

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ADOLESCENT ESSAY WRITING: A STUDY OF SS II AND III STUDENTS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN AZARE

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Abstract

This paper studies the impact of social media on adolescents' essay writing. A test on essay writing is given to the students to write an essay, after marking the essay, impact(s) of social media is ascertained using simple percentage to analyse the impact of social media on students essay writing. The paper reveals that adolescents as a group that are negatively influenced by the usage of social media and it affects their essay writing as most of them abbreviate words without following the rules and do not consider the rule of tenses more importantly use slangs in their writing as found on most social media platforms. The paper concludes that social media have an important role in students' daily life but there is another side to it, which affects their essay writing. The researchers use a sample of 20 SS 2 and students who are selected purposively as the time each student spends on social is taken in to consideration and serves as yardstick for the selection of the respondents. The paper recommends that teachers should pay attention to students' essay writing by emphasizing on making corrections after marking and students' access to the internet should be censored and restricted wherever possible. Students should not be exposed to social media at early levels. Parents should be monitoring their children and wards activities on social media so that they will not be so much carried away by it. Teachers should try to explain the difference between texting and writing as well as between spelling and abbreviation. Emphasis should be made on making formal writings. Essay written by students should be marked and the students should be made to make corrections pointed out.

Key Words: Social media, Adolescent, Essay Writing.

Introduction

Language is not only a means of communication but also a necessary condition of survival for human beings. Language is a major part of our daily life being the basis of social integration. Language in any society is for communication. It has enabled human being to express and bring to reality great ideas. Lucas (1995) describes language as a vital tool to thinking. It is a medium of communication, which gives meaning to our thought through the expression of our feelings. Widdowson (1974) affirms that all languages are highly developed and are sophisticated communication systems capable of meeting the demands of the society in which they are used and the personal needs of the individual of the society in terms of expressing emotion and giving and receiving information itself. Oluruntoaju (1995) defines language as specific human characteristics. Other species have means of communication, which are considered instinctive and narrow in scope.

Human language on the other hand, is conventional, symbolic, and complex and has an infinite range of possibilities.

Tinouye (2003) describes language as an instrument of thought that is psychosocial interactive measure, which binds human society together in communities and linguistic groups. Language is important because it gives us a very clear structured set of symbols, which we can use in locating ourselves in the world. Speech is not clearly different in kind from other aspects of social behaviour but that some aspects of language structure can be described properly only by reference to speech as social behaviour. There is no homogenous grammar whether for an individual or for a community but speakers make extraordinary subtle use of the available variety in order to locate one another in the society.

Social media refer to internet and telecommunication-based tools for sharing and discussing information among human beings. It is a

typical blend of technology and social interaction of social value. It is a term used to refer to a category of networks that is based on user participation and user generated content and includes social networking sites like LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp, social bookmarking sites like Delicious.us social news sites like Digg or Simpy, and other sites that are centred on social networking. It also includes mobile technology-based communication such as SMS and instant messaging commonly referred to as chat like Blackberry messenger, Yahoo messenger. Social networking is thus known as the act of interacting with other people in a social online environment through the use of a website or telecommunications network. Social networking sites describe these websites that enable users to create public profiles within that websites and form relationships with other users of the same websites who access their profiles, friendships are reviewed, relationships are fostered and even businesses are showcased to a very large audience through social media. Social media has exploded as a category of online discourse where people create content, share, bookmark and network it at a prodigious rate. Because of its ease of use, speed and reach, social media is fast changing the public discourse in society and setting trends and agenda in topics that range from the environment and politics to technology and the entertainment industry (Asur and Huberman, 2010 share the same concept of social media. To them *social media is the use of Facebook, blogs, twitter, Myspace and other links for the purpose of communication, sharing photos as well as videos*. However, for the purpose of this study, social media is captured within the use of internet through Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Skype, Myspace, goggle+, Instagram as well as Yahoo messenger for communication, sharing of idea, sharing of photos and videos by users. The increased use of social networking websites has become an international phenomenon in the past several years. What started out, as a hobby for some computer literate people has become a social norm and way of life for people all over the world (Boyd, 2007:72). Teenagers and young adults have especially embraced the sites as a way to connect with their peers, share information, reinvent their personalities and show case their social lives (Boyd, 2007:72).

Concept of Social Media

According to Junco, et al. (2010), social media is a collection of internet websites, services and practices that support collaboration, community building, participation and sharing. The growing dimension of the use of social media among the youth of today cannot be over emphasized. Over the years, social

networking among students has become more and more popular. Due to its increased popularity, teachers are questioning whether grades of students are not being affected by how much time is spent on these sites (Choney, 2010: 33)

Social media is a form of electronic communication, which facilitate interactive base on certain interests. Social media include web and mobile technology. Kaplan and Hacnlein (2010) define social media as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content.

According to Lenhert et al (2010) about 57% of social network users are 18-19 years old and have personal profile on multiple social media websites. In a study by Pampek, et al. (2009), the amount of time spent daily on social network sites varied greatly. However, an analysis of the data indicated most participants spent approximately thirty minutes a day socialising, mostly during the evening hours. Students spent an average up forty-seven minutes a day on Facebook.

Essay Writing

Historians agree that writing existed many years ago due to the need for recording information about different domains in life. It is one of the most important language skills which represents the development of expressing human desires by letters and other different symbols. Writing is defined as “a sequence of letters, words or symbols marked on a surface”, many definitions were given to writing. For Nunan (1989), “writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate communication by means of conventionally visible marks”. It means that writing is a very difficult concept, which requires some important rules that must be followed in order to communicate.

According to Nunan (1989), essay is derived from the French word “essayer”, which means “to attempt” or “to try” an essay is a short form of literary composition based on a single subject matter and often gives the personal opinion of the author. A famous English essayist, Nunan (1989) defines essays as “a literary device for saying almost everything about almost anything”, it can also be described as “short piece of writing on a particular subject”.

The spoken language existed a long time before the written language. People were interested only in the spoken language in communicating with each other, especially in the twentieth century and concentrated

mostly in the oral approach, as a result of this, writing was neglected for many years. In teaching language, many linguists, like De'Saussure and Chomsky claimed this negligence.

One of the reasons behind this obvious negligence is the fact that writing is difficult to teach and learn, Hess (2001) said that writing is the most problematic to teach in class and it is the most challenging of the four skills to master. For Nunan (1989).

...Producing a coherent, fluent, extended piece of writing is probably the most difficult thing there is to do in language. It is something most native speakers never master. For second language learners, the challenges are enormous, particularly for those who go on to a university and study in a language that is not their own, (P19)

Writing, according to Nunan (1989), should not just be a pen and paper activity; teachers have to rate their students' writing according to the format, content, sentence and structure, vocabulary, punctuation and spelling. Also, the writing should be restricted to a set of rules and criteria, an effective piece of writing should include, according to Starkey (2004), organisation, coherence, clarity, accurate language and word choice.

Adolescence

Adolescence (from Latin "adolescere", meaning "grown up") is transitional stage of physical and psychological development that generally occurs during the period from puberty to legal adulthood (Dorn & Biro 2011). Adolescence is usually associated with the teenage years, but its physical, psychological or cultural expressions may begin earlier and later. Adolescence can be a time of both disorientation and discovery. The transitional period can bring up issues of adolescence and self-identity. Chambers (1995) describes adolescence as a stage at which children prepare to be next generation of adults, unlike children, adolescents aim to be different from all previous stages which gives rise to the constantly changing picture of their lives.

Adolescence and Language

All languages change over a period of time for reasons which are imperfectly understood, since speech is really a form of human activity, like dancing or playing a piano. It is more exact to say each successive generation behaves linguistically in a slightly different manner from its predecessors. Foster (1968) frowned upon some of the expressions

and pronunciations now being used in all seriousness in government and law-court.

Language does not exist in vacuum, but it is powerfully affected by social, political, economic, religious and technological change. Parents and teachers often have a negative attitude towards adolescent language, judging it as sloppy and attempting to correct vernacular features such as, local accents, slang words, discourse particles or code mixing which is not the problem, Adolescents, themselves, are quite conscious of these attitudes as well as of generational different in their speech. Schlobinski (1993: 64). Schlobinski (1993: 64) further suggests that adolescents evaluate their speech positively, but at the same time hold it to be appropriate for group external purposes such as job interview.

Methodology

The survey method was used to solicit data and information from a sample of students of the Islamic Orientation Secondary School, Azare and Abdullahi Memorial Secondary School, Azare. Ten students of SS II and III from each school were randomly selected. A set of questionnaires was designed by the researcher to collect information and data. Following Kumekpor's (2002) view, social survey may be said to be an objective, quantitative approach to the study of the social processes within a well-defined area at a given time through one or more instructions by means of an interview schedule, a questionnaire and the data thus obtained relate statistically: social survey aims at understanding some specific problems at a particular time and so study opinion attitude towards major social, economic and political problems and issues (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003: 13). A test was also conducted to the selected students where the words misused and sentences incorrectly used are identified. The data collected using the questionnaire instrument was analysed using simple statistics and the test conducted was marked and the mistakes which came as a result of social media influence were collected and discussed.

Data analysis

This section analyses the questionnaire used for the research. The responses are presented in tabular forms with the discussion of each table coming under it.

Question 1: Do you use social media daily?

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	20	100%
No	00	100%
	20	100%

When asked if the participants use social media daily, all the participants answered yes. The results show that 100% of students use social media which means it is very important to them and became a necessity in their life,

Question 2: which social media site(s) do you use?

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook only	02	45.24
Facebook and others	17	
Instagram only	00	7.14
Twitter only	00	4.76
Google ⁺	00	0.00
Whatsapp only	00	38.10
Others	01	4.78
	20	100

According to the analysis of data, majority of students gave more than one choice 19 respondents representing 45.24% use Facebook, 3 respondents representing 7.14% use Instagram, 2 respondents representing 4.76% use Twitter while none of the respondents use Google⁺. 16 respondents representing 38.10% use WhatsApp and 2 respondents representing 4.78% use other which are not listed in the questionnaire. So, Facebook is the most used social media site.

Question 3: What do you prefer while chatting on social media?

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Writing	16	80
Speaking	03	15
Both	01	05
	20	100

Findings show that 16 respondents representing 80% prefer writing on social media, 3 respondents representing 15% prefer speaking through voice message while one respondent representing 05% prefers both, this shows that when communicating with others most of them write and in the cause use abbreviation to save time and space.

Question 4: Tick the abbreviation(s) you frequently use.

Option	Full meaning	Frequency	Percentage
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Lol	Laughing out land	18	8.11
Omg	Oh my God	12	5.41
Gm	Good morning	04	1.80
Ge	Good evening	02	0.90
Dunno	Don't know	00	00
TBH	To be honest	00	00
HRU	How are you	14	6.31
Tnx	Thanks	19	8.56
IDK	I don't know	02	0.90
ATM	At the moment	03	1.35
Sth	Something	02	0.90
U 2	You too	18	8.11
GTG	Got to go	02	0.90
BRB	Be right back	06	2.70
ASAP	As soon as possible	08	3.60
CU	See you	13	5.86
2 day	To day	18	8.11
2n8	Tonight	19	8.56
Bro	Brother	20	9.10
Im-1	I miss you	08	3.60
B4	Before	13	5.86
Dm	Direct message	18	8.11
RT	Retweet	03	1.35
		222	100

The table above has 222 as number of the abbreviations ticked by the students each respondent uses many of the abbreviations given. The table represents the most used abbreviation among students as almost all of them use so many in writing. Similarly, some of the abbreviations used by the respondents are not even known to them. They became just a language of their group and they feel the meaning. The abbreviations given in the table above do not represent all the abbreviations used by the students. They asked for many they did not see on the questionnaire which shows that they use many.

Question 5: Is your writing affected by the abbreviations used on social media?

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	16	80
No	04	20
	20	100

The result shows that 16 respondents representing 8% said yes and agreed that their writing is affected by the abbreviations used on social media while 4 respondents representing 20% said no, they are not affected by the abbreviations used on social media.

Question 6: Why do you use abbreviation while texting?

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Gain time	12	24
Facilitate the process of texting	14	28
Fashion	06	12
Save space	18	36
	50	100

Findings here show that the respondents use abbreviation to gain time, facilitate the process of texting and save space because most of the respondents chose multiple options. This shows that abbreviations make texting faster and easier.

Analysis of the respondents' marked papers.

While observing some students' essay writing which was administered by the researcher, different things were identified about the way they write their formal essays in terms of making errors. Beside abbreviations, the students made grammatical and spelling mistakes. The following table summarizes some mistakes made by the students while writing formally. These mistakes were extracted from the test administered to them.

Grammar

These errors are made by the students because they are used to writing on social media which has no regard of correctness as such they shift them to their classroom works. This affects mostly grammar and spelling.

Errors	Correct form
It change	It changes
Some student	Some students
The men is	The men are

SPELLING

Capitalisation Errors	Correction
different	Different
bauchi	Bauchi
God	God

ABBREVIATION

SMS	Short message
Lit	Literature
Eng	English
Naija	Nigeria
Lt	Late
Ppl	People
Tnk	Thanks
CU	See you
GRT	Great
IC	I see
Msg	Message
Rg	Right
K	Ok
b/w	Between

The data collected shows that the students use social media platforms with Facebook topping the list as the most used social media platform. The respondents use Facebook and other platforms. It is evident from the data collected that social media greatly influence the students essay writing. The findings of the research reveal that the students carelessly abbreviate certain words when writing essays as they do when chatting on social media. They also pay no regard to grammatical and spelling errors because nobody cares to correct them when chatting as the aim is just to pass information.

Conclusion

It is evident that social media plays an important role in students' personal and educational daily lives since it facilitates the interaction between people from all over the world and provides useful information, which aids their search of knowledge. However, this research work proved that there is another side in which social media can negatively influence the student's educational careers. The result of the analysis revealed that most respondents agreed that texting affect their writing, which was confirmed by the sample essays given to them.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend the following;

- i. Students should not be exposed to social media at early levels.
- ii. Parents should be monitoring their children and wards activities on social media so that they will not be so much carried away by it.
- iii. Teachers should try to explain the difference between texting and writing as well as between spelling and abbreviation.
- iv. Emphasis should be made on making formal writings.
- v. Essay written by students should be marked and the students should be made to make the corrections pointed out.

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