

The Influence of Social Media on Spelling Skills among Primary School Students

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Social media is the platform for communication or sharing information on the internet through the medium of gadgets like computers, tablets and mobile phones. It enables people to share ideas, articles, information and news just a button press away. However, social media has replaced face-to-face communications with texting via smart phones or technology gadgets. It is found that students who frequently use social media sites as a medium of communication are easily exposed to the overuse of abbreviations or slang. Hence, this study aimed to explore the influence of social media on spelling skills among primary school students. A survey was conducted on 50 randomly selected Year 5 students from urban areas, with a high chance of exposure to technology devices as well as familiarity with social media. The results of the study showed that social media has a positive influence on students' spelling skills.

Key words: *social media, spelling skills, ESL learners*

Introduction

Social media is basically the platform for communications or sharing information on the internet through gadgets like computers, tablets or mobile phones. It enables people to share ideas, articles, information and news just a button press away. Since social networks are so well-established, they are rapidly gaining popularity among internet users. According to the Global Digital Report (Chaffey, 2019), the number of internet users worldwide has increased 9.1% compared to the year before. On the other hand, it is also reported that there is a 9% increment to the number of social media users, which is approximately 3.484 billion users worldwide. These readings show that people are living in a global world and new technologies are adopted in daily lives.

According to a survey by Common Sense Media (Rideout & Robb, 2018), seven out of 10 teens checked social media more than once a day, which is a doubling of the 34% figure from a similar survey in 2012. This indicates that social media gradually impacts the younger generation. Meanwhile, social media has replaced face-to-face communications with texting via smart phones or other technological gadgets. Hence, students who frequently use social media sites as a medium of communication are easily exposed to the overuse of abbreviations or slang (Belal, 2014; Sambo, Aghojare & Ahutu 2016). Certain acronyms, neologisms and abbreviations have infiltrated their everyday speech (Chopra, 2013; Rozaimie, Huzaimah & Morni 2016).

With the increasing use of mobile phones and the internet, students may not always adhere to conventional written language. Phonetic replacements, for example, are used such as “ur” instead of “your” and acronyms like “lol” that stands for “laughing out loud” (Van Djik et al, 2016). Farina and Lyddy (2011) also commented that online communication and text language in the past decades has become a form of communication consist of non-standard language forms. In other words these social media languages are heavily abbreviated and symbolically rich.

As educators in schools and tertiary institutions, the researchers decided to survey the impact of social media on language learning. This is because social media sites are currently the most used sites compared to other websites among primary students. Children used social media mainly for keeping contact with friends and family, and for learning (Badri et al, 2017a). In short, social media is rapidly establishing and connecting people. Meanwhile, for primary students who learn English language as second language in Malaysia, their learning might be affected by the use of social media. Hence, the main aim of this study is to ascertain the influence of social media on spelling skills among primary students.

Literature Review

Social Media

Social media is used by millions around the world. It plays an important role in everyone’s life. Baruah (2012) refers to social media as the use of the web and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue. It serves as an online community (Faizi et al., 2013) and enables users to interact, express, share and create content about anything online (Muntiga et al, 2011). On the other hand, Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2012) also claimed social media as a twenty-first century term to define differently networked tools that promote the social aspects of the internet, not only as a channel of communication, but also to collaborate and express creatively.

With the rapid development of modern technology and ICTs (information and communication technologies), social media has turned into an essential tool where educators and policy makers see the potential benefits of using social media in education. It engages learners, to collaborate and participate in social interactions in the virtual environment. On the other hand, Yunus (2007), also stated that social interaction technologies, or ‘social media’, have great benefits for lifelong education environments. To sum up, social media is indubitably playing a significant role in education and thus, its implications should not be taken lightly and will be discussed further.

Spelling skill

Sparks (2007) defines spelling skill as an ability to relate the knowledge of phonological processing, and letter sound correspondences, in the sounds that map onto letters. It is also an important skill where it would influence one’s acquisition of language. This happens when learners do not comprehend English vocabulary, and thus face difficulties in learning the language (Riyanti, 2018; Bakar et al., 2019).

Spelling has to be mastered to learn English, as poor spelling would lead to a low proficiency in writing. In other words, students with poor spelling tend to apply the wrong spelling when writing, and would confuse correct word forms. Hence, learners need to be exposed to the correct spelling of new vocabulary to avoid the above situations.

Effects of Social Media in English learning

As internet access gets easier, it is not surprising that many students use social media daily. In English language learning, social media plays a crucial role in the four basic skills of language (i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing), as well as establishing English vocabulary and competency (Khan et al., 2016; Rostami & Balmaki 2018). By using social media, Yunus et al. (2012) commented that students’ thinking becomes more creative while Linse (2006) suggested that the language of learners will be improved overall.

In fact, due to the rapid development of the world and technology, it is said that language learning has grown beyond the boundaries of the four walls of the classroom (Yunus & Salehi, 2012). Students can read different types of texts from social media without having to read large numbers of books. This indirectly enables students to engage with educational content informally, and also provides them a more flexible and pleasant way to enhance their English learning.

It is easy to see how social media has eased English language learning. However, negative effects of social media arisen for discussion. An interview by Shih (2011) found that students

who used social media (e.g. Facebook) relied heavily on online auto-correction tools, resulting in less awareness about the accuracy of their spelling skills outside of social media, when no help was provided for their writing.

On the other hand, one finding by Perkins (2013) showed that social media such as Twitter only enables users 140 characters for each post. It indirectly limits users in their complete sentences, resulting in the creation of acronyms and short forms. Eventually, this leads to a poor choice of words and the tendency to use this form of writing in their formal written tasks.

Methodology

The main purpose in this study was to measure the influence of social media in spelling skills among primary students. Therefore, the researchers randomly selected 50 Year 5 students in Seri Kembangan, Selangor as the respondents. These students live in urban areas and have a higher chance of exposure to technology devices, as well as to social media sites. They were selected from two different classes in the same school. The respondents are familiar with technology devices and some are also users of well-known social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram and Wechat).

To carry out the survey, the researchers employed a quantitative approach to collect data; a questionnaire. The survey consisted of six sections. The first solicited demographic information from the respondents while the second enquired about their access to ICT tools. Next, the third section comprised 10 open-ended items with a 4-level of “Never”, “Seldom”, “Sometimes” and “Always”. The fourth section comprised 10 open-ended items that allowed respondents to respond on their social media competency with a 5-level of “Not applicable”, “Weak”, “Moderate”, “Good” and “Very good”. In the fifth section, respondents gave their reasons for using social media, while in the sixth section eight open-ended items were set, to ascertain the factors affecting spelling with regard to social media. Both the fifth and sixth sections comprised a 4-level of “Strongly Disagree”, “Disagree”, “Agree” and “Strongly Agree”. To ensure that all the respondents make a stand on the statements given, a “Not Sure” option was not included.

To analyse the data, percentages were used for the first through fourth sections. In the fifth and sixth sections, percentages and mean scores presented the reasons of respondents who use social media, and the social media factors that affect their spelling skills.

Findings and Discussion

In the findings and discussion, the researchers analysed the survey data, which is tabulated below.

Table I: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Gender	Male	64%
	Female	36%
Primary	Four	0%
	Five	100%
Locality	Urban	100%
	Rural	0%
Duration of Use	1-3 years	24%
	4-6 years	36%
	7-9 years	40%

There is no gender comparison in this study. Hence no quota was set for each gender. All the respondents are currently studying Year 5. Most respondents (40%) have been using social media since they were two to four years old, 36% have used social media since they were five to seven years old, and 24% started using it when they were eight to ten years old. Data has shown that all the respondents are exposed to social media at a very young age, and the convenience of social networking websites is just at their fingertips. Besides, a study by Lenhart et al. (2015) also showed that it is now easier to access social networking websites via applications (apps) on smartphones and gadgets.

Table II: Access to ICT Tools

	ACCESS	YES	NO
1	Computer	88%	12%
2	Smart Phone	90%	10%
3	Tablet	78%	22%
4	Internet	98%	2%
5	Using Social Media	98%	2%

Most respondents have easy access to ICT tools including gadgets like smart phones (90%), computers (88%) and tablets (78%). Ninety-eight percent of them responded that they can access the internet and use social media. This indicates that most are very enthusiastic about internet technology which is also agreed by Ingrid et al. (2010). Also, students enjoy the

convenience of the internet and social media as their locality is in urban area. Hence, this is a reflection of the studies by Mustaffa et al. (2011) who reported that the younger generation is no longer a passive audience that merely relies on traditional media to get information, but rather is active in contributing to the new media.

Table III: Social Media Usage

	SOCIAL MEDIA	NEVER	SELDOM	SOMETIMES	ALWAYS
1	Facebook	12%	22%	40%	26%
2	Twitter	78%	12%	4%	6%
3	Wechat	14%	20%	24%	42%
4	LINE	78%	18%	4%	8%
5	Instagram	30%	24%	14%	32%
6	YouTube	0%	2%	10%	88%
7	Whatsapp	6%	4%	16%	74%
8	Telegram	94%	2%	4%	0%
9	Tik Tok	20%	22%	34%	24%
10	Snapchat	74%	10%	6%	10%

As mentioned earlier, more than 98% of the respondents are social media users. In Table III, findings show how frequently respondents use different social networking sites. With 88% usage frequency, YouTube is the most popular site as it contains a large number of videos of which children are fond. This supports a study by Marshall (2016), who commented that ‘5 of YouTube’s top 10 most views channels in the month of April 2016 were from the “Kids and Family” genre’. Next, Whatsapp and Wechat follows with 74% and 42% use respectively. Then, the fourth most used social networking site is Instagram, showing 32% use. Meanwhile, Telegram is the least popular social media; 94% have never used the application.

Table IV: Social Media Competency

	SOCIAL MEDIA	NOT APPLICABLE	WEAK	MODERATE	GOOD	VERY GOOD
1	Facebook	10%	2%	36%	28%	24%
2	Twitter	76%	4%	10%	6%	4%
3	Wechat	12%	8%	10%	28%	42%
4	LINE	68%	18%	8%	2%	4%
5	Instagram	26%	16%	18%	14%	26%
6	YouTube	0%	0%	2%	36%	72%
7	Whatsapp	6%	0%	6%	24%	64%
8	Telegram	94%	2%	2%	2%	0%

9	Tik Tok	16%	12%	32%	20%	20%
10	Snapchat	76%	2%	6%	8%	8%

Most of the respondents have high competency in YouTube and Whatsapp, with percentages of 72% and 64% respectively. This is in line with Burroughs (2017) who reported that respondents are familiar with YouTube functions, due to high exposure at home and its minimalist layout. Whatsapp is the most common communication app among primary school students. Overall, 42% of respondents rated themselves competent in using Wechat while 26% of them rated themselves as competent on Instagram. The findings are coherent with Ismail (2016) who concluded that students use social networking websites to serve different functions such as communication, socialisation, education, information-seeking and entertainment.

Table V: Reasons of Using Social Media (SM)

	ITEM	S.D	D	A	S.A	MEAN
1	I use SM to communicate with my friends	0%	6%	20%	74%	3.68
2	I use SM to communicate with my family	4%	18%	46%	32%	3.06
3	I use SM to learn new things	4%	12%	58%	26%	3.06
4	I use SM to follow my favourite artiste	24%	22%	16%	38%	2.68
5	I use SM to learn English	18%	44%	16%	22%	2.42
6	I use SM to fill my free time	6%	4%	30%	60%	3.44
7	I use SM to gain knowledge	2%	30%	40%	28%	2.94
8	I use SM to follow the current trend (fashion, movie, music)	4%	8%	26%	62%	3.46
9	I use SM because my friends use it	28%	36%	24%	12%	2.20

10	I use SM to do business	76%	10%	10%	4%	1.42
11	I use SM because it is easy to use	12%	10%	40%	38%	3.04
12	I use SM because it is useful to me	12%	4%	36%	48%	3.20

The researchers found most respondents agreed that social media enables them to communicate, with the mean score 3.68. On the other hand, the second highest mean showed that students often follow the latest trends in music, fashion and movies via social media. Other than a communication tool, Badri et al. (2017b) also reported that students utilise social media as a platform to receive current information on their interests. This table also shows the mean score of 3.44 where the respondents agreed on using social media to fill their free time. This reflects the study by Wang and Vasquez (2014), who suggested that the effect of social media language is higher for those students who tend to spend their free time on social media. Besides, students find social media useful as 84% positively agreed with this statement. This also points out that social media is pivotal for students' acquisition of language.

Table VI: Factors Affecting Spelling Skills due to the Use of Social Media

	ITEM	S.D	D	A	S.A	MEAN
1	I use SM to learn to spell new words	12%	24%	40%	24%	2.76
2	I use short forms to comment on SM	8%	22%	40%	30%	2.92
3	I create my own short forms to write on SM	36%	32%	22%	10%	2.06
4	I use the short forms I learnt on SM in my writing task	54%	14%	24%	8%	1.86
5	I make sure I write the correct spelling when I comment on SM	22%	22%	42%	14%	2.48
6	I do not care about the spelling mistakes I see on SM	36%	32%	22%	10%	2.06
7	My friends correct my spelling mistakes on SM	18%	26%	38%	18%	2.56
8	I try to use the new words I have learnt on SM in writing	26%	20%	30%	24%	2.52

	task					
9	I memorise the new words I learnt on SM	18%	32%	34%	16%	2.48
10	SM helps me to improve my spelling skills	20%	20%	48%	12%	2.52

Based on the results derived from this table, more than 60% of students positively agreed that they use short forms when they comment in social media. This data shows that they are used to short forms when responding to social media. On the other hand, the students also think that social media does help them learn new vocabulary, with the mean score of 2.76. They are likely to apply the new words they learnt in their writing task, with the mean score of 2.52. Next, 70% of students positively agreed that they do create short forms when they write in social media. However, 54% were on the negative side of the statement that they would apply the short forms they learnt in social media to their formal writing tasks. In this case, the findings also supported the study by Cabrera (2018) that these media have sidetracked the students into ungrammatical contents. Apart from that, students are alert to the accuracy of their spelling on social media; 56% agreed that they would make sure they use correct spelling when commenting on social media. They are conscious when they give any comments or status as it represents themselves on social networking sites. At the same time, 56% of students responded that they would be corrected by their friends for incorrect spelling on social media. This is also in line with Yunus et al. (2016) who reported that social networking sites are good platforms for students to learn from others, and they think the sites do represent their identity. Lastly, the results showed that social media has a high, positive influence on spelling skills among primary school students. Communication via social media is highly appreciated by the students, as they get to learn new vocabulary on it. Further, 60% of them also agreed that social media helps their spelling. They tended to use their new words from social media in their formal writing, with 54% of students responding positively to that statement.

Conclusion

Social media is crucial in enabling people to connect and update to the latest information. The results have clearly shown that the students in this study embraced the digital way of communication and utilised social media positively. They find that social media helps their spelling. This is coherent with Kuimova and Zvekov (2016) who suggested that technology helps to develop writing skills and promote communication skills. On the other hand, this study also indicates that social media helps students in the informal acquisition of language. They learn new vocabulary from reading social media texts, and tend to apply the new words in their formal writing tasks. Hence, social media does provide a practical platform for students to learn English.



However, social media also promotes a form of learning where students get corrections from their peers when spelling errors are found in their typed-out texts. Compared to other learning activities, sharing and obtaining materials (in this case, peer review) are perhaps the most consistent student activities when they learn through social media (Li, 2017; Saeed & Kayani 2018). As educators, the researchers recommend that subsequent studies focus more on the challenge of using social media as an English teaching tool, as there are still certain criteria that need to be taken into account when promoting social media as a learning platform. Hence, it is important for educators to emphasise the correct ways to make social media benefit students, and to use social media to enhance learning.

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