Media Chatting Inscription as Determinant of Students’ Academic Writing in Higher Institutions of Nigeria

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Abstract

The study sought to investigate the level at which social media chatting inscriptions affect Nigerian universities students’ academic writing and to ascertain the students’ perceptions toward the effectiveness of social media chatting on students’ English Language writing in terms of their gender. Descriptive survey research design was adopted in the study. The population for this study consists of all undergraduate students from South-West, Nigeria. Ten universities were randomly selected and they are Babcock University, Bowen University, Caleb University, Leeds City University, University of Lagos, Olabisi Onabanjo University, University of Osun State, University of Ibadan, Ekiti State University, and Federal University of Technology, Akure. A sample of 2,000 students was used for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 200 students from 300 level in each of the 10 universities. The sample is made up of 1,090 male and 910 female students. Questionnaire was used for data gathering. The validity of the instrument was reviewed for face and content validity by experts from Linguistics, and Measurement and Evaluation. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to find the reliability coefficient of the instrument and a value of 0.80 was gotten. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentage and frequency count) and inferential statistics (independent t-test and Analysis of Variance-ANOVA). Research findings revealed that the level and extent at which students in Nigerian higher institutions engage in chatting is very high; students agreed that social media chatting affects them in English Language writing; there is no significant difference in the level of chatting among students in terms of their different institutions; and there is a significant difference in the perception of male and
female students towards the effectiveness of media chatting on students' English Language writing.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Chatting, Academic, English Writing, Gender

**Introduction**

Nigeria has experienced an exponential growth in internet and social media exploit for a very long time. Social media are new information network and information technology using a form of communication utilizing interactive and user-produced content, where interpersonal relationships are created and maintained. Hansem (2015) see social media as the platform that offers students the opportunity to communicate with each other and one another with ease. Researchers have argued that the popularity of social media among university students might suggest that they would be suitable and valuable tools which could be used for educational purposes. According to Schroeder & Greenbowe (2009), social media have been used to aid online and offline education, to provide easy and flexible access to educational materials, to provide students with administrative information, to facilitate communication among students and between students and instructors and in some ways have been used to replace learning management systems, as well as motivate students. The use of Social media chatting, however, has great potential in higher education in developing countries because of their availability and affordability. Bsharah, Gasaymeh, and Abdelrahman (2014) established that 92.6% of 282 university students who participated in a study in a university in Jordan reported using Facebook. Hamade (2013) found that 89% of 300 students who took part in a study in a university in Kuwait reported using Twitter. On a broader perspective, KarpiHamade Onski, Kirschner, Ozer, Mellott, and Ochwo (2013) revealed that 100% of 875 students from universities in the United States and in Europe reported using different types of Social Networking Sites.

Russel (2012) opines that, there are positive effects to chatting as students are exposed to writing in a more relaxed and less stressful atmosphere. According to his opinion there are many reasons that make chatting one of the best and most convenient means of communication. You rarely find a student who doesn’t have at least one mobile phone. Most of their mobile phones have internet access that enables them to send and receive these chat messages anytime and anywhere as long as there is internet network coverage. Students in this environment are so addicted to mobiles that they don’t stop using them even in the classroom. Affirming this situation, Maclean (2010) states that chatting is a very easy and cheap way to convey any message. Any company or institution regardless of the number of staff it has can tell its members in one minute about a delay of an exam, a meeting or the first day of study or any other issue. This process of healthy teacher-students exchanging of messages away from the traditional red pen and paper assessment according to them is undoubtedly less threatening and more motivating to students.

On the other hand, Social media chatting according to Starovoit (2012) can be of adverse disadvantage to its numerous young higher institution users, and if not brought under control, it could degenerate into creation of tainted words such as ‘Aiit’ instead of ‘Alright’, abbreviations such as ‘Sup?’ instead of ‘What’s up?’, acronyms such as ‘LOL’ as against ‘laugh out loud’, Pidgin English language such as ‘Gerrit’ to taint ‘Get it’, sloppy spellings and grammatical errors just to get a quick and short message across which will gradually find their way into formal writings. Furthermore, Oluga & Babalola (2013), say that, a whole lot of sanctions are provided and applied against cases of ungrammatical use of the English language in formal writings. Mistakes in such situations are usually unfailingly penalized. Regardless of the unpardonable punishment for such oversight, students as a result of frequent and profound engagement in chatting on social media are often inclined to use ungrammatical forms of writing. Dansieh (2011) warns that as more and more students worldwide acquire and use mobile phones, so are they immersing themselves in social media chatting, therefore,
Nigerian university students’ academic writing skills stand the risk of being dented as a result of chatting.

This research work is backed up with Bandura’s Social learning theory. The theory is a form of learning where people take after a depicted pattern based on a stimulus. This is the reason Gewirtz (1969) defines social learning as a category of learning involving stimuli provided by people. Generally, humans learn from observation; essentially students learn by the virtue of their exposure to social media chatting language and inculcate into their English language writings, what they constantly see and write online. This Social cognitive theory posits that an individual’s behavior is primarily learned through personal observation of others as well as through interaction with his or her environment. Hence, Bandura (1994:61) explains that things that are experienced through the mass (social) media can affect people’s behaviours, and that effect is influenced by various personal factors. Observation as part of learning has never been in contest by any means, this prompts Bandura (1971:198) to note that the use of media representations operates in the observational learning process because consumers of representations can acquire new patterns of behaviour by simply watching these representations. The relevance of this theory to the study is very explicit; most learning and idea formations are almost always as a result of observations. Constant social media chatting with grammatically inappropriate writings will definitely inculcate ideas into some people who may or may not choose to replicate it but for some others, the case may be different.

Writing is a basic skill that University students need strongly in their academic endeavors. It is a sequence of letters, words, or symbols marked on a surface. Consequently foreign language learners, as the case is with Nigeria, face difficulties in writing correct sentences because it is not original to them, this problem is however being compounded by the frequency of social media chatting and its accompanying new choices of words and structure, and progressively it is taking a toll in students’ academic writing in Nigerian universities. The language of social media chatting does not observe grammatical and syntactic rules. The chat language affects two aspects of learners’ language proficiency i.e. skills to express oneself eloquently through writing and skills and ability to use words appropriately in context. Chatting students tend to write the spelling of some words as they are spoken and omit punctuation and overuse it in their tests, assignments and reports which sometimes hamper comprehension of the sense they want to convey. They are thus unable to differentiate the context and situation for the use of social media chatting language. Thus, Baron (1984) examines how chat language impacts on writing, and he states; ‘underlying the fact that contemporary writing is actually a deeper concern: that the internet language is corrupting the way we craft traditional writing or even speak face-to-face’. Due to worries about language against abbreviations, word shortenings and acronyms in addition to other violations of grammar rules, researchers showed their concerns that messages may cause unintentional harm to Standard English. O’connor (2006) expresses concern about “bastardization” that is the use of bad grammar, poor punctuation and improper abbreviations in academic writing. Ping A. C.; Wei Y. U. & Sue Y. T. (2011) conducted a study to visualize how the adoption of chatting language affects writing among its users. Analyses were made at both semantic and syntactic levels of their writings. There were obviously traces of effect of chatting on the standard of writing among the participants. The findings suggest that the extent of ignorant use of chatting language adopted in writing among university students might reach an uncontrollable and unacceptable state if not frowned at. Also Njemanze (2012) examines the chatting style of language communication among Nigerian University students with emphasis on its effect on English language usage.

The exponential growth and popularity of social networking sites have generated concerns among higher institution authorities, communication experts and socio-psychological researchers about the benefit and potential risks facing undergraduates’ academic writings, as they engage in online social networking chatting to cater for their social and information needs. Illuminating further on the risk of social network chatting among higher institution users, Sherry (2012) asserts that the convenience of chatting social networking sites gives its users to communicate with one another, can
damage their writing skills. This paradigm shift from the conventional English language writing to what researchers call online/internet communication, is identifying the influence of mobile phones on-the-go internet access on the writing of the English language. The fact that English language in Nigeria is studied in a second language situation with many indigenous languages creates enough problems. Also the emergence of mobile phones chatting and instant messaging communication as the interference features from this new development add new dimensions to these problems. The emerging trends have generated great interests and curiosity in exploring the influence of the emerging trend on the structure and general development of the effectiveness of English language writing among students of Nigeria higher institutions. Hence, the aspiration of this research work.

This study aims at investigating the level at which social media chatting inscriptions affects University students, and to find out how social media can be incorporated successfully into academic programme particularly in Nigerian universities students’ academic writing. The results of this study will provide new information about the potential of social media and how it can be successfully incorporated into existing Nigerian university curricula to provide effective social communication and enhance good academic writings.

Objectives of the Study
The objectives of this study are:

a. To determine the extent at which the Nigerian higher institution students engaged in social media chatting
b. To find out if the students that engaged in social media chatting will be adversely affected in their English Language writing.
c. To ascertain the difference in the students’ perceptions towards the effectiveness of social media chatting on students’ English Language writing in terms of their gender.

Research Questions
To achieve the set objectives of this study, the following questions are raised:

a. To what extent do the Nigerian higher institution students engage in social media chatting?
b. Does social media chatting affect the students’ English Language writing?
c. Is there any difference in the perception of male and female students towards the effectiveness of social media chatting on students’ English Language writing?

Research Hypotheses
The following hypotheses are tested in the course of the study:

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the level of chatting among students in terms of their different institutions.

Ho2. There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female students towards the effectiveness of media chatting on students’ English Language writing.

Methodology
This study used the survey method of research. The population for this work consists of all undergraduate students from South-West, Nigeria. Ten universities were randomly selected and they are Babcock University, Bowen University, Caleb University, Leeds City University, University of Lagos, Olabisi Onabanjo University, University of Osun State, University of Ibadan, Ekiti State University, and Federal University of Technology, Akure. The selection was based on the fact that
they are established within the South-western part of Nigeria and are appropriately covered by major Mobile phone service providers. A sample of 2,000 students was used for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 200 students from 300 level in each of the 10 universities. The sample is made up of 1090 male and 910 female students. A structured questionnaire was constructed by the researcher to elicit information from the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two parts; part A takes care of the demographic information of the students while part B includes questions that are related to medial chatting inscriptions and its effect on Nigerian university students’ academic writing using a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agreed (SA); Agreed (A); Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The validity of the instrument was reviewed for face and content validity by experts from Linguistics, and Measurement, and Evaluation. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to find the reliability coefficient of the instrument and a value of 0.80 was gotten which is considered high enough for the research. The questionnaire was randomly shared to respondents based on the fact that, they chat regularly on social media, and were collected immediately after responding to the questions. Data collected were analyzed and presented using simple percentage, frequency distribution, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Independent t-test.

**Results**

**Research Question One:** To what extent do the Nigerian higher institution students engage in social media chatting?

**Table 1:** The level and extent at which students in Nigerian higher institutions engage in chatting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>SA (57.7%)</th>
<th>A (40.1%)</th>
<th>SD (1.7%)</th>
<th>D (0.5%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Almost every Nigerian higher institution student engages in frequent chatting.</td>
<td>1154</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>A high number of students in Nigerian higher institutions chat on their phone at least once a day.</td>
<td>1126</td>
<td>739</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Chatting occupies a greater part of students’ time in school.</td>
<td>1003</td>
<td>948</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Most Nigerian higher institutions students engage in chatting while in a lecture.</td>
<td>1132</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4415</strong></td>
<td><strong>2889</strong></td>
<td><strong>548</strong></td>
<td><strong>148</strong></td>
<td><strong>8000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that 55.2% strongly agreed the level and extent at which students in Nigerian higher institution engage in chatting is high and 36.1.1% respondents also agreed that the level and extent at which students in Nigerian higher institutions engage in chatting is high while 6.85% and 1.85% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively.

**Research Question Two:** Does social media chatting affect the students’ English Language writing?
Table 2: Students’ perception on the significant threats posed by chatting to the English Language writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Words adopted as a result of chatting unconsciously find their ways into formal English writing.</td>
<td>900 (45%)</td>
<td>600 (30%)</td>
<td>355 (17.75%)</td>
<td>145 (7.25%)</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Chatting reduces one’s chances of communicating appropriately in conventional English writing.</td>
<td>1050 (52.5%)</td>
<td>440 (22%)</td>
<td>239 (11.95%)</td>
<td>271 (13.55%)</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>English writing skills are dwindling as a result of regular chatting.</td>
<td>1015 (52.6%)</td>
<td>600 (30%)</td>
<td>233 (11.65%)</td>
<td>152 (5.8%)</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The new chatting coined words if not curtailed, are likely to replace and debase the conventional words.</td>
<td>950 (47.5%)</td>
<td>654 (32.7%)</td>
<td>299 (14.95%)</td>
<td>97 (4.85%)</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>3951 (49.39%)</td>
<td>3394 (28.68%)</td>
<td>1126 (14.08%)</td>
<td>629 (7.85%)</td>
<td>8000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that 49.39% of the respondents strongly agreed that chatting poses a significant threat to their English Language writing and 28.68% of the respondents agreed that chatting poses a significant threat to their English Language writing while 14.68% and 7.85% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively.

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference in the level of chatting among students in terms of their different institutions.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing the difference in the level of chatting among students in terms of their different institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Sum of Square</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig. (p-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>68.830</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.648</td>
<td>0.903</td>
<td>0.522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>16862.465</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>8.474</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16931.296</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that the F-value is 0.903 and p-value is 0.522. Testing the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significant, the p-value (0.522) is greater than the alpha level of 0.05, consequently, there is no significant difference. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the level of chatting among students in terms of their different institutions.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female students towards the effectiveness of media chatting on students’ English Language writing.

Table 4: Independent t-test analysis of difference in the perception of male and female students towards the effectiveness of media chatting on students’ English Language writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig. (p-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1090</td>
<td>7.36</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>7.71</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows the mean and standard deviation values of the male and female respondents as 7.36 (2.88) and 7.71(2.93) respectively. This revealed that the mean vale of female is greater than the male. The table also showed that the t-value is 2.66 and p-value is 0.008. Testing the hypothesis at 0.05 significant level, the p-value (0.008) is greater than the alpha level (0.05), consequently, there is a
significant difference. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the perception of male and female students towards the effectiveness of media chatting on students’ English Language writing.

**Discussion of Findings**
Research question one revealed that the level and extent at which students in Nigerian higher institutions engage in chatting is high. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Yeboah and Ewur (2014) who carried out a study to find out the impact of social network (whatsapp messenger) on the performance of tertiary students in Ghana and found that 48% of the participants indicated that they spend over 8 hours every day using whatsapp on their mobile phones, followed by 4% spent 1-2 hours, 17% spent 3-5 hours per day while 31% spent 6-7 hours.

Research question two revealed that chatting poses a significant threat to their English Language writing. Social media chatting affect the students’ English Language writing. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Iro & Mohammed (2014) who examined the negative impact of using such social networks to the Nigerian ESL students writing in academic setting. The results indicate that students’ writing is hampered by serious writing impediments occurring mainly at three important and crucial writing aspects: lexis, punctuation and grammar.

Result from hypothesis one revealed that there is no significant difference in the level of chatting among students in terms of the students’ different institutions. This finding is in line with the findings of Yeboah and Ewur (2014) who carried out a study to find out the impact of social network (whatsapp messenger) on the performance of tertiary students in Ghana and found that there is no significant difference in the level of chatting among students in Ghana in terms of their different institutions.

Result from hypothesis two revealed that there is a significant difference in the perception of male and female students towards the effectiveness of media chatting on students’ English Language writing. The mean value of female respondents is greater than that of their male counterparts. The result of this study is in consonance with the finding of Burke (2010) who conducted a study on social network activity and social well-being and found that females spent more time on social network sites and use them more actively than their male counterparts.

**Conclusion**
The study concluded that social media chatting have negatively affected students’ academic writing in the Nigerian higher institutions. The study revealed that female students frequently use social media chatting more than their male counterpart. Moreover, the study revealed that there is no significant difference among the undergraduate students in Nigeria in their level of chatting, and there is a significant difference in the perception of male and female students towards the effectiveness of media chatting on students’ English Language writing.

**Recommendations**
Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations are made:
1. Students should be educated on the influence of social media on their academic English writing.
2. Students should create a balance between chit-chatting and academic activities. More attention should be directed to researches.
3. Teachers should try as much as possible to correct the mistakes and errors students make in their writing of assignments, class works, tests, and even in their examinations in all their courses of study and make sure they implement them.
4. The students should be encouraged to write formal English while chatting.
References


