

The Influence of Social Media Language on Students' Academic Writing in English language education students at Al Mawaddah Warrahmah Islamic Science University Kolaka

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A B S T R A C T

The widespread use of social media has significantly shaped students' communication patterns, yet its specific impact on the quality of academic writing remains underexplored, particularly among English language education students in Indonesian tertiary institutions. Addressing this gap, the present study examines how social media language influences the academic writing performance of 10 students in the English Education Department at Al Mawaddah Warrahmah Islamic Science University Kolaka. Data were collected through a questionnaire measuring students' social media usage and perceptions, alongside an analytical writing task in the form of a short academic essay to identify the presence of informal language features. These features included abbreviations, slang, code-switching, and unconventional punctuation. The findings indicate that frequent social media engagement contributes to the unintentional transfer of informal expressions into academic writing. A total of 31 informal language instances were identified, with Pearson correlation analysis showing a moderate negative relationship ($r = -0.42$) between social media use and writing accuracy. Despite this, several students reported positive effects such as increased confidence, fluency, and exposure to new vocabulary. In conclusion, social media language exerts a dual influence – diminishing formality and accuracy while enhancing certain aspects of language development. These findings highlight the need for educators to incorporate digital literacy and targeted academic writing instruction to help students manage informal language interference and optimize the benefits of online language exposure.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the widespread use of social media has significantly transformed the way students communicate, express ideas, and construct written texts. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, Twitter (X), and Facebook encourage users to communicate quickly and informally, often using abbreviated words, slang, emojis, and non standard grammatical structures. This emerging "social media language" has become a dominant mode of daily interaction among students, particularly in the digital native Generation Z.

While social media provides opportunities for authentic communication and language exposure, concerns have arisen regarding its potential negative impact on formal literacy skills, especially academic writing. Academic writing requires clarity, accuracy, coherence, and adherence to linguistic convention (Aulia, 2019). However, the informal linguistic features common in social media such as shortened forms ("u", "btw", "idk"), code-switching, unconventional punctuation, and creative spelling may inadvertently influence students' formal writing performance.

Several studies indicate that frequent exposure to informal digital language can shape users' writing patterns. Research by (Nordin, 2020) found that students often transfer social media abbreviations into academic tasks unintentionally. Similarly, (Rosali, 2022) notes that constant use of informal online language may reduce students' awareness of grammatical

accuracy. On the other hand, scholars such as (Wood, 2019) argue that digital communication does not necessarily harm writing ability; instead, it may enhance creativity and linguistic adaptability if properly managed. Another result from (Nukator, 2023) indicated that the new trends in writing on social media sites affect students' spellings in their school work. It was also found out that social media sites distract students from effectively engaging in their academic works, thereby negatively affecting their academic performances/results

Despite growing scholarly attention, the extent to which social media language influences academic writing remains a relevant and evolving issue, especially in educational contexts where technology plays an increasingly central role (Febriyanti M. &.; Febriyanti M. &., 2024; Masluha, 2024). Therefore, it is important to investigate how students' daily engagement with social media affects their academic writing performance, linguistic choices, and overall writing quality. Findings from this study are expected to provide insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers in developing strategies to strengthen students' academic literacy in the digital era (Jaiswal, 2025).

Furthermore, the rapid growth of social media usage among university students has created an environment where informal linguistic features are not only normalized but also preferred for efficiency and interpersonal bonding (Ahmed, 2019). Students' frequent exposure to such linguistic patterns may gradually shape their cognitive processing of language, causing a shift in how they construct sentences, choose vocabulary, and organize ideas in writing. This phenomenon is increasingly visible in academic settings, where lecturers have reported the presence of informal expressions, incomplete sentences, and non-standard abbreviations in students' essays, research papers, and examinations (Rosali, 2022).

In addition, the boundary between formal and informal writing has become more fluid in the digital age. Digital natives often multitask between academic assignments and social media activities, which may lead to inadvertent linguistic transfers. According to (Tagliamonte, 2019), digital communication plays a significant role in shaping adolescents' language practices, making it essential to understand how these patterns influence formal writing outputs. If students are unable to effectively differentiate between informal digital language and formal academic structures, their academic writing quality may be compromised.

However, it is also important to consider the potential positive impacts of social media on literacy development. Social media platforms provide opportunities for authentic communication, peer interaction, and exposure to diverse language inputs. Some scholars argue that engaging with digital text can enhance learners' writing fluency, motivation, and confidence, particularly in second-language contexts (Suwandi & Yuliana, 2021). This suggests that the influence of social media language is multifaceted, involving both challenges and potential benefits for academic writing skills.

Given the dual nature of these impacts, a deeper investigation is needed to examine how students' daily engagement with social media shapes their academic writing performance (Ali, 2020). Understanding these patterns will contribute to more effective literacy instruction strategies and help educators develop approaches that strengthen students' awareness of writing conventions while acknowledging their digital communication habits. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze the extent to which social media language influences students' academic writing, focusing on linguistic features, writing accuracy, and the factors contributing to linguistic transfer.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to investigate the influence of social media language on students' academic writing. The respondents consisted of 10 students from the English Education Department, selected through purposive sampling based on their active use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter), as well as their regular engagement in academic writing tasks. These respondents,

aged 20 – 23 making them relevant subjects for examining linguistic transfer from social media to academic writing.

Two primary instruments were utilized to collect data: a questionnaire and a writing test. The questionnaire was designed using a 5-point Likert scale to gather information on students' frequency of social media use, the types of platforms they engage with, and the specific linguistic features they commonly employ online, including abbreviations, slang, emojis, and code-switching. Additionally, the questionnaire explored students' perceptions regarding the extent to which social media language influences their academic writing. Meanwhile, the writing test required students to produce a short academic essay of approximately 250–300 words on a predetermined topic. The essays were then analyzed using a standardized writing rubric that assessed grammar, vocabulary, organization, and adherence to formal academic tone. This rubric allowed the researchers to identify inaccuracies, informal expressions, and the presence of social media-related linguistic features in the students' writing.

The research procedures were carried out in several stages. First, the instruments were prepared and validated through expert judgment to ensure clarity and reliability. After obtaining the necessary permissions, the data collection process began with the online distribution of the questionnaire via Google Forms. Subsequently, students completed the writing task under controlled time conditions and submitted their essays digitally. Each writing sample was then examined to identify instances of informal language transfer, such as the use of non-standard abbreviations ("u", "btw"), slang expressions, unconventional punctuation, or other informal patterns commonly found in social media communication.

The data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize students' social media habits and perceptions. A linguistic error analysis was performed on the writing samples to categorize specific types of informal language features present in the texts. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was then conducted to determine the relationship between students' frequency of social media use and the accuracy of their academic writing. In addition, qualitative content analysis was applied to further interpret patterns of linguistic transfer and provide deeper insights into how social media language manifests in academic writing. Through this combined analysis, the study aimed to produce a comprehensive understanding of the extent to which social media language influences students' academic writing performance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, based on data collected from 10 undergraduate students of the English Education Department, reveal clear patterns regarding the influence of social media language on students' academic writing. The questionnaire results showed that all respondents actively used social media every day, with eight students spending more than two to four hours engaging on platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter). A majority of them (70%) reported frequently using abbreviations such as "u," "btw," and "idk," as well as employing slang expressions and code-switching in their online communication. Furthermore, six students admitted that they sometimes experienced difficulty in shifting from informal digital language to the formal language required in academic writing tasks.

The writing samples provided additional evidence that social media language influences academic writing. From the 10 essays analyzed, a total of 31 instances of informal language features were identified. These included non-standard abbreviations (35%), informal vocabulary or slang expressions (26%), missing capitalization and punctuation inconsistencies (23%), as well as the presence of ellipsis or emoji-like expressions (3%). Notably, students who reported higher levels of social media usage tended to produce essays containing more informal elements and lower accuracy in grammar and academic tone. These results indicate

that linguistic habits formed through digital communication were unintentionally transferred into academic writing.

Two main instruments were used: a questionnaire and an analytical writing task. The questionnaire consisted of a 5-point Likert-scale format designed to measure the frequency and type of social media usage, the linguistic features commonly employed online (abbreviations, slang, emojis, and code-switching), and students' perceptions of how social media language may influence their academic writing. The content validity of the questionnaire was ensured through expert judgment by two lecturers specializing in applied linguistics, and a pilot test with five non-participant students indicated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.82$).

The writing task required students to produce a short academic essay of approximately 250–300 words on a predetermined topic related to education. Writing samples were collected digitally under controlled time conditions (45 minutes) without access to online resources to ensure authenticity. The essays were evaluated using a standardized rubric assessing grammar, vocabulary, organization, and academic tone. This rubric also guided the identification of informal language features and social-media-related linguistic patterns, such as non-standard abbreviations, slang, unconventional punctuation, and code-switching.

The research procedure consisted of the following steps: preparation and validation of instruments, obtaining ethical approval from the department and receiving informed consent from all participants, online distribution of the questionnaire through Google Forms, administration of the writing task in a supervised classroom setting; and collection and archiving of writing samples for analysis. Confidentiality and data anonymity were ensured throughout the process.

These findings support previous research claiming that the linguistic practices shaped by social media can influence students' formal writing performance. The presence of informal linguistic features in the essays aligns with the arguments of (Rosali, 2022) who warn about the potential negative impact of digital communication habits on academic literacy. The results also correspond with (Crystal, 2019) view that digital environments foster new linguistic behaviors that may blend into other forms of writing. Additionally, the influence of digital language on young users observed in this study reinforces (Tagliamonte, 2019) assertion that adolescents' everyday communication norms strongly shape their linguistic expression.

However, the findings also reveal that the influence of social media is not entirely negative. A few respondents noted that regular exposure to English content on social media helped them build confidence and fluency in expressing ideas. This perspective is consistent with (Wood, 2019) view that digital communication can enhance literacy development when learners are equipped with strategies to differentiate between informal and formal writing contexts. Despite potential benefits, the dominant trend observed in this study remains that informal digital language habits tend to interfere with the writing conventions required in academic settings.

Overall, the findings of this study highlight the importance of raising students' metalinguistic awareness so that they can consciously distinguish between online informal communication and formal academic writing. The results suggest that educators should integrate digital literacy instruction and explicit guidance on academic writing conventions to help students minimize unintended linguistic transfer. Even with a small sample of 10 respondents, the patterns observed in this study clearly demonstrate that social media language continues to shape students' academic writing behavior in significant ways.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that frequent exposure to informal linguistic features on social media—such as abbreviations, slang, code-switching, and unconventional punctuation—tends to unconsciously transfer into students' academic writing, thereby challenging their ability to maintain formal conventions and supporting previous research on the influence of digital communication practices on writing behavior.



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Higher levels of social media engagement are associated with increased informal language errors, reduced grammatical accuracy, and weaker adherence to academic norms, as reflected in the moderate negative correlation between social media usage frequency and writing accuracy, while qualitative feedback indicates limited metalinguistic awareness among students regarding informal expressions in their academic texts. Nevertheless, social media also offers potential benefits, as some students reported enhanced confidence, writing fluency, and vocabulary development through exposure to English content, suggesting its value as a supplementary learning resource when properly managed. Accordingly, educators are encouraged to provide explicit instruction on formal writing conventions and digital literacy, emphasizing distinctions between informal online communication and academic writing, while curriculum designers may integrate language awareness modules, guided writing practice, and critical digital engagement. Despite these contributions, the study's small sample size, reliance on self-reported data, and focus on a single institution limit the generalizability of the findings, indicating the need for future research with larger and more diverse samples, comparative or experimental designs, and deeper exploration of specific platforms or targeted interventions to better understand and address the impact of social media language on academic writing.

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