



The Impact of Social Media on Writing Skills: A Case Study of English Department Students in the College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Kirkuk

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Abstract

The widespread adoption of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed communication behavior, particularly among university students, sparking concerns regarding its influence on various aspects of their life. This study specifically explores the effects of social media use on the writing skills of English Department Students in College of Education for Human Sciences in Kirkuk University. The research provides a quantitative and qualitative findings based on the communication patterns widely used across social media platforms. These platforms are commonly used by students for both interaction, making them ideal for analyzing the intersection of digital communication and student linguistics behavior. The findings reveal several notable trends. Firstly, a shift towards informal language use in academic contexts was observed, which appears to be contributing to a decline in formal academic writing skill. Secondly, this study highlights the urgent need for educational



institutions to integrate digital literacy and training into their curricula. Such measures could help mitigate the negative effects of social media and promote healthier online behavior, enhancing students' academic success.

Key words: social media platforms, communication behavior, linguistic behavior, academic and social interactions

تأثير وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على مهارات الكتابة: دراسة حالة لطلبة قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

في كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة كركوك

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الملخص

لقد غير الانتشار الواسع لمنصات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي سلوك التواصل بشكل جذري، لا سيما بين طلاب الجامعات، مما أثار مخاوف بشأن تأثيره على مختلف جوانب حياتهم. تستكشف هذه الدراسة بشكل خاص آثار استخدام وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي على مهارات الكتابة لدى طلبة قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية في

جامعة كركوك. وتقدم الدراسة نتائج كمية ونوعية مستندة إلى أنماط التواصل الشائعة الاستخدام عبر منصات التواصل الاجتماعي. وتستخدم هذه المنصات بشكل واسع من قبل الطلاب لأغراض التفاعل، مما يجعلها مثالية لتحليل التداخل بين التواصل الرقمي والسلوك اللغوي للطلبة. تكشف النتائج عن عدة اتجاهات بارزة؛ أولاً، لوحظ التحول نحو استخدام اللغة غير الرسمية في السياقات الأكاديمية، وهو ما يبدو أنه يساهم في تراجع مهارات الكتابة الأكاديمية الرسمية. ثانياً، تبرز هذه الدراسة الحاجة الملحة للمؤسسات التعليمية إلى دمج التثقيف الرقمي والتدريب ضمن مناهجها الدراسية. إذ يمكن لمثل هذه التدابير أن تخفف من الآثار السلبية لوسائل التواصل الاجتماعي وتُعزز سلوكاً رقمياً صحياً، مما يساهم في تحسين النجاح الأكاديمي للطلبة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: منصات التواصل الاجتماعي، سلوك التواصل، السلوك اللغوي، التفاعلات الأكاديمية والاجتماعية.

1. Introduction

The rapid proliferation of social media platforms in the 21st century has redefined how individuals communicate, particularly among university students. While these platforms offer unique opportunities for interaction and self-expression, they



also pose potential threats to the development of formal writing skills, especially for students in English departments. This study investigates the influence of social media usage on the writing proficiency of English

Department students in the College of Education for Human Sciences at the University of Kirkuk. The research aims to explore whether constant exposure to informal online communication patterns impacts students' ability to write effectively and formally in academic contexts.

2. The Problem of the Study

In the digital age, university students are increasingly immersed in social media environments that prioritize speed, informality, and emotional expression over grammatical accuracy and structured composition. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok have become integral to students' daily communication, often exposing them to nonstandard language forms, abbreviations, emojis, and informal registers. While these tools foster social connectivity, they also raise critical concerns about their potential influence on academic writing performance. The core problem addressed by this study lies in the observable shift among English department students from formal academic writing norms toward a more casual, socially influenced style. This shift may result in frequent grammatical errors, loss of sentence coherence, inappropriate vocabulary use, and declining awareness of formal writing conventions.



Despite the academic importance of clear, structured writing, many students seem to unconsciously replicate social media habits in their assignments and exams.

This study seeks to explore the depth and nature of this influence: To what extent does social media usage reshape students' academic writing skills? And how can educators respond effectively to these emerging linguistic trends

3. Aims of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine the impact of social media on students' writing abilities. It also seeks to identify the specific aspects of writing (such as grammar, spelling, punctuation, and structure) that are most affected by frequent social media use.

4. Hypotheses

- 1- H1: There is a significant negative relationship between social media usage and writing skills among students.
- 2- H2: Students who spend more time on social media demonstrate poorer grammar and spelling in their academic writing.
- 3- H3: Social media influences the tendency to use informal and nonstandard language in formal writing.

5. Methodology



This research adopts a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Samples of students' written communication on Google Classroom, Telegram Facebook and Instagram platforms were selected and analyzed to detect the linguistic deviations linked to social media habits. Then, a test paper was distributed to 100 English Department students at the

College of Education for Human Sciences\ University of Kirkuk to assess their social media usage patterns and perceptions of their impact on students' writing skills. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 faculty members in the department of English at the college of Education for Human Sciences\ University of Kirkuk to gather insights into observed changes in students' academic writing.

6. The Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

- Analyze the impact of social media on students' writing skills.
- Identify specific aspects of writing (grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure) affected by social media usage.
- Explore students' awareness of formal writing norms versus informal online communication.
- Propose educational strategies to mitigate the negative impact of social media



- on writing proficiency. **Definitions**
- **Social Media Platforms:** Digital tools such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and WhatsApp that facilitate user interaction and content sharing. Social media platforms are online tools and websites that enable users to create, share, and interact with content and communicate with others in real time or asynchronously. These platforms allow users to post text, images, videos, and links, as well as to comment, react, and engage with content posted by others.
- They serve as virtual communities where individuals, groups, and organizations connect for personal, educational, professional, or entertainment purposes. According to van Dijck (2013, pp 4-5), social media platforms are defined as "online platforms that enable users to create and share content and participate in social networking."
- **Linguistic behavior:** this refers to the observable use of language in communication, encompassing speaking, writing, listening, and comprehension. It involves the patterns, norms, and choices individuals make when using language, influenced by social, psychological, and cognitive factors. As Lyons (1995, pp. 228-236) explains, linguistic behavior is "the overt expression of linguistic competence, shaped not only by grammatical knowledge but also by contextual and communicative appropriateness in real-life situations."



• **Writing Skills:** these skills refer to the ability to express thoughts, ideas, and information clearly, coherently, and effectively through written language. These skills encompass proper grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary usage, organization, tone, and the ability to adapt writing for various readers and purposes. According to Harmer (2004, p. 4), writing is not only a physical act of committing words to paper but also a mental process that involves generating ideas, organizing them logically, and presenting them in a linguistically appropriate way

• **Informal Language:** Non-standard grammar, slang, abbreviations, and emojis. Informal language refers to a casual and conversational style of communication that is typically used in everyday interactions, especially among friends, family, or peers. It often includes contractions, colloquialisms, slang, and relaxed grammar rules. According to Joos (1967, p. 23 & Hummaira et al 2022, pp. 259 - 260), informal language is “language used in relaxed, familiar

settings, often characterized by colloquial expressions, simplified syntax, and a reduced level of formality appropriate to the social context.”

• **Academic Writing:** this is a formal style of writing used in universities and scholarly publications. It is characterized by evidence-based arguments, logical organization, clarity, and an objective tone. It avoids informal language and



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- focuses on presenting ideas with precision and support from credible sources. According to Bailey (2018, pp. 28 - 42), academic writing is “a formal, structured way of writing used in universities and scholarly publications, designed to convey complex ideas clearly and objectively, often using evidence and referencing to support arguments.”

7. Literature Review

Scholarly interest in the intersection between digital technology and literacy skills has surged in recent years. According to Al -Eidan (2024: 283 - 284), social media's informal language tends to infiltrate academic writing, diminishing students' adherence to grammatical rules and academic conventions.

Similarly, Crystal (2008b: 7 - 9) noted that digital communication forms, such as texting and social media, promote a culture of brevity and informality that often contradicts academic writing standards. Other studies (e.g., Lakhal, 2022, pp. 269 - 270 & Ezeudo, 2024, pp. 89 - 91) emphasize both positive and negative aspects, indicating that while social media can enhance students' engagement with writing, it may also erode their grasp of formal structures and vocabulary.

(Zheng et al., 2018, pp. 2-3) and others highlight the constructive role it can play when integrated into educational contexts (Anthony & Jewell, 2017, pp. 42; Lutviana & Mafulah, 2020, p.102). Social media encourages brevity, leading to



oversimplified sentence structures, and promotes the use of abbreviations, emojis, and non-standard grammar. However, when used strategically, it may help learners express ideas freely and increase their engagement with language.

8. Historical Background

Over the past two decades (2003–2023), the rise of social media platforms has dramatically reshaped communication worldwide. Beginning in the early 2000s, Facebook was launched in 2004, quickly becoming the dominant social networking site by the late 2000s. Following this, Twitter appeared in 2006, introducing a new style of brief, rapid messaging with its character limits (Williams et al, 2013, p. 1 and Brügger, 2015, pp. 10 – 13).

The early 2010s saw the emergence of Instagram (2010), popularizing visual communication through photos and videos (Yang, 2021, p.16). More recently, in the mid-2010s, platforms like Tik Tok (2016) have revolutionized short-form

video content, attracting primarily younger audiences (Wu, 2021, pp. 12-13). Across these periods—from 2004 to 2023—social media progressively changed linguistic practices, especially among youth, by encouraging informal, spontaneous, and interactive writing styles (Crystal, 2011, pp. 57-69).

Traditional adherence to formal grammar and writing standards began to blur as emojis, abbreviations, hashtags, and phonetic spellings became widespread. This



historical progression raises significant questions about the impact of social media on writing norms, literacy development, and language evolution in digital contexts (Androutsopoulos, 2014, pp. 66-78).

9. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Media Richness Theory, which posits that the medium used to communicate can influence the clarity and effectiveness of the message. It also draws from the Cognitive Load Theory, suggesting that the cognitive demands of processing informal digital language may interfere with learning and applying formal writing conventions.

Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) holds that communication media vary in their "richness," or ability to faithfully transmit information and enable individuals to understand one another. Richer media are better for equivocal, complicated, or ambiguous messages, and leaner media are suitable for clear and routine messages.

Sheer and Chen (2005, p. 76) provide a description of the dimensions of Media



Richness:

-Immediacy of Feedback: How quickly can sender and receiver give feedback to one another? (e.g., face-to-face is immediate, email is not).

-Multiplicity of Cues: How many cues can be conveyed? (For instance, verbal, non-verbal, visual, auditory).

-Language Variety: Is the language natural or is it restricted?

-Personal Focus: Is the communication adaptable to the individual

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 62) classify Social Media Platforms by Richness:

-Richer: Video calling (WhatsApp video calling, Zoom), voice notes (WhatsApp). These allow some tone, rhythm, and feeling of "presence."

-Medium Richness: Instant messaging with emojis/GIFs (WhatsApp, Messenger, Instagram DMs). Some non-verbal information, instant feedback, but still mostly text.

-Leaner: Text-only messaging (SMS, Twitter/X, static Facebook posts), comments with no meaningful conversation. Less cues, less instant feedback.

The study informal data is considered as medium richness since taken from google classroom, telegram face book and twitter chats and discussions. On the other hand, the formal data is considered as leaner richness that is taken from designed test written answers to comparison composition and essay writing questions.



Sweller (1988, pp. 257-285) gives us the basis for understanding the different types of cognitive load.

Cognitive Load Theory defines three types of cognitive load:

-Intrinsic Cognitive Load: This is the intrinsic difficulty or complexity of the learning material itself. It is a measure of a function of the "element interactivity" – the amount of interactive elements that must be processed simultaneously in working memory in order to be comprehended. This load cannot be altered by instructional design; it's task-inherent discusses the "problem elements" and how they interact, the difficulty of tasks and what needs to be processed (Sweller et al, 1998, pp. 259 – 260).

Extraneous Cognitive Load: The load is imposed by the presentation or generation structure in which the instructional material is provided, but not by content. It is "unnecessary" load that will not help schema acquisition and should be reduced. Examples include ambiguous organization, redundant data, or inefficient problem-solving strategies (e.g., means-ends analysis). Sweller (1988, pp. 265 – 270; Chandler & Sweller 1991, p. 296) discuss how certain problem-solving strategies or instructional design could impose "unnecessary cognitive load" or "ineffective cognitive load" that interferes with learning.

The philosophy of doing away with unnecessary processing is the core.



Germane Cognitive

Load: It is mental effort put into schema development and automatization (deep learning). It is the "effective" cognitive load that shapes long-term memory.

It's grounded in instructional design that encourages students to process significant information in-

depth, typically by connecting it with the existing knowledge. Unlike intrinsic and extraneous load, germane load is not an isolated source of load but rather the working memory resources at hand to deal with the element interactivity following reduction of extraneous load. However, the idea that the capacity of working memory provided by reducing extraneous and releasing of working memory space to build effective schemas where effective learning processes are equated with schema building (Sweller, 1988, pp. 275 – 285).

The students' formal answers of learner media are analysed on the basis of these cognitive loads as mentioned in the study findings and results.

10. Influence of Texting Language on Grammar

Texting language emerged alongside the rise of mobile phones in the late 1990s and early 2000s. According to Crystal (2008b, p. 81), texting is not a linguistic decline but a natural evolution, similar to the development of shorthand or other written registers in history. However, its widespread use among youth has prompted concerns about language deterioration, digital communication has



given rise to a new form of language commonly known as “textese” or “texting language.” This linguistic style is often characterized by abbreviated spellings (e.g., “u” for “you”), acronyms (e.g., “LOL” for “laugh out loud”), lack of punctuation, and unconventional syntax. While such forms are efficient in casual digital interactions, their influence on users' grammatical skills in formal

contexts remains a growing concern among educators and researchers.

11. Code-Switching

12.1 Definition

Code-switching refers to the practice of alternating between two or more languages or language varieties within a conversation or discourse. It is commonly observed among bilingual or multilingual speakers who shift from one language to another depending on context, reader, or topic. “Code-switching is the alternation between two or more languages, dialects, or language registers within the same communicative event” (Bullock & Toribio, 2009, pp. 1 - 5).

12.2 Types of Code-Switching

According to Hoffman (1991, pp. 110-116), code-switching can be categorized into several types:

a. Inter-sentential Switching



- Switching occurs between sentences.
- *Example*: “I’m going to the bookshop. Orada sat – ıl– an kitaplar var (cf. kitaplar orada satılıyor).” [-“The books are sold there”] (Rauf, 2015, p. 4).
- *Example*: He went to the market. Kera : ldi [He bought butter] (Al- Bazaz & Mustafa, 2006, p. 4)

b. Intra-sentential Switching

- Switching occurs within a single sentence.
- *Example*: “She’s so friendly, çok tatlı bir kız.”

c. Tag-Switching

- Insertion of a tag phrase from one language into an utterance in another.
- *Example*: “It’s a nice day, değil mi?”

d. Intra-word Switching

- A switch occurs within a word boundary.
- *Example*: “Unbelievable-yim” (*I am unbelievable*, with Turkish suffix).

12.3 Effects of Code-Switching

A. Positive Effects



- Enhances communication in multilingual contexts.
- Reflects linguistic creativity and cultural identity.
- Helps in explaining difficult concepts using familiar terms.
- Supports social bonding and group identity.

(Martine, 2018, pp. 17 – 21).

B. Negative Effects

- May cause confusion in formal contexts like academic writing.
- Can hinder the full development of one language.
- Frequent switching may result in language interference or fossilized errors.

(Sun & Yang, 2024, pp. 3-4).

“Code-switching serves both functional and sociolinguistic purposes, aiding communication and expressing identity, but overuse may influence language development and lead to interference” (Grosjean, 2010, pp. 52-57).

12. Common Grammatical Shifts

Research indicates that frequent texters often carry over non-standard forms into academic or formal writing. For instance, omission of punctuation, incorrect verb agreement, and misuse of sentence structures are common (Beuenviaje & Lopez,



2017, pp. 59-61). Students may write “u r going 2 the store?” in academic papers, confusing digital shorthand with formal conventions.

Code-Switching and Language Awareness

Some studies, however, highlight the ability of students to code-switch effectively between texting and formal registers. Boştină-Bratu (2015, p. 548) and Muslimawati (2022, p. 13) shows that students are aware of contextual language norms and can separate texting language from academic writing when taught properly. Language awareness refers to a learner’s conscious

understanding of the features and structures of a language. Code-switching can increase learners’ metalinguistic awareness by:

- Making them more conscious of differences between language systems.
- Encouraging reflection on grammar, vocabulary, and pragmatics.
- Facilitating learning through contrastive analysis.

“Code-switching can be a valuable tool in developing language awareness by highlighting structural differences and encouraging deeper cognitive processing of linguistic forms” (Jogulu, 2024, pp. 6-7).

12.1. Code-Switching and Language Errors

While code-switching can support communication, it can also lead to language errors, particularly in formal or academic settings. Some of these include (Riparip,



2024, pp. 471-477 and Tran et al, 2024, pp. 843-846):

- Using informal or nonstandard expressions in formal writing, e.g. LOL, Yeah, cuz, He was, like, cogging from Lulu [He was copying from Lulu without attribution].
- Incorrect sentence structure due to influence from another language, e.g. The boy the fish caught yesterday [The boy caught the fish yesterday].
- Fossilized grammatical errors due to repeated switching, e.g. There's may people in the garden [There are many people in the garden].
- Common Errors Linked to Code-Switching:
 - Word order mistakes, e.g. He speaks well not in Arabic [He doesn't speak Arabic well].
 - Mixing up tenses or auxiliary verbs, e.g. The work been finished since last Monday [The work has been finished since last Monday].
 - Using direct translations that don't fit the target language, e.g. Put attention to Literature [Pay attention to Literature]. “Frequent code-switching without awareness can lead to interference and persistent language errors, especially in syntax and morphology” (Odlin, 1989: p. 140). Those errors are not often corrected on social media platforms and will be transferred to students' formal writing.
- **Cognitive and Linguistic Creativity**



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Interestingly, texting can also foster metalinguistic awareness. Children who use texting language reportedly show greater phonological awareness and language manipulation skills, suggesting that texting does not necessarily erode grammar but rather coexists with it (Wood et al, 2011, pp. 34-36). Contrary to the widespread belief that texting negatively influences language development,

emerging research highlights its surprising cognitive and linguistic benefits. Texting, far from being a mindless activity, can actually serve as a powerful tool for enhancing metalinguistic awareness—the ability to think about and manipulate language consciously. Moreover, the use of texting language—characterized by abbreviations, phonetic spellings, and creative syntax—requires a flexible understanding of language norms and the ability to switch between

informal and formal registers. Such linguistic dexterity indicates not a breakdown of grammar, but a parallel development of language manipulation skills. In fact, rather than eroding grammatical competence, texting appears to coexist harmoniously with standard language, enriching the user's linguistic repertoire and fostering cognitive agility. As Wood et al (2011, p. 36) argue, this form of digital communication challenges users to be inventive with language, encouraging a playful and strategic engagement with words that can ultimately enhance both spoken and written language abilities.



12.2 The Effect of Abbreviations and Emojis on Academic Tone

The incorporation of abbreviations and emojis in written communication reflects a significant shift in linguistic expression in the digital era. While these elements enhance emotional clarity and brevity in casual exchanges, their presence in academic contexts often disrupts the formal tone expected in scholarly work. Abbreviations like “LOL” (laugh out loud) or “BRB” (be right back) are generally not acceptable in academic writing due to their informal register.

Similarly, the use of emojis (e.g., 😊 , 😞) can convey sentiment but lacks the nuance and precision required in analytical discourse. According to Algaraady & Mahyoub (2021, p. 45), although emojis serve as paralinguistic cues in digital dialogue, they diminish the perceived professionalism of academic texts. Students who unconsciously transfer these habits into academic assignments risk undermining the credibility of their arguments. Therefore, distinguishing between informal digital communication and formal academic writing remains

essential for maintaining appropriate academic tone.

13. Communication and Social Media

Communication has long been a central subject of interdisciplinary study, examined through diverse perspectives such as linguistics, psychology, sociology, and media studies. At its core, communication revolves around the exchange of information, serving as the foundation of human interaction. According to Crystal



(2008a, p. 89), communication is a “fundamental notion in the study of behavior which acts as a frame of reference for linguistic and phonetic study”. It is an essential component of daily life, occurring in nearly all social, academic, and professional contexts.

Effective communication is vital for relationship-building, idea-sharing, delegating responsibilities, and team management. Defined broadly, communication is the process by which individuals exchange information

through a shared system of symbols, signs, or behavior. It entails conveying meaning from one person or group to another using mutually understood codes, whether verbal, nonverbal, written, or visual (McCornack & Ortiz, 2019, pp. 5-11).

Every communication event includes at least three components: a sender, a message, and a receiver. While this framework may appear simple, the actual process is complex, influenced by multiple variables such as emotional states,

cultural contexts, the communication medium, and physical location. The sender encodes a message—using language, gestures, or other signs—then transmits it via a chosen channel. The receiver then decodes and interprets it. In face-to-face communication, the roles of sender and receiver alternate fluidly, often enriched by nonverbal cues like eye contact and body language. In contrast, written



communication creates a clearer division between the two roles. Regardless of the form, the ultimate goal of communication is mutual understanding (Shannon and Weaver, 1949, p. 7 & Fatimayin, 2018, Ch2).

Main Stages in the Communication Process

Theorists and scholars have expanded Shannon and Weaver's (1949) model of communication adding psychological aspects of communication that the modified version outlines the following core stages (Shannon and Weaver, 1949, pp. 7-12 , Schramm, 1954, pp. 3-26, Fiske, 2010, pp. 20-40 & Littlejohn & Foss 2021, Chs 2-3):

Motivation: The internal or external drive prompting the need to communicate.

- 1- Message composition: Structuring thoughts into a coherent message.
- 2- Encoding: Converting the message into a communicable form (e.g., speech, writing, gestures).
- 3- Transmission: Sending the message through a particular medium or channel.
- 4- Noise: Any interference that distorts the message during transmission (e.g.,
- 5- environmental noise or misunderstanding).
- 6- Reception: The message is received and reassembled by the recipient.
- 7- Decoding: Translating the received message into a meaningful concept.
- 8- Interpretation: Making sense of the message and responding accordingly.



This model emphasizes that communication is not merely the exchange of information but a complex process influenced by internal and external factors (Shannon & Weaver, 1949).

13.1. Types of Communication

Communication can be categorized into four primary types: verbal, nonverbal, written, and visual. Each serves specific purposes and is suited to different contexts.

1. Verbal Communication

Verbal communication involves the use of spoken language or sign language to convey information. It is frequently employed in everyday interactions, meetings, presentations, phone calls, and interviews. Verbal communication is often supported by nonverbal and written elements to enhance clarity and engagement. Its efficiency and immediacy make it one of the most widely used communication forms (Al-Haj et al, 2021, pp. 4-5).

2. Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication includes facial expressions, body language, posture, gestures, and tone of voice. It can be intentional or unintentional—for example, a spontaneous smile in response to pleasing news. Nonverbal cues often provide insight into a speaker's emotions or attitudes and serve to complement, reinforce, or even contradict verbal messages (Dash, 2022, pp.174-179).



3 Written Communication

Written communication uses symbols such as letters and numerals to convey ideas. It provides a permanent record and allows information to be shared across time and space. Common forms include books, emails, reports, articles, and online messages. The rise of digital platforms has expanded written communication dramatically, making it easier to share and access information globally (Prabavathi & Nagasubramani, 2018: S30-S31; Öztay & Koç, 2020, pp. 233-235).

4. Visual Communication

Visual communication uses images, graphs, charts, illustrations, and other visual aids to transmit ideas. It is especially effective when used alongside verbal or written communication to clarify and reinforce concepts. Because individuals have different learning styles, visual elements often enhance comprehension and retention of information (Dewan, 2015, pp. 2-4; Vanichvasin, 2021, p. 35).

Communication is an indispensable life skill that forms the foundation of personal, academic, and professional success. Whether through spoken words, gestures, text, or visual symbols, communication allows individuals to connect, share, and understand each other. By examining its fundamental processes and various forms, we gain deeper insight into how meaning is constructed, transmitted, and interpreted. In an age shaped by rapid technological advances and the widespread use of social media, mastering effective communication has never been more crucial.



13 Educators' and Linguists' Views

Educators across various levels of instruction have voiced increasing concern regarding the decline in students' grammatical accuracy, particularly in formal writing such as essays and academic reports (Worku, 2022, pp. 985-986). These concerns often stem from observations of pervasive errors in sentence structure, punctuation, and language use—issues frequently attributed to students' widespread engagement with informal digital communication, especially text messaging and social media. From the perspective of many educators in the department of English at the college of Education for Human Sciences\ University of Kirkuk with whom the researchers conducted interviews, this trend signals a weakening of linguistic standards and an erosion of traditional writing skills expected in academic contexts.

However, prominent linguists such as David Crystal (2008c, p. 11) offer a contrasting, more progressive interpretation of this phenomenon. Rather than

viewing texting as a threat to language integrity, Crystal argues that it should be recognized as a distinct linguistic register—one that demonstrates creativity, efficiency, and adaptability in communication. In his view, texting and other forms of digital language use are not indicative of linguistic decay but rather represent the natural evolution and diversification of language in response to changing technological and social environments



This divergence in perspectives highlights a deeper issue: the potential inadequacy of grammar instruction in formal education. While educators may attribute grammatical shortcomings to the influence of informal digital communication, the real challenge may lie in insufficient emphasis on explicit grammar teaching and critical language awareness in the curriculum. Without a solid foundation in the rules and functions of standard grammar, students may struggle to switch effectively between formal and informal registers, a skill that is increasingly essential in today's multilingual, multimodal world (Nuri, 2023, p. 27). Therefore, instead of dismissing digital language practices, it may be more productive to enhance students' metalinguistic competence—teaching them to navigate and adapt their language choices depending on the communicative context.

In essence, rather than blaming texting for grammatical decline, educational institutions should recognize the complexity of language use across contexts and invest in teaching students how to code-switch effectively between informal digital communication and formal academic writing. This approach aligns more closely with contemporary linguistic insights and empowers students to become more competent and confident communicators

14. Findings and Data Analysis

The data revealed three primary findings:



Increased Informality: The majority of students reported frequent use of informal abbreviations, slang, and emojis in both social media posts and academic assignments. Examples included the use of “u” instead of “you,” or “b4” instead of “before.”

1. **Grammar and Spelling Decline:** Analysis of writing samples showed a noticeable increase in grammatical errors, misuse of punctuation, and a decline in complex sentence constructions. These were particularly prevalent among students who reported heavy social media usage.

2. **Positive Aspects:** A minority of students stated that frequent writing on social media platforms improved their overall confidence and writing fluency, though the style often lacked academic rigor.

The findings are based on the analysis of writing test samples, and instructor interviews.



Table no. 1 Common Writing Problems Observed

Writing Issue	Percentage of Students Affected
Informal vocabulary/slang	72%
Incorrect punctuation usage	65%
Grammar and verb tense errors	58%
Sentence fragmentation	42%

Table no. 2 Instructor Perspectives (Interview Summary)

Instructor Perspectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90% noted an increase in informal expressions in essays.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 60% said students confuse spoken/chat language with formal English.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% supported the integration of digital literacy into the curriculum.



15. Visual Data Representation

The following charts visually represent key statistical findings from the study.

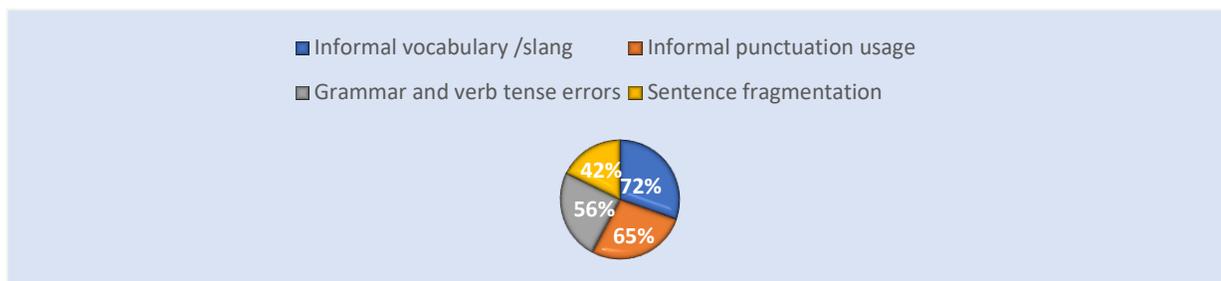


Figure no. 1 Common Writing Problems among Students

The pie chart of the figure no. 1 displays the proportion of students affected by various writing issues. Informal vocabulary 72%, and incorrect punctuation 65% are the most prevalent problems. Then, grammar and verb tense / slang errors and sentence fragmentation have scored 56% and 42% respectively.

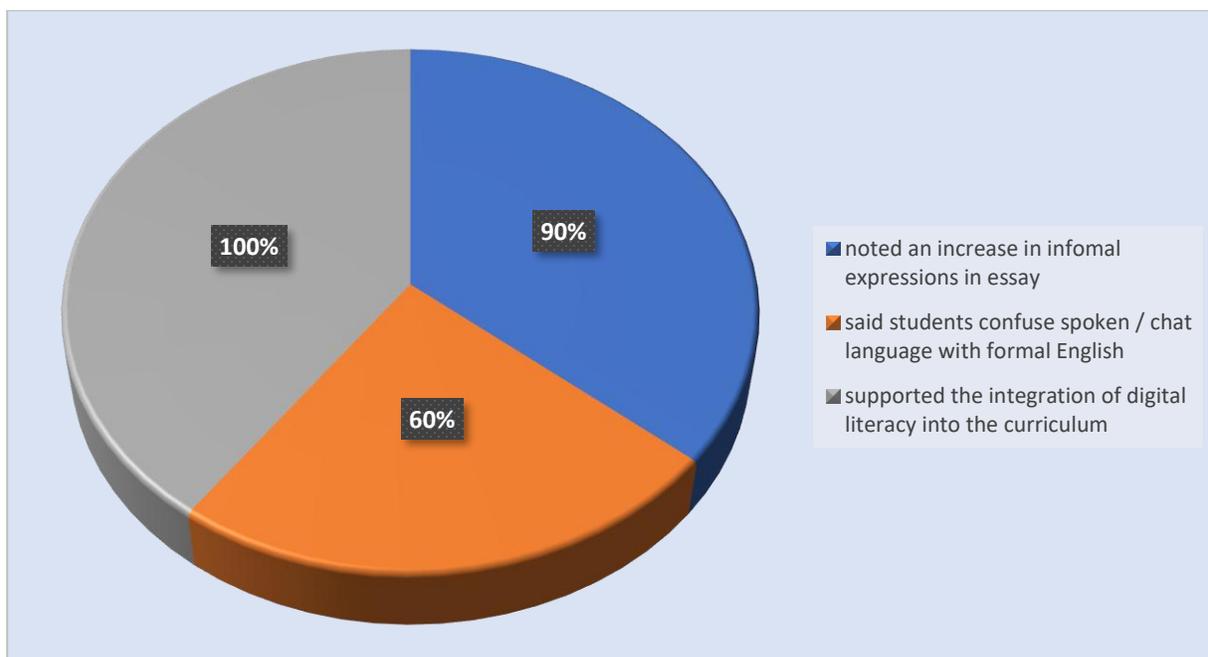


Figure 2: Instructors Viewpoints

Figure no. 2 shows the instructors viewpoints and experience with students. 90% of the English department instructors at the College of Education for Human Sciences\ University of Kikuk have noted an increase in the use of informal expressions in Academic writing. 60% of the instructor agree on finding confusion in the writing of students. They all agreed on the integration of digital literacy into the curriculum.

16.Limitations of the Study

Despite the insightful findings, this study has several limitations. First, the sample



is restricted to students of the department of English at the college of Education for Human Sciences, university of Kirkuk. Second, the self-reported nature of the samples use of language limits the use of language to the user's personal linguistic behavior. Third, the qualitative observations were based on the writing samples collected by testing the selected students.

17-Results and Discussion

The study confirms that excessive informal communication through social media platforms is contributing to a decline in academic writing standards as shown on table No. 16.2. These are impact of the medium richness platforms of the study data. The frequent use of casual expressions, fragmented sentences, and lack of punctuation seen in student writing is consistent with the language norms on platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger.

However, the data also suggests potential opportunities. When used mindfully, social media can serve as a supplementary space for language practice.

Educational integration and writing challenges in the study platforms: google classrooms, class-specific telegram, Facebook, and Instagram groups could channel these platforms' power into positive learning outcomes. Teaching and learning groups and the groups of discussion and commentary interactions in addition to the use of podcasts are the best examples on enhancing students learning that reflect the germane cognitive load processes.



Yet, both the intrinsic and extraneous cognitive loads also appear to be processed as reflected in the code- switches and style shifts from formal to casual and the use of non- verbal communication forms found the students' formal academic written answers to the study designed tests.

Concerning writing issues, table no.1 and figure no.1 show that the use of slang and informal of vocabulary items scores 72% and the incorrect punctuation usage scores 65%. Then, we find the scores of the grammar errors and sentence fragmentation to be 52% and 42% respectively. This indicates students' erroneous habits in the use of slang vocabulary items and negligence of the punctuation marks as reflected through high frequencies scored for these issues in the formal academic writing. The lower frequency scores of the grammatical errors and sentence fragmentation show students awareness of these issues that shown in the leaner academic texts. This can be explained in relation to the students

understanding of the text coherence in terms of the correct use of grammatical expressions and sentences that is connected with less attention

given to the avoidance of the use of informal slang vocabulary items and punctuation marks that are represented in the use of pitch and tone in speaking. Such interpretation can also be due to the instructors focus on teaching grammar more than the focus on the use of vocabulary items and punctuation marks.



Instructors may focus on correcting the language form more than the use of the correct vocabulary items. The students, on the other hand, neglect the use of punctuation marks that are replaced by tones and pitch in speaking.

The findings of the errors show the impact of the intrinsic and richer media platforms on the learner texts that can be described through the language focus and language variety dimensions. In addition, the cognitive processing of the interactive elements of the intrinsic cognitive load of the learned content will be gained when the students reduce the extraneous cognitive load and increase awareness of the load effectiveness to get to the germane load processes that develop content in memory through connecting existing knowledge with new information and automatization. These processes are accessed both for the content topic and grammatical use of items and sentences.

Concerning the instructors' views, the scores of the interviews support the results and findings of the students test in the consideration of social media impact on students academic writing skill. As table no.2 and figure no.2 show, instructors agree on the decline in the use of academic writing skills in students' written assignments and exams answers. They suggest the integration of digital

literacy into the curriculum and they provide feedback to the overlap and confusion of the informal language with the formal use of language. They suggest the addition of instruction to the syllabus of academic writing curriculum. The



negative impact of social media will increase in future if the instructors and book designers do not pay attention to solutions

Conclusions

This study has illuminated the intricate and evolving relationship between social media use and the academic writing performance of university students studying English. In an age where digital interaction dominates much of daily communication, the influence of social media platforms on students' linguistic habits cannot be ignored. On one hand, these platforms have fostered creativity, immediacy, and global interaction, offering users a space to express themselves freely and authentically. However, this freedom often comes at the expense of linguistic precision, grammatical accuracy, and stylistic formality—core elements that define academic writing.

The findings of this research suggest that the frequent use of social media platforms can blur the boundaries between informal digital communication and formal academic prose. Students exposed to the language norms of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Twitter (X), and Facebook may unconsciously adopt casual expressions, emojis, abbreviations, and syntactical patterns that are unsuitable for scholarly writing. Moreover, linguistic behaviors such as code-

switching and reliance on informal registers can lead to fossilized errors and hinder the development of a professional academic voice.



Yet, it would be a mistake to view social media solely as a threat. When integrated wisely into educational settings, social media has the potential to become a valuable tool for language learning and engagement. It provides

opportunities for authentic communication, peer interaction, and reflective writing. Platforms can be repurposed as environments where students can explore language in real-world contexts, build digital literacy, and develop critical awareness of audience and tone.

The responsibility, therefore, falls heavily on educational institutions and instructors to guide students in distinguishing between informal and formal contexts. Rather than banning or ignoring social media, educators must embrace it as part of the contemporary linguistic landscape. Through targeted curriculum design, media literacy education, writing workshops, and language awareness activities, students can be trained to consciously shift registers and tailor their language according to the context.

In conclusion, social media should not be viewed as the downfall of academic writing but rather as a reflection of changing communicative norms. With thoughtful guidance, digital communication can be transformed from a source of linguistic degradation into a dynamic opportunity for language development. A balanced, informed, and student-centered educational approach is necessary—

one that neither rigidly polices expression nor passively accepts poor writing



habits, but instead fosters adaptable, mindful, and proficient communicators in both digital and academic realms. Only then can students truly thrive as confident writers in the 21st century.

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Index No. (1)

Samples of Students' Written Communication

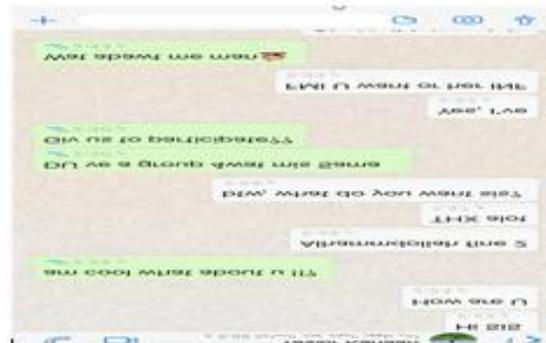
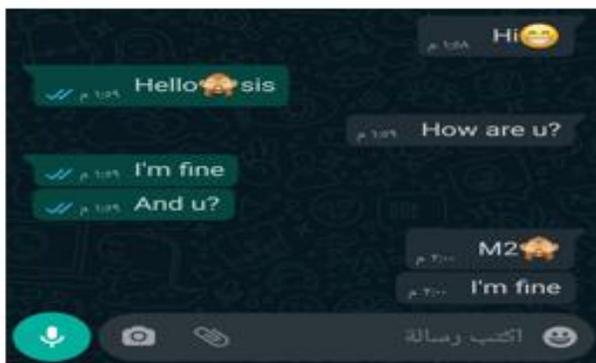
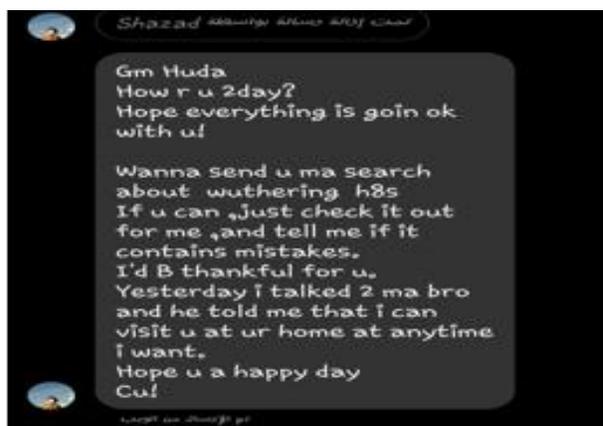


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Index No. (2)

Test Paper

University of Kirkuk

College of Education for Human Sciences

Department of English

2024 – 2025

Dear student,

Please carefully read these directions. You have (80 minutes) to finish every question of this test. For research reasons, your responses will help us to learn how various communication methods might affect academic writing. Honesty and your greatest effort are needed here.

Q1\ Briefly explain your usual social media usage (platforms you use most, frequency, types of interactions). Then consider whether your social media communication approach affects your academic writing. Provide specific examples if possible. (Around 200-250 words) (25 Marks)

Q2\ Two situations are presented to you. Compose a brief answer as shown for every situation.



Scenario A (Informal): You are messaging a close friend to explain why you could miss a laid-back meeting. Compose your message (about 50–75 words).

Scenario B (Formal Academic): You are emailing your professor to ask for a brief extension on an essay due to unexpected events. About 100–150 words should comprise your email. (35 Marks)

Q3\ The mistakes in the sentences below occasionally seen in academic writing could be related to informal digital interaction; identify and correct them. Write "Correct" if you believe a sentence is proper in a formal scholarly setting. Briefly explain your reasoning for the alteration (or why the sentence is right). (2 points per sentence, 1 point for recognition/correction, 1 point for justification) (20 Marks)

1. Students who frequent TikTok could utilize shorter sentences in essays since that is typical on the platform.
2. For us as academics, it is critical to grasp how these internet practices influence formal writing.
3. Many students believe their social media writing has no bearing on their academic work, yet the data could indicate differently.



4. The teacher advised the students not to include abbreviations like "idk" in their research papers.
5. This section of the research aims to determine whether more regular emoji use relates with a more casual academic style.
6. Some say that the rapid character of social media conversation causes more grammatical errors in academic papers.
7. The instructor stressed that clarity in scholarly writing depended on proper punctuation, including accurate use of commas.
8. Academic essays are not suitable for slang or extremely informal language like "that's so lit."
9. Though their writing occasionally exhibited a variety of styles, the study participants said they could change readily.
10. Academic writing calls for more deliberate creation even though social media sites offer a venue for rapid feedback.

Q4\ What, in your opinion, are the main difficulties kids encounter as they move between the casual writing styles of social media and the formal standards of academic writing? What techniques do you think would help students bridge this



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gap efficiently? (About 150-200 words) (20 Marks)

Index No. (3)

Interview Questions

University of Kirkuk

College of Education for Human Sciences

Department of English

2024 – 2025

Dear instructor,

The researchers are conducting a research paper on the impact of social media on students' academic writing skills. We would be grateful if you provide answers to this interview questions.

The study is based on **Media Richness Theory** (how different communication channels convey information) and **Cognitive Load Theory** (the mental effort involved in processing information).



- 1- What do you think are the most important reasons students replicate these informal language structures into their academic writing?
- 2- Students combine informal/chat talk with formal English, can you provide some specific examples of this combination error in their writing? (e.g., informal sentence forms, direct address of the reader, overuse of discourse markers like
- 3- "like" or "so").
- 4- Do you suggest that this register mixing is so prevalent because it is a lack of awareness, an unconscious habit, or something else?
- 5- How do you envision the "leaner" nature of social media communication (less interest in formal structure, fewer signals, faster feedback loops) to directly serve the greater informal expressions that you observe in scholarly writing?
- 6- If students misinterpret chat/spoken language as equivalent to formal English, do you think that this is a challenge for "enriching" their written communication in a classroom environment, where there is no immediate feedback and multiple cues? Give an example.
- 7- Do you believe that students, through customary use of social media, become accustomed to a limited "language variety" or more imprecise vocabulary, and therefore it becomes more challenging for them to access and employ the nuanced academic vocabulary? How do you perceive that influence their writing?
- 8- Do you think that constant code-switching between highly colloquial



- 9- social media language and formal academic English imposes a huge extraneous cognitive load on students, leading to error or delay in writing? What happens to their work?
- 10- If informal writing habits (through social media) become highly automatized, how might this affect the automatization of formal scholarly writing schemata? Are students struggling to render formal grammatical principles "automatic," suggesting interference
- 11- Since students are accustomed to rapid, repeatedly disrupted social
- 12- media communication, how might this affect their ability to sustain attention and allocate the natural cognitive load of constructing elaborate scholarly arguments in working memory?
- 13- Concerning digital literacy, we would like to know more about how you envision direct addressing of the issues of informal expressions and blended registers that we discussed.
- 14- What specific elements or what particular areas of digital literacy do you think are most crucial to improve students' academic writing in the current digital age?
- 15- Besides digital literacy, what other methods do you employ to instruct students directly how to differentiate between and code-switch proficiently from informal digital communication to formal academic writing?



- 16- How do you prepare students to actively build and automatize formal academic writing schemas, especially when they are repeatedly exposed to informal online language?
- 17- What are the biggest challenges you face in trying to counter the negative impacts of social media on students' academic writing?
- 18- Based on your experience, what would be your top 2-3 recommendations for university curricula or teaching styles for effectively addressing the impact of social media on students' academic writing capacity?
- 19- How do you foresee the future between academic writing and social media in the next 5-10 years to be, and how can institutions of higher education prepare?