits of students in tertiary institutions

Tertiary students are expected to write and stay informed about what is happening around them. However, with social media, this appears to no longer be the case. Many tertiary students now devote significant time to online gossip and other trivial matters. Various studies have revealed that most students no longer enjoy writing fiction (Imade, Elogie and Ikenwe 2016). Furthermore, numerous studies have revealed that many students graduate from institutions with inadequate writing abilities, attributing this to the poor culture they developed during their university days (Anjugu, 2013). In most tertiary institutions, students do not cultivate the habit of writing, and those who do write do so only to pass their exams (Tahir, Shah, et al. (2021).

According to Ehiemua and Omoera (2015), the evolution of technology and the introduction of social media have washed away students' writing culture. According to Shabo, Ehiemua, and Omoera (2015), the evolution of technology and the introduction of social media has washed away students' reading culture. Regardless of status, gender, or age, writing is the fundamental factor determining the foundation of prominence in people's lives. It helps to improve and develop an individual and is also necessary when writing an exam. One of the primary reasons for the slowing rate at which students write is the previously mentioned invasion of social media.

Social media influence on students' writing performance

Writing is a medium through which humans communicate emotion and language. The documentation of signs and symbols frequently accompanies it. Many of the structures of a speech are used in writing. To name a few, there is the use of vocabulary, grammar, and semantics, as well as the reliance on a system of signs and symbols, usually in the form of the alphabet (Harwati and Hashim, 2018). Again, Harwati and Hashim (2018) revealed that when they read through students' written work, they noticed that capitalization and punctuation were non-existent. Similarly, Gazi and Çetin (2017) claim that their students' use of social media increased, so did their writing, and they noticed the use of abbreviated text spellings. The authors say that their students are likelier to write phrases they see in text messages, such as *'smthng'* or *'smbdy,'* rather than learning to spell the word correctly.

Theoretical framework

Cultivation and Dependency theory

The cultivation theory and media dependency theory were adopted for this research. While cultivation theory cultivation which was originally put forward by Gerbner (1973) was adopted to foreground the examination of the impact of social media on the writing abilities of Nigerian youths in English language, using undergraduates in Redeemer's University as a basis of analysis and discussion. The cultivation theory argues that television plays an extremely important role in how people view their world, the media dependency theory on the other hand as propounded by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin Defleur in 1976 see the audiences as depending on media information to meet their needs and that social institutions and media system interact with audience to create needs, interests and motives in persons.

The media dependency theory and the cultivation theory were used for this study. While using undergraduates from Redeemer's university as the basis for analysis and discussion, the cultivation theory, which Gerbner first proposed in 1973, was adopted to focus on examining the effect of social media English on students' writing abilities. The media dependency theory, propounded by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin Defleur in 1976, contends that media audiences rely on media for information to meet their needs and that media system interact with audiences to shape people's needs, interests, and motives. The cultivation theory posits that television plays a significant role in how people view their world.

The effects of this type of communication are particularly felt by students captivated by social media because of the English used there. This finding has importance for this study. According to the Dependency Theory, students rely on social media platforms to satisfy their needs. As a result of this exposure and possible addiction, they seem to extend their use of social media for communication to the wrong locations. According to Syallow (2015), most prominent researchers and the general public are aware that the introduction of new media has significantly impacted people's lives, especially in the area of written communication.

Methodology

Procedure

Focus group discussions were used in this study to collect crucial data. This method is used to get people's views and opinions on specific issues, for example, social media English (Kumar, 1987). Eight group interviews were conducted at Redeemer's university. These eight groups represented each department in the eight faculties (Engineering, Built Environmental Studies, Natural Sciences, Basic Medical Sciences, Law, Humanities, Management Sciences and Social Sciences). The departments are Mass Communication, English, Banking and Finance, Biochemistry, Law, Computer Science, Estate Management and Civil Engineering. Each group consisted of four participants, making a total number of 32 respondents. The rationale of the focus group discussion method was explained to the respondents; more specifically, the objectives of the study were clarified during the introduction sessions. The focus groups were conducted in English and lasted approximately 40 -45 minutes.

Measurements

Adopting a structured FGD guide ensured that each focus group session followed a consistent framework. The article's appendix contains a list of essential questions. The interview began

with an opening question from the moderator, who asked which social media platforms the respondents were members of. This question aimed to get everyone talking and provide an overview of how the respondents used social media sites. This question was not meant to be included in the study. After the opening, a general introductory question asked respondents to give an example of social media English they could remember. This question aimed to ensure that the respondents were informed on the subject of the study.

Data analysis

After looking over the transcripts, two researchers decided that the data was saturated. The researchers identified each response supplied by the respondents and assigned each response with a code using an open coding process. The researchers then used their thematic commonalities to link the many codes discovered during the coding procedure. Through discussion, the researchers identified recurring themes from the data connected to the study's goals. The codes were organised based on several thematic areas that could address the study objectives. After that, the transcripts of each focus group discussion were reread to ensure that each response had been correctly coded. The data in the results below are presented following how respondents felt about the effect of social media English on students' spelling ability.

Ethical procedures

Respondents were given a fact sheet with more details about the objectives and methods of the study before the interview. The researcher briefed the students on the information contained in the fact sheet and underlined that their participation was optional, that they were not required to respond to all of the researcher's questions, and that they might leave the interview at any time. The processing of the students' responses was guaranteed to remain anonymous.

Result

The use of abridged spellings to communicate.

The first common theme from the focus group conversations was that respondents were active users of short spellings or abbreviations to communicate on social media. According to the respondents, each time they are having a conversation on social media sites, especially in written communication, they prefer using abridged spellings because it makes communication faster and more engaging. Respondents also agreed that they use abridged spellings every day as long as they are engaged with any activities on the social media sites.

- F1R3:** The English short spellings I use every day is 'tanks' it is the short form of 'Thanks'. Or I can use '1ok u' which is the short spelling for 'Thank you'.
- F4R1:** The abridged spelling I use are: 'grtwrk', 'LOL', 'BRB', 'U', 'whnwil u cum bk', 'tlk 2 me', 'pp'l, these are shorts spellings for 'Great work', 'Laugh out loud', 'Be right back', 'You', 'when will you come back', 'talk to me' and 'people' respectively.
- F2R4:** I also use 'bby', 'wots wrng wit u', 'ok', 'aiit/alrt', 'dis', 'wil u cum 2 clas 2moro', 'u r gud', 'gud', 'villa', are all abbreviations for 'baby', 'what is wrong with you', 'okay, alright', 'this', 'will you come to class tomorrow', 'you are good', 'village' respectively.
- F4R4:** Some of the abridged spellings I can remember are 'Buk', 'exam', 'tgif', 'smthng' 'smbdy'. This are short spellings for 'Book', 'examination', 'thank God is Friday', 'something' and 'somebody'.

F8R1: For me *shaa*, I am used to writing '*C ulata*' as in '*see you later*', *bcos*, -*Because* or *schl*-school.

From the discussions, respondents revealed that they use shortened English words because it is convenient and safe time. While some revealed that they are already addicted to the use of social media English because they have been exposed to and actively involved in it over time.

F7R3: personally, I prefer the usage of short form word while typing in the social media

F5R4: I intentionally use short forms of English words and sentences because it saves time

F5R2: I find it more comfortable and easy to use short forms in chatting

F3R4: I feel it has become a habit to use short form words in English essay writing.

The effect of social media English on the spelling ability

The second theme that emerged from the discussion is the effects of social media English on the spelling ability of students. Respondents indicated that social media English had affected their communication ability, especially in writing activities. Some revealed that they had had instances where they unconsciously used abridged spellings to write tests, essays, examinations, term papers and other written activities in school. Others also revealed that occasionally their lecturers had cautioned them on the use of shortened or abbreviated English.

F8R2: Omo I can remember a day my lecturer called me to his office to caution me against the usage of shortened English language. I wanted to spell today but what I wrote on my booklet was '*2day*', while '*better*' was spelt as '*beta*', '*to*' as '*2*' and '*looking towards*' as '*lukiing 2wards*'. I was so ashamed of myself. But we move. I swear it was not intentional. But now I am more careful how I spell especially during examinations.

F8R1: For me I strongly feel social media English spellings patterns affect communication skills of undergraduates. Not just the written even spoken English. I feel it is because of our frequent exposure to it.

F8R5: One effect of the use of abridged spelling it that it makes it difficult for a person who is so use to it to write in Standard English without errors.

F8R3: I totally agree with speaker number 5. For me, am only concerned about the message received and not about the grammar usage of my social media friends.

F7R2: another effect of the usage of abridged spellings is that it result to poor grammar construction

F7R1: I agree with the last speaker because I seldom face difficulties in writing suitable words in English

F7R3: I also use abridged spellings however; I am really concerned about my grammar while using social media

F7R4: My friends from social media frequently point out my grammar errors in post or on chats. Each time I am corrected it makes feel like I need to improve on my English writing skills.

From the discussion, respondents revealed that they are making efforts to improve their spelling abilities. For instance, F6R2 mentioned that she tries to avoid the use of abridged

spellings while writing, whether in formal or informal writing activities. Others revealed that they make use of online grammar tools to improve their spelling abilities. By and large, most of the respondents acknowledged the negative effects of the usage of English social media on the spelling ability of students.

Attitude of respondents on the usage of social media English

The last theme that emerged from the discussion was the attitude of respondents on the use of social media English for communication. Respondents identified that they infuse abridged spellings in official writing exercises like examinations, term papers, assignments, et cetera. Also, respondents revealed that abridged spellings affect their spelling ability. Similarly, respondents revealed that they feel bad, ashamed, or have low self-esteem whenever errors are identified in their writings as a result of the usage of abridged spellings.

- F6R1:** I feel I use social media English for communication more often. I really need to work on myself.
- F6R3:** I don't see anything wrong with the use of social media English. As long as long as the content of the message is understood, there should not be a problems.
- F6R2:** social media English is not bad. The only problem is that it does not measure with the Standard English language or grammar rules.
- F6R4:** I prefer the use of media English than formal language for communication.
- F7R1:** I feel this is a problem. It is not something we should take for levity. Because I am just one out of hundreds of students which social media English reflects in the formal communication pattern
- F3R4:** I am not addicted to social media usage. I am always extra cautious when writing.
- F4R1:** I feel ashamed each time I make spelling errors
- F7R1:** I feel I could stop using social media English to communicate
- F4R4:** I don't feel bad at all. It's fun. Besides whenever I want to write for academic purposes, I use Standard English.
- F8R3:** I feel social media English should be use informal settings like chatting with friends or family members. So I don't feel bad using it.
- F1R2:** Ahh it quite embarrassing for your lecturer to call your attention to a bad piece of writing. I feel I need to reduce the usage of social media English.
- F6R1:** I feel the use of abridged spelling is a deliberate effort and if I work on myself I can stop.
- F2R4:** I still don't see anything wrong with it. Social media English is very convenient. The thing is one need to avoid using during examination or test.
- F7R1:** I feel consistent usage of social media English will in poor spelling ability and lack of confidence in a person's ability to spell appropriately.

Discussion

The first objective, examined the usage of abridged spellings by respondents to communicate on social media, findings revealed that social media English are commonly used among respondents. Lending credence to these findings, Belal (2014) asserts that a new means of online communication has emerged with its idiosyncrasies. This new communication style occurs through the use of social media sites, and it is primarily seen and common young

people. The findings of this study also agree with Osakue, Oluranti et al. (2018) that social media English or spellings have a significant effect on their users; most addicted users unconsciously transfer it from social platforms to formal writings.

Furthermore, the second objective examined the effect of social media English on the spelling ability of respondents. The result showed that social media English had affected respondents' communication ability, especially in writing activities. Findings also revealed that using social media English has resulted in poor spelling ability and an inability to construct error-free sentences. Some respondents attested that they had had instances where they unconsciously used abridged spellings to write tests, essays, examinations, term papers, et cetera. Others also revealed that their lecturers occasionally cautioned them on using shortened or abbreviated English. Although some respondents revealed that they are using other grammar tools to improve writing skills, others had no problem using social media English to communicate. This study's findings align with Leman and Adamu (2021), who opines that communication in the modern technological-fast-paced society suffers from social myopia because people desire fast and brief communication, which leads to ineffective communication in writing and in speech. Earlier findings show that students engage in social media English spellings because it consumes less time, which goes in line with Leman and Adamu's statement.

The last objective examined respondents' attitudes on using social media English for communication. Findings showed that respondents make use of social media English more often. This shows that they have a somewhat positive attitude towards using social media English. This is not exactly a healthy development as often usage of social media English may cause a decline in good communication patterns as indicated. Further findings revealed that the students preferred to use social media English over the formal English language in general communication. Seeing that respondents believe that social media English is more effective implies that they are liable to make use of it.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the results gathered and analysed in this research work, it can be concluded that a reasonable number of respondents are addicted to using social media English, which has affected their spelling ability. This has affected their communication skills negatively, and because the English language has been abused, it has also led to poor spelling ability among the students. It can be concluded that students' motive for using social media to communicate ranges from the fact that it consumes less time and is very addictive and compelling. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommended that for students to achieve effective communication, they should maintain the habit of clarity in their written communication because communication cannot be comprehensible by using abridged spelling to communicate. However, it will instead affect their writing skills. It is also recommended that students should not depend on social media English with their accompanying spellings as the only mode of communication that is easier and time effective but should realize its negative influence on their writing skills.

APPENDIX

Opening question:

What social media site(s) are you subscribed to?

Introductory question:

Can you give an example of social media English?

1. What social media English writing pattern are you familiar with?
2. How often do you infuse it in your everyday writing activities?
3. Why do you prefer the use of abridged spellings in your everyday writing?
4. How would you say social media English affected your writing ability?
5. How are you managing it?
6. Do you infuse abridged spellings in official write-up like examinations, tests, assignments et cetera?
7. What can you say are the effects of abridged spelling on students spelling performance?

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