

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS' WRITING SKILLS AT THE HIGHER SECONDARY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of social media usage on the writing skills of English language learners at the higher secondary level in district dera ghazi khan, Pakistan. The research focuses on Facebook and WhatsApp and examines their impact on four sub-skills of writing: expression, grammaticality, spelling, and organization. An experimental posttest-only control group design was employed, involving 60 students divided equally into experimental and control groups. The experimental group participated in structured social media-based writing activities for eight weeks, while the control group received traditional classroom instruction. Data were collected through an essay-writing task and assessed using standardized criteria. The findings indicate significant improvements in expression, grammaticality, and organization among students exposed to social media. However, no significant effect was observed on spelling. The study concludes that social media can serve as an effective supplementary tool for enhancing selected writing sub-skills when integrated appropriately into language teaching practices.

Keywords: social media, writing skills, English language learners, Facebook, WhatsApp, Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

The globe is now interconnected. People's relationships have gotten so close-knit thanks to social media that it appears our social networks have become intertwined (carr & hayes, 2015). The era of big data is upon us. Social media is becoming a unique form of big data since millions of people spend enormous amounts of time there sharing, connecting, creating, and producing consumer content at an incredible rate. This singular source of massive volumes of data has unparalleled prospects and holds great potential for scientific inquiry and progress (zafarani et al. 2014). It is well acknowledged that English is important in Pakistan and across the world. Most pakistani pupils still struggle with it, despite its significance in social, economic, educational, and even political contexts and the fact that it is taught starting in grade one in private schools and grade six in public ones. The issue does not appear to be resolved by studying English for nearly 15 years; learners are still unable to interact in most native and non-native contexts (mahboob & elyas, 2014). Pakistani English speakers have significant challenges in both local and international contexts due to their poor level of communicative skills in the present global environment, where English has become a necessity. Scholars specializing in social media studies and second language acquisition (sla) maintain that acquiring a second language (l2) differs significantly from acquiring other skills in academic contexts such as science and mathematics (allam & elyas, 2016;

namaziandost & nasri, 2019). This necessitates that students alter their conduct and create a new identity that occasionally looks quite different from their identity in the community. Therefore, it's critical to ascertain what drives individuals to acquire a second language and how L2 learners persist in their language learning endeavors over an extended period. Technology and information flow will always have an influence on language acquisition (alkhunzain & khan, 2021; shahbaz & khan, 2017). When it comes to the motivation behind students' acquisition of a target language, the reasons have changed from fifty years ago, when social media and technology were not as advanced as they are now. New developments in computer and mobile technologies have demanded a rethinking of instructional strategies. For all students and educational institutions, staying up to date with computer technology is essential (alhujaylan, 2019). The demand for digital pedagogies in the classroom is increasing, especially for writing skills, due to technological developments, the internet, and information-savvy students—referred to by some educational demographers as the information generation (bal, 2018).

Statement of the problem

This study is determined to assess the effects of social media usage on English language learners' writing skills at the higher secondary level.

Significance of the study

The research will help instructors and students assess the benefits and drawbacks of using social media for spelling and writing assignments, as well as how to maximize the advantages of text messaging while minimizing the drawbacks. They might be able to take use of the benefits and steer clear of the drawbacks of text messaging in this way. Additionally, it will assist educators in identifying the areas of academic writing that are being impacted by overuse of social media for posting and commenting, as well as potential solutions for addressing this issue in the classroom. Lastly, by designing these kinds of activities, educators, researchers, and language planners will be able to make beneficial use of social media.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are following;

1. To determine how social media use affects the writing abilities of English language learners.
2. To investigate the impact of social media usage on the standard of academic English spelling.

Research questions

1. How does the usage of social media affect the writing abilities of English language learners in higher secondary schools?
2. How do English language learners in higher secondary schools utilize social media in terms of expression, grammaticality and organization?

Limitations

Social media is a broad term that refers to a large number of messaging and socialization sites. The research only focused on the use of WhatsApp and Facebook. Moreover, the study has been confined to selected higher secondary level students at different institutes of d.g. khan district due to lack of time and resources to investigate it at a broader level.

The following institutes have been selected for study:

1. Govt. Higher secondary school, mana ahmdani
2. Govt. Higher secondary school kot chutta.

Literature review

Researchers and educators acknowledge social media's place in the educational process. "social media is often seen as the key learner variable because without it nothing happens." Because social media integration is a continuous process, students may adapt how they use it to different contexts and circumstances. Since learning a second language is a drawn-out and ongoing process, it is crucial to understand what motivates students to persevere through it and how they handle the process in this era of information and technology. Some strategies that they use include goal setting, time management, learning strategies, self-evaluations, self-attributions, seeking assistance or information, and related applications (zimmerman & mcmeekin, 2019). Although the use of computers in education has increased, its evolution may be much more significant. While computer literacy became popular in the 1980s, drill and practice was the main focus of educators in the 1960s. Every day, references from educators, professionals in business, parents, and students in newspapers, periodicals, and journals reinforced the necessity for computer literacy. Globally, the usage of e-learning and remote learning applications has become commonplace (alkhunzain & khan, 2021). Modern technology is becoming a necessary component of education, and without technology and social media, it is difficult to encourage most students, if not all of them, to learn how to write (joseph & khan, 2020). A teacher will not really benefit from the simple use of books and notes in accomplishing the objectives of target language acquisition. Thus, it is important to research how social media and technology affect writing motivation in esl students and how this might lead to beneficial improvements in writing motivation. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how social media affects pakistani learners' writing abilities. The postmodern world of today necessitates that english learning and teaching conditions be improved due to the growth of knowledge-based businesses, globalization of the world, and the growing usage of the language in all walks of life (denisar, 2021). As gillani et al. (2010) states, "to remain in step with the expanding frontiers of knowledge, the use of english needs to be actively sponsored by the educated and patronized by the policymakers." Without a doubt, the most difficult and complicated problem that instructors are now dealing with is how to use social media. However, social media—especially facebook and whatsapp—is changing people's lives and the way they view commonplace phenomena like the use of social media. At the same time, the significance of english in pakistani culture offers a strong foundation for both intrinsic and extrinsic social media use (khan et al., 2018). Despite the fact that a number of research have examined the impact of social media on writing abilities in the pakistani setting, a sizable vacuum still needs to be filled. As a result, this study can significantly contribute to our growing understanding of how social media promotes language proficiency.

Methodology

Writing skill is an important skill for the non-native students because they have to use it for every exam inside and outside their institution like for their job placements. That is why exploring the effect of social media on the writing of higher secondary school students is important to know. Along with that nobody can deny the influence of social media in the lives of pakistani youth, so the cross-section of social media and writing skill was needed to know. For this purpose, the writer has decided to conduct an experimental study. Experimental study is a type of quantitative methodology which is based on numeric.

Study design

the experimental investigation was conducted using a “posttest-only control group design” by the researcher. Random assignments are used to assign respondents from experimental research to the control and experimental groups. The independent variable is manipulated, and a treatment is administered to the experimental group. The variable of interest is measured at the end using a posttest, and conclusions are drawn by statistically analyzing the scores and making comparisons (phakiti, 2015).

Population and sampling for experimental study

All higher secondary level english language students registered in public and private schools in district dera ghazi khan made up the population of the experimental study. Ary et al. (2006) advise that in order to provide “equivalent comparison groups,” each group in a posttest-only experimental design should include at least 30 respondents. For the sake of selecting a representative sample, the researcher visited the two schools and personally asked the students whether they used social media or not. The students who reported that they had been using social media from at least six months were placed in the experimental group and the ones who reported that they did not have any access to internet and social networking sites were assigned to the controlled group. A total of thirty higher secondary school students were chosen from each school to take the exam in order to provide a representative sample. The total sample strength from the two higher secondary schools added up to 60. Furthermore, of the 60 respondents, 30 students who reported that they had access to the internet and used facebook and whatsapp were assigned to the experimental group, while the remaining 30 students who did not use social media were assigned to the control group.

Intervention

The students who were assigned to the experimental group were given access to the internet in the school's computer lab three times a week. Each time the students had to spend 40 minutes in the computer lab, they were allowed to use facebook during their stay in the computer lab. Every time the participants were taken to the computer lab, the researcher posted a situation on facebook and all the students placed in the experimental group had to give their comments comprising their opinion about that situation. This treatment was continuously administered for eight weeks. The students placed in the controlled group were taught in the conventional classroom and they were given the same situations in their class, and they discussed it with their fellows present in the classroom. The posttest was conducted after eight weeks following the norm of the procedure.

Data collection

The researcher visited the selected schools after getting due permission from the authorities to collect data in the form of written tests from the participants. The researcher briefly described the objectives of the study to the participants and assigned them the task of writing an essay on the topic “myself”. The participants were guided to focus on their introduction, family background, hobbies, and ambitions in their piece of creative writing. The researcher himself collected the writings of the participants after an allotted time of 40 minutes. The responses of the participants from both the experimental and control group were marked on the basis of criteria adapted from the marking criteria of cambridge international examination for o’ level candidates. It consisted of following points:

- i. 5 marks were allotted for the appropriateness of expression with prime focus on relevance, tone and style, and logical arguments.
- ii. 5 marks were allotted for the grammaticality of the writing which was focused on the appropriateness of sentence structure, verb forms, and punctuation.
- iii. 5 marks were allotted to correct spellings.
- iv. 5 marks were awarded on the basis of good organization of the writing that was focused on the organization of paragraphs, unity, connectivity, and coherence in the writing.

Results of the experimental test

Table 1

Dependent sample t-test of posttest only with control group design

		Mean	N	Correlation	Mean	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	E total	11.90	30	.041	2.47	2.81	.009
	C total	9.43	30				
Pair 2	E expression	3.33	30	.022	.80	3.07	.005
	C expression	2.53	30				
Pair 3	E grammaticality	2.50	30	.051	.70	2.28	.030
	C grammaticality	1.80	30				
Pair 4	E spelling	3.50	30	.001	.37	1.36	.183
	C spelling	3.13	30				
Pair 5	E organization	2.63	30	.320	.67	3.25	.003
	C organization	1.97	30				

The above table is the results of a dependent sample t-test, being applied to get the results of a post-test based on an experimental study. There were two groups, control and experimental, and after treatment the posttest was conducted. The results were entered into spss and got the table. As per the data, there were 4 main variables which were tested: expression, grammaticality, spelling, and organization. The pair one shows the difference in total scores of both groups. It shows the results are significantly different with p score is less than the standard .05, $t(29) = 2.81$, $p > .009$. In the same pair, the correlation is weak with a score of .041. The other pairs like pair 2 ($m = 3.33$ vs $m = 2.53$ with $t(29) = 3.07$ and sig. $P > .005$), pair 3 ($m = 2.50$ vs $m = 1.80$ with $t(29) = 2.28$ and sig. $P > .030$), and pair 5 ($m = 2.63$ vs $m = 1.97$ with $t(29) = 3.25$ and sig. $P > .003$) are significantly different with the weak correlation score of .022, .051, and .320 respectively. For the pair 4 ($m = 3.50$ vs $m = 3.13$ with $t(29) = 1.36$ and sig. $P > .183$) there is no significant difference with the weakest correlation score of .001. The data shows that for the expression, grammaticality, and organization the experiment group achieved a good score, which shows that social media affects their writing in terms of these three aspects but in spelling social media has no effect. Overall, there is no significant difference between the total score of control and experiment groups, showing weak correlation.

Conclusion

The current study was started to determine the effects of social media particularly Facebook and WhatsApp, on the writing skill of higher secondary school students in the district of dera ghazi khan; for which, two higher secondary schools were selected based on having good results in the concerned board. The focus was on four basic sub-skills of writing: expression, grammaticality,

spelling, and organization. The students were randomly selected based on their exposure to social media and then divided into two control and experimental groups. The experimental group was treated with the use of social media for developing writing skill, but the control group was dealt with traditional teaching. The study conducted was based on 'posttest-only control group design' in which only posttest was conducted from both control and experimental groups.

For the posttest, the researcher asked the participants to write an essay on "myself". The participants were guided to focus on their introduction, family background, hobbies, and ambitions in their piece of writing. The students were allotted 40 minutes to write the essay and collected by the researcher himself then to mark on the designed rubric.

The study started with two research questions. The first research question was about the overall impact of using social media on the writing skill of the respondents, and the other was about the impact on 4 sub-skills of writing, i.e., expression, grammaticality, spelling, and organization. For the first research question, the results show there was no significant difference in the overall scores of both groups, like their achievements were almost the same with a slight difference as the correlation score of .041 shows. The last research question results in the significant difference for expression, grammaticality, and organization but no significant difference in spelling. It means that social media is impacting the higher secondary school students in their writing in terms of using good expressions, keeping grammaticality, and having organization but in terms of spelling, social media showed no impact on the writing skill of those students.

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