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To Investigate the Influence of Social Media on Second Language (L2) Writing Skills

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to investigate the influence of social media on L2 writing skills. The popularity of social media sites has changed the way young adults communicate through written L2 language on various social media platforms. Therefore, researchers selected 40 females through a purposive sampling technique via mixed methodology. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 respondents on WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Messenger video calls. The quantitative data was collected online. The qualitative data and Demographics were analyzed in tables, and the quantitative data were substituted in Figures. The findings revealed that social media widens vocabulary, fluency, and exposure to the English language; on the other hand, it also leads to informal writing such as abbreviations, omitting capitalization, and reducing grammatical accuracy. The use of abbreviations can derogate academic writing without conscious effort. The study further revealed that social media is a double-edged sword, which weakens academic writing and boosts communicative features of students. At the same time, it leads to informal language use. Therefore, stakeholders should guide pupils to avoid informal writing communication.



Introduction

In the 21st century, social media changed the way we communicate, learn, and express our ideas. Social networking sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have transformed social interactions and greatly impacted language practices and writing behavior. The advent of Web 2.0 changed the role of information consumers to producers, who can create, share, and edit texts all the time (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Undoubtedly, these changes affected the linguistic environment in which young adults operate, the most active population of social media users.

The extensive use of social media in modern life has weakened the difference between informal and formal discourse. This phenomenon has a great concern among applied linguists and educators due to its possible impact on language development, writing skills, and literacy practices (Thurlow, 2018). On the one hand, social media is a dynamic and informal learning environment where learners express, collaborate, and engage in various forms of self-study. Moreover, it has brought about many variations of slang, abbreviations, emojis, and non-standard orthography that might affect students' writing behavior and accuracy (Chu et al., 2023). In this regard, social media has more advantages and disadvantages for language learners, especially English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

In addition, several qualitative studies reported that social media helps students to enhance their autonomy, motivation, and engagement. The use of digital platforms in language learning helps students to improve their vocabulary and motivates them to write more due to the abundance of authentic communication and immediate feedback (Pakpahan et al., 2025). Similarly, Shahzadi and Kausar (2021) reported that Pakistani university students considered social media as an inspiring and interactive tool to improve their writing performance in online peer discussions. In this sense, social media is like an informal "learning community" that extends the classroom learning to a broader environment. Writing is no longer a solitary act but a social practice. Therefore, this study attempts to find the effects of social media on writing skills through a mixed approach. Specifically, this study aims to explore how learners believe that social media affects their writing behavior, what kinds of difficulties and facilitations they experience, and how their online linguistic use affects their academic writing identity. This study also aims to make pedagogical implications for teaching EFL writing by exploring the possibilities of incorporating social media literacy into EFL writing instruction. That way, it will bridge the gap between informal and formal writing in digital communication while ensuring that the affordances of social media are properly utilized without lowering linguistic standards.

Problem Statement

In the past era, social media has become the most popular means of communication and expression among students and young adults. Communicating with one another is a matter of seconds in an innovative way through social networking sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and X (previously Twitter) has given rise to a new type of language use, which is deviating from the standard writing conventions. Abbreviations, emojis, slang, code switching, and informal speech structures are becoming more and more prominent in students' online communication, which eventually influences the way they write and think while online. However, the gap that this study is going to fill is firstly, the previous studies have conducted qualitative studies, while this is a mixed study. Secondly, they had male/female respondents, while this study solely selected female respondents. Thirdly, they had selected school/college/university students, while this is a general study of only undergraduate and graduate students. Further, the core problem of this study is the

unknown impact of social media on writing skills, which includes the influence of informal online writing on pupils' performance in formal academic writing, perceptions of correctness, and communicative competence.

Research Questions

RQ1: How does social media affect writing skills in an ESL setting?

RQ2: How do pupils distinguish between informal writing and formal academic writing on social media platforms?

RQ3: What difficulties and advantages do pupils encounter in social media writing experiences?

Significance of the Study

The present study is of both academic and practical significance in applied linguistics and language education. Given the prevalence of social media in contemporary life, it is important to be aware of the impacts of social media on pupils writing skills. Teachers, curriculum designers, and language researchers need to be aware of the linguistic effects of social media on pupil's formal writing performance at city, country and international level. Lastly, this study will also be important for future scholars who are interested in the topic of social media and its impact on language learning in terms of communication and writing in the digital age.

Definition of Key Terms

In order to avoid ambiguities and confusion throughout this study, the following terms are defined and used throughout the study in the aforementioned manner.

Social media: Social media are online platforms or digital tools that enable people to create, share and interact with content and people across virtual networks. These platforms contribute to informal mass communication in real time and may affect students' language use and linguistic choices.

Language Skills: Language skills refer to the basic skills required to use a language, i.e. reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Language skills include vocabulary choices, usage of tense and mood forms, correctness of grammar, and sentence construction due to informal writing on social media platforms.

Writing Skills: Writing skills refer to the ability to connect ideas, use proper grammar, achieve coherence and cohesion, and write texts suitable to a particular context. Good writing also requires the awareness of audience and purpose. In this study, the term 'writing skills' refers to students' formal academic writing skills.

English as a Foreign Language: It is a term used in contrast to the concept of 'mother tongue' or 'first language' and is used to denote a language that is learned and used in a country where it is not the native or first language. In this study, it is used for Pakistani students who learn English as a foreign language but speak their mother tongue as an everyday language.

Digital Communication: Digital communication means communication through electronic devices, such as mobile phones or computers. It includes chatting on social media platforms, online chatting, and digital writing. This study utilizes social media platforms.

Linguistic Influence: Linguistic influence means that the use of language in one form or context influences the use of language in another. In this study, it refers to the influence of informal

language use on social media platforms, characterized by abbreviations, emoticons, code switching, and slangs, on students' formal writing on educational platforms.

Academic Writing: Academic writing is formal, structured, and evidence-based writing used in academic contexts such as essays, reports, dissertations, and research projects. It values clarity, accuracy, and grammatical accuracy. In this study, it refers to students' formal academic writing, which is influenced by their informal writing habits on social media platforms

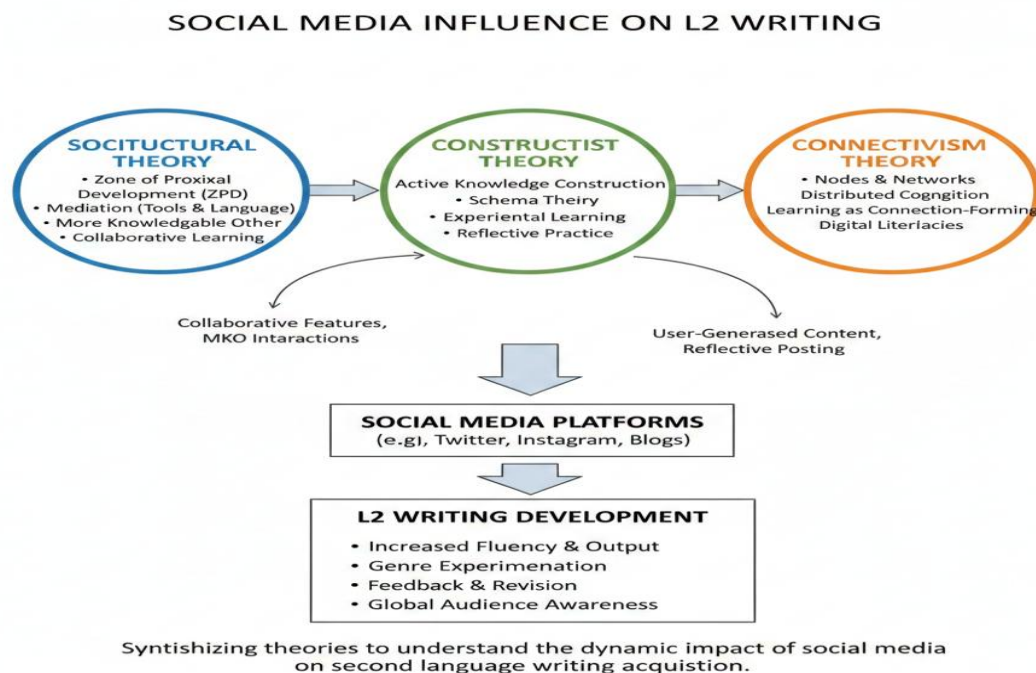
Review of Literature

According to (Maitlo S K., 2024), a literature review is a survey of scholarly sources on a specific topic, used to provide a foundation for new research and show the authors understanding of the subject.

Theoretical Framework

According to Warschauer (2019), the context of social media is similar to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which learners receive scaffolding from their peers in the form of feedback, comments, and collaborative writing. When students publish their writing on the web, they get immediate feedback for revision and improvement. Therefore, according to sociocultural theory, the argument for using social media as an interactive environment for language learning is strong. Social media provides meaningful social experiences that facilitate learners' linguistic and cognitive development through participation.

Figure 1:



Sociocultural Theory

Originating from Lev Vygotsky (1978), sociocultural theory emphasizes that learning occurs through social interaction and mediation. Language development is a socially situated process where communication plays a central role. In the context of social media, platforms serve as digital communities where learners engage in authentic exchanges, negotiate meaning, and co-construct

linguistic knowledge. According to Warschauer (2019), social media environments replicate Vygotsky's "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD), where learners receive scaffolding from peers through feedback, comments, and collaborative writing. When students post their writing on digital platforms, they receive immediate responses that guide revision and improvement. Similarly, Rahman and Zarei (2022) found that learners who participated in peer feedback through Facebook groups demonstrated greater awareness of grammatical accuracy and organization. Thus, sociocultural theory supports the argument that social media can be an effective environment for interactive language learning, fostering both linguistic and cognitive development through meaningful social participation.

Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivism believes that learners construct knowledge through experience and reflection. Piaget (1972) and Bruner (1996) contended that knowledge is not transmitted from teachers to students but is constructed by students based on their engagement and interaction. As discussed above, social media learning is always constructive because it engages learners in creation, collaboration, and discussion (Yunus et al., 2019). In digital writing situations, students are no longer passive receivers but active producers who express themselves and judge others' writings; they are also engaged in iterative revisions, all of which are characteristics of constructivist learning. (Yunus et al., 2019). In this sense, social media can transform traditional writing instruction into a participatory activity that is both learner-centered and reflective.

Connectivism Theory

First introduced by Siemens (2005), connectivism defines learning in the digital age as a process of connecting specialized nodes or information sources. According to this theory, knowledge is not stored in individuals' minds but spread across networks. Learning in this context involves the ability to effectively navigate, connect, and apply information from these networks. Social media learning fits well with connectivism because it provides various linguistic inputs and communication opportunities. Students can connect with native speakers, follow different educational accounts, and join writing communities online. Manca, E. (2025) reported that networked learning through social media exposure increases authentic language input and enhances lexical diversity. Fathi et al., (2024) also argued that connectivist learning through digital platforms develops students' language abilities along with digital literacy skills, empowering them with the communication skills required in the 21st century. Therefore, in line with connectivism, social media learning is viewed as a space where learners establish communication networks that facilitate their linguistic and cognitive learning.

Concept of Social Media

According to Kaplan, A., & Mazurek, G. (2018), social media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the theoretical and technical foundations of Web 2.0, allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content." In other words, social media is about interaction and participation rather than just information consumption. In the 21st century, social media has changed communication behaviors. Many studies reported that Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok changed not only how people socialize but also how they use language when communicating (Facebook, Instagram, & TikTok, 2020; Al-Ali, 2021). The tone of conversation, use of emojis, abbreviations, and slang have all contributed to creating a "digital dialect," an informal variety of language used in digital media.

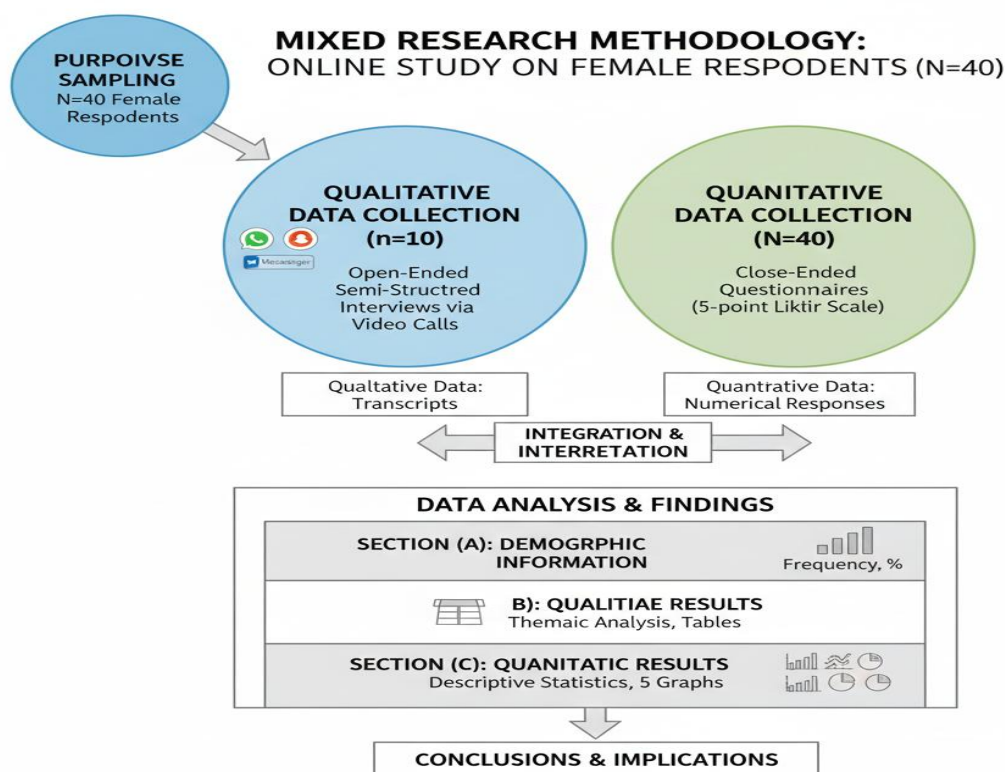
Previous Studies on Social Media and Writing Skills

Yunus et al. (2019) stated that social media transformed the process of writing from a receptive mode to a more participatory mode where users publish, revise, and respond to feedback from peers in a short time. (Atmojo et al., 2024; Liao et al., 2024) reported that social media changed language use to be more informal. González and Chang (2023) argued that students' exposure to abbreviated writing, such as using "u" instead of "you", "b4" instead of "before", and "lol" for "laugh out loud", normalized linguistic abbreviations and encouraged their transfer to academic writing. Shahzadi and Kausar (2020) studied Pakistani undergraduates as well. More than 70% of them admitted to using informal expressions or abbreviations in their academic assignments. Lakhal (2022) studied the use of messaging applications on EFL students' writing. (Aziz, Hashim, and Yunus, 2019; Manca, 2021; and Dewi and Rizal, 2023) argued that if assigning writing tasks on social networking sites promoted collaboration and peer review, then it would increase motivation. Under the instructor's guidance, students could use social media as a place for creativity, confidence, and self-expression. All these findings agreed that students' exposure to social media blurred the line between formal and informal registers, which is a challenge to academic writing quality.

Research Methodology

According to Murtaza et al. (2025), research methodology describes the research design, population, sampling, instrument, data collection procedure, and methods of data analysis. Furthermore, it explains the ethical standards and measures taken in this study to ensure trustworthiness.

Figure 2:



The present study was conducted using a mixed research methodology. This design was suitable for a study that aimed to explore human experiences in depth to gain a better understanding of 40 female respondents' attitudes, beliefs, and reflections on how social media exposure affected their writing skills. The reason to get suitable results already used by Martínez-Carrasco, R. (2018). The purposive sampling technique was employed. The researchers ethically requested permission from the respondents before the field study. Qualitative data were obtained from 10 respondents through open-ended semi-structured interviews conducted via WhatsApp, Messenger, and Snapchat video calls. Quantitative data and further demographics were obtained online through closed-ended questionnaires using a 5-point Likert scale. The interview technique enabled the researcher to have a guided conversation with participants that was face-to-face on a video call, allowing participants to express their views naturally. A pilot test of the interviews was also conducted on participants to ensure the clarity of the questions. In the end, the data was presented in three different sections: Section (A) covered demographic information, Section (B) displayed qualitative results in tables, and Section (C) expressed quantitative results in five graphs.

Table 1: The demographic characteristics of the participants

Variable	Category	Frequency (n = 40)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	40	100
Average Age	16–20 years	27	67.5
Average Age	21–25 years	13	32.5
Academic Discipline	Undergraduate/Graduate	40	100.0
Most Used Social Media Platform	WhatsApp, X, FB	9	22.5
Most Used Social Media Platform	Messenger, TikTok, Snapchat	31	77.5

The demographic data revealed that only females participated in the study (100%). Moreover, 67.5% of the participants were between 16 and 20 years of age, and 32.5% between 21 and 25 undergraduate and graduate levels. In terms of the most commonly used social media, WhatsApp, X, and Facebook were the most popular (22.5%), followed by Messenger, TikTok, and Snapchat (77.5%).

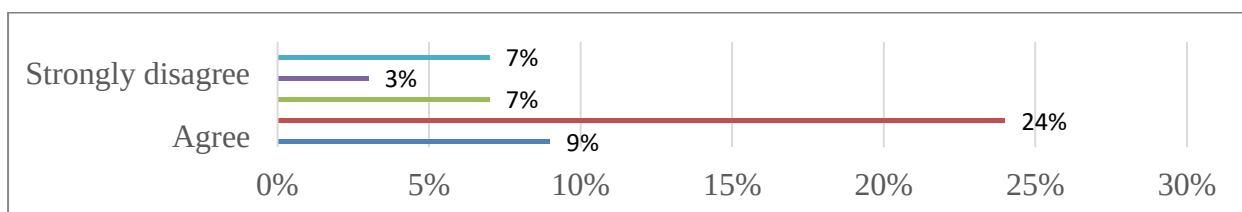
Table 2: Qualitative Results

R. Questions	Answer Themes	Models/Keywords
For what purposes do you use social media platforms?	"My main purposes are entertainment, following trends, and staying in touch with friends. I occasionally use Facebook to follow news and professional groups."	Entertainment, Socializing, News Consumption, Professional Networking

R. Questions	Answer Themes	Models/Keywords
Have you ever thought social media might have affected your English writing?	Yes, I think it has affected it. I feel like I'm writing more, and my fluency has increased because I text and post in English all the time. I worry about using too many informal abbreviations or slang in my academic papers."	Increased Fluency, Informality/Slang Use, Blurring of Registers
Have you changed your writing style due to online communication?	"I use shorter sentences, more emojis and emoticons, and I often misspell words intentionally for humor or speed. I focus more on getting the message across quickly than on perfect grammar."	Use of Visual Cues (Emojis), Code-Switching, Focus on Clarity over Accuracy
Do you think social media can be beneficial for language learning?	"It provides real-time exposure to native speakers' language and culture. I learn new vocabulary and idioms every day by reading posts and comments. It also offers a low-stress environment where I can practice writing without fear of judgment from a teacher."	Authentic Input, Vocabulary Acquisition, Reduced Anxiety, Informal Practice, Exposure to Native Discourse

Figure 1: Quantitative Results

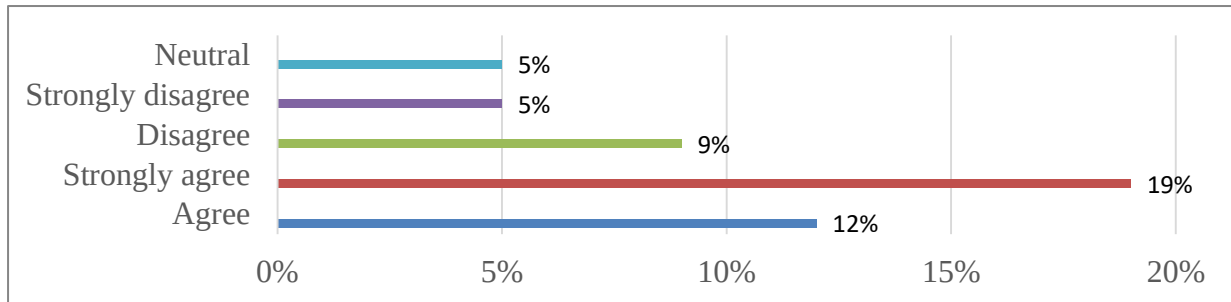
RQ1: Do you think that social media affect your writing skills?



While the presented data offers insights into student perspectives on question one regarding the effects of social media on their writing skills in ESL setting. Only 9% of students explicitly agreed while 7% outright disagreed that social media platforms rarely affect writing. Notably, 24% acknowledged the potential effect. 7% remained neutral and only 3% strongly disagreed.

Figure: 2

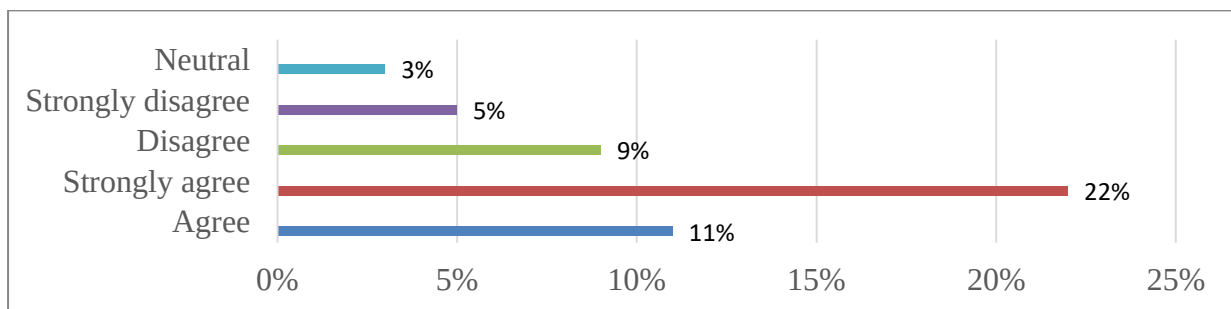
RQ2: Are you able to distinguish social media informal writing and formal academic writing?



The presented data offers insights into student perspectives on question 2 regarding the social media informal writing and formal writing skills. Only 12% of students explicitly agreed, while 9% outright disagreed. Notably, 29% acknowledged the potential effect. 5% remained neutral, and only 5% strongly disagreed.

Figure: 3

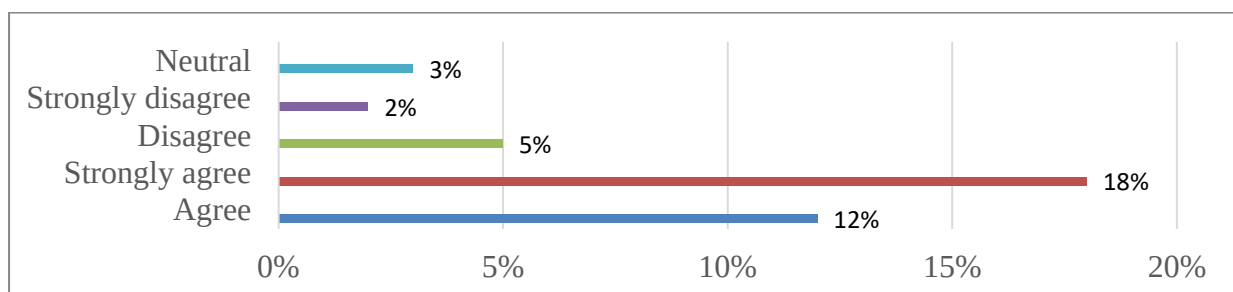
RQ3: Do you use abbreviated words in writing text experiences on social media?



The presented data offers insights into student perspectives on question 3 regarding the social media informal writing and formal writing skills. Only 11% of students explicitly agreed, while 9% outright disagreed. Notably, 22% acknowledged the potential effect. 3% remained neutral, and only 5% strongly disagreed.

Figure: 4

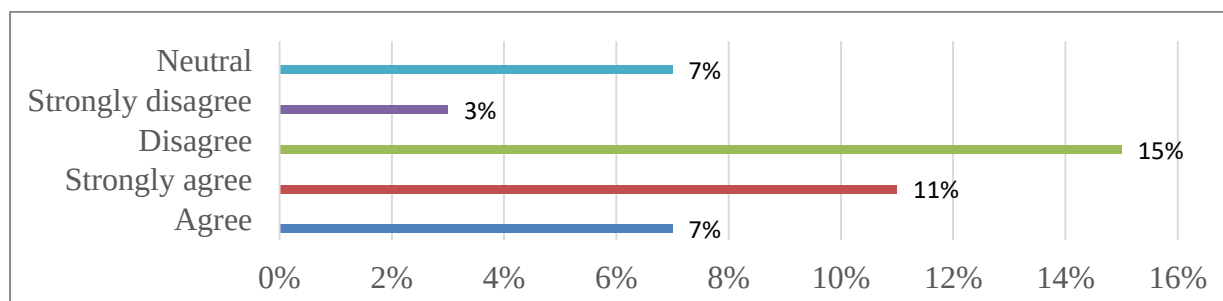
RQ3: Do you face difficulties in transferring social media writing experiences to academic writing?



The presented data offers insights into respondents' perspectives on question 4 regarding social media. Only 12% of students explicitly agreed, while 5% outright disagreed. Notably, 18% acknowledged the potential effect. 3% remained neutral, and only 2% strongly disagreed.

Figure: 5

RQ2: How do you suggest social media helps you improve academic writing skills?



The presented data offer insights into students' perspectives on question 5 regarding social media writing skills. Only 7% of students explicitly agreed, while 15% outright disagreed. However, 11% acknowledged strongly agree. 7% remained neutral, and only 3% strongly disagreed.

Discussion

The mixed investigation uncovered a pronounced influence of social media practices on the formal academic writing skills of the participants. A primary finding is the routine, informal linguistic behavior on social media platforms, characterized by the use of coinages, shortened word forms, abbreviations, and acronyms (e.g., 'u' for 'you', 'gr8' for 'great', 'ur' for 'your'). This highly abbreviated and non-standard communication style is a constant feature of their online chats and posts, aligned with the study done by Songxaba et al. (2019) and Ghouali et al. (2019). The research also highlighted the diverse applications of social media by the respondents, extending beyond mere communication to include entertainment, socializing, news, and professional networking. Crucially, the platforms offer substantial language learning benefits; students report improvements in vocabulary acquisition, reduced writing anxiety, opportunities for informal practice, and valuable exposure to authentic native English discourse. However, a significant negative consequence arises from the collision of these two language spheres. Even though the informal social media language is inappropriate for formal assignments, traces of these deviational patterns and writing inconsistencies that fall outside the parameters of Standard English are frequently observed in their academic work. This suggests a deeply internalized habit. The study confirmed that a majority of undergraduates, who utilize platforms like Facebook, X (Twitter), Messenger, TikTok, and Snapchat, are generally aware that this abbreviated "brand of English" is unsuitable for formal contexts. Nonetheless, many participants unconsciously or unknowingly transfer these non-standard features into their formal writing. The constant exposure and repeated use of these unconventional expressions cause them to creep into the respondents' writing consciousness. While these deviational spellings and abbreviations make perfect informal sense among peers, their appearance in structured academic writing is viewed as indicative of sub-literacy within the formal educational environment. This transition from an easy, habitual online style to a lack of adherence to standard spelling and grammar in formal writing necessitates further investigation. Consequently, the researchers recommend that additional studies be conducted among different populations to either corroborate or challenge these initial findings.

Conclusion

The study, primarily based on the perspectives of undergraduates/graduates, investigated how social media usage affects the writing proficiency of young people. The central finding reveals that most youths adopt a non-standard form of English for online communication, a linguistic style that operates outside the conventional limitations of both Standard English (SE) and even popular ESL varieties. This continuous use of deviational patterns such as abbreviations and acronyms like 'u' for 'you', 'gr8t' for 'great', and 'ur/urs' for 'your/yours' has become so pervasive that it has infiltrated their writing consciousness. While these expressions are perfectly intelligible and functional in informal peer settings, their presence in formal academic writing contexts suggests a potentially critical deficit in literacy skills. This linguistic shift presents serious implications for the development of effective and appropriate writing competencies among youths, particularly when transitioning to formal situations. Consequently, the research suggests that educational authorities should conduct further studies into these deviational patterns used by youths globally, to potentially standardize or officially recognize these "new words" to both ensure uniformity in usage and acknowledge the evolving nature of social media-driven language culture.

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