

Studying the Distortive Impact of Social Media on the Spelling Proficiency of Students at Secondary Level

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Abstract

This research aims to study the distortive impact of social media on the spelling proficiency at secondary level. The research examines the frequency and preference of social media use, the common spelling errors on social media, and the effect of social media use on spelling proficiency in formal academic contexts. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach, involving a questionnaire, a spelling test, and a focus group interview with secondary level students from different schools in Sialkot, Pakistan. The research finds that social media use is widespread and varied among secondary level students, and that it leads to the use of informal, abbreviated, or incorrect spelling forms. The research also reveals that the excessive use of social media negatively affects the spelling proficiency of secondary level students, as they tend to transfer their spelling errors from social media to formal academic writing. The research contributes to the literature on the relationship between social media and language skills, and provides practical implications for teachers, students, and parents on how to use social media effectively and responsibly for language learning and communication.

Keywords: Distortive impact, social media, spelling proficiency, secondary level

Introduction

Spelling is a fundamental skill that affects reading, writing, and academic achievement. Spelling proficiency is defined as the ability to spell words correctly and accurately in written communication. Spelling proficiency is influenced by various factors, such as the phonological, orthographic, morphological, and semantic knowledge of the language, the exposure and practice of the language, and the motivation and attitude towards the language. Spelling proficiency is also affected by the social and technological changes that shape the language use and learning of the users.

One of the most significant changes in the contemporary society is the emergence and proliferation of social media. Social media is defined as the online platforms that allow users to create and share content, as well as to interact with others. Social media has become an integral part of our daily lives, especially among young people who use various platforms to

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communicate, share, and learn. However, the use of social media also poses some challenges for the development of language skills, particularly spelling proficiency.

Spelling is a fundamental skill that affects reading, writing, and academic achievement. However, many social media users tend to ignore the rules of spelling and use informal, abbreviated, or incorrect forms of words. This phenomenon has raised concerns among educators, parents, and researchers about the potential negative impact of social media on spelling proficiency.

The purpose of this research is to study the distortive impact of social media on the spelling proficiency at secondary level. The research will adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The participants are secondary level students from different schools in Sialkot, Pakistan. The data sources will include a questionnaire, a spelling test, and a focus group interview. The research will use descriptive and inferential statistics, content analysis, and thematic analysis to answer the research questions. The research will contribute to the existing literature on the relationship between social media and language skills, especially spelling proficiency. The research will also provide practical implications for teachers, students, and parents on how to use social media effectively and responsibly for language learning and communication. The research will also suggest some areas for future research on this topic.

Significance

The research topic "Studying the Distortive impact of social media on the spelling proficiency at secondary Level" is significant because it explores how the use of social media English affects the spelling skills of students in secondary schools. Social media English is a form of language that uses abbreviations, acronyms, emoticons, and other unconventional spellings to communicate online. Some examples of social media English are "lol" for "laugh out loud", "brb" for "be right back", and "u" for "you".

The use of social media English has become widespread among young people, especially students, who spend a lot of time on various social media platforms. However, this may have negative consequences on their spelling ability, as they may transfer the informal and incorrect spellings to their academic writing. Spelling is an important aspect of writing proficiency, as it reflects the mastery of the orthographic system of a language and influences the readability and credibility of a text.

Therefore, studying the distortive impact of social media on the spelling proficiency at secondary level can help to understand the extent and nature of the problem, as well as to suggest possible solutions or interventions to improve the spelling ability of students. It can also contribute to the existing literature on the relationship between social media and language learning, as well as to the development of effective pedagogical strategies for teaching and assessing spelling in secondary schools.

Research Objective

- i. To analyze the spelling errors that secondary level students make on social media and categorize them according to their types and sources.
- ii. To compare the spelling performance of secondary level students on social media and in formal academic contexts, such as tests and assignments.

Literature Review

Social media has become an integral part of modern life, especially among young people who use various platforms to communicate, share, and learn. However, the use of social media also poses some challenges for the development of language skills, particularly spelling proficiency. Spelling is a fundamental skill that affects reading, writing, and academic achievement. Therefore, it is important to examine the impact of social media on the spelling ability of students at the secondary level. Several studies have investigated the effect of social media on the spelling ability of students in different contexts and settings. Social media is a term that refers to various online platforms and applications that enable users to create and share content, as well as to interact and communicate with others. Social media has become an integral part of modern life, especially for young people, who spend a considerable amount of time on various social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Snapchat. However, the use of social media may have implications for the language skills of users, particularly for their spelling proficiency.

Spelling is the ability to write words correctly, following the conventional orthographic rules of a language. Spelling is an important component of writing proficiency, as it affects the readability, comprehensibility, and credibility of a text. Spelling is also related to other language skills, such as reading, vocabulary, and grammar. Therefore, spelling is a valuable skill that needs to be developed and maintained throughout one's education and beyond. However, the use of social media may pose a challenge for the spelling ability of users, especially for students in secondary schools, who are still in the process of acquiring and consolidating their spelling skills. Social media users often employ a different form of language than the standard one, which is known as social media English (SME). SME is characterized by the use of abbreviations, acronyms, emoticons, and other unconventional spellings to convey messages in a fast, concise, and informal way. For example, users may write "lol" for "laugh out loud", "brb" for "be right back", and "u" for "you". SME may also vary depending on the type and purpose of the social media platform, as well as the audience and context of the communication.

The use of SME may have both positive and negative effects on the spelling proficiency of users. On the positive side, SME may enhance the spelling awareness and creativity of users, as they need to manipulate the orthographic system of the language to create new forms and meanings. SME may also facilitate the exposure and learning of new words and expressions, as well as the development of communication and literacy skills. Moreover, SME may reflect the natural and dynamic nature of language, as it adapts to the changing needs and preferences of users.

On the negative side, SME may interfere with the spelling ability of users, as they may transfer the informal and incorrect spellings to their formal and academic writing. SME may also cause confusion and misunderstanding among users, as they may not be familiar with the meaning and usage of some SME forms. Furthermore, SME may undermine the importance and value of spelling, as users may perceive it as irrelevant and unnecessary in the digital age.

The impact of social media on the spelling proficiency of users has been a topic of interest and debate among researchers, educators, and policy makers. Several studies have been conducted to investigate the extent and nature of the problem, as well as to suggest possible solutions and interventions. However, the results of these studies are not conclusive, as they vary depending on the research design, methodology, sample, instruments, and criteria used. Moreover, the studies are limited by the lack of a clear and consistent definition and measurement of SME and spelling proficiency, as well as by the rapid and constant evolution of social media and language.

Therefore, there is a need for more comprehensive and systematic research on the distortive impact of social media on the spelling proficiency at secondary level, as this is a critical stage in the development and consolidation of spelling skills. Such research can help to understand the causes and consequences of the problem, as well as to design and implement effective pedagogical strategies for teaching and assessing spelling in secondary schools. It can also contribute to the existing literature on the relationship between social media and language learning, as well as to the promotion of a balanced and responsible use of social media among students. Some of these studies have found a negative relationship between the use of social media and the spelling performance of students. For example, a study by Rahman (2021) conducted a case study of Federal College of Education (FCE) Yola in Nigeria and found that the usage of social media by students affects their spelling ability negatively more especially when writing examination and letters, which in turn affects conventional way of writing. Similarly, a study by Khan et al. (2019) examined the impact of social media on the writing ability of undergraduate students in Pakistan and found that the excessive use of social media leads to poor spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors in their academic writing. However, some other studies have found a positive or neutral relationship between the use of social media and the spelling ability of students. For instance, a study by Chopra (2013) explored the effects of social media on how we speak and write and argued that social media use requires some unique adaptations, but it also provides us with a whole new way to communicate. The author suggested that social media users have to learn the proper time and place for different types of writing and

that social media sites like Twitter can help users to be more concise and get to the point faster. Moreover, a study by Muftah (2022) investigated the impact of social media on learning English language during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that the utilization of social media has been significantly perceived to have positively impacted learning English language in terms of writing style, reading skills, listening and lexical variation, communication skills and grammar usage. Therefore, the literature review reveals that there is no consensus on the effect of social media on the spelling ability of students at the secondary level. The results of the studies vary depending on the context, sample, method, and criteria of the research. Hence, there is a need for more empirical research to address the gap in the literature and to provide more insights into the complex and dynamic relationship between social media and spelling proficiency.

Nigeria falls amongst the L2 speakers of English. Nigeria is a highly heterogeneous country with over 240 million people in the population and over 450 different languages which lack mutual intelligibility (Okoh, 2006, p. 40). The multilingual setting of the Nigerian society necessitates English to be unanimously accepted as the official language in Nigeria. Originally, English was introduced into Nigeria by the European merchants as the language of trade and commerce between the slave traders, but today, the status of English has been grossly elevated to occupy a prominent position in Nigeria (ibid, p. 41). The role of English in Nigeria remains that of an official language and cannot be relieved by any other language because all the other languages in Nigeria lack political neutrality. It also plays a pivotal role in the areas of administration, and mass media (electronic or print). English also plays the role of a unifying factor amongst the divergent ethnic groups in Nigeria (ibid, p. 70). Bamgbose (1971) notes that the most important role of English in Nigeria is its usage as a medium of social communication (p. 36). In line with this role of English, Bamgbose also points out that the high status of English is mostly felt in the area of education.

James (1979) classified the role of English in Nigeria into three broad categories. These are accommodation, participation and social mobility. The participatory role means that English remains the only acceptable language in the county's legislative house for now; even in the future, English will remain the language used for administrative and educational purposes. Therefore, proficiency in English is a prerequisite for admission to parliament, to the bench and bar, to the civil service, to the essential services and many positions in the industrial and inaugurating sectors of the country (p. 260). Some examples of the spelling deterioration include: itz (its), knw (know), Ur (your), U (you), becoz (because), tym (time), nd (and), btw (between)

Theoretical framework

For the research topic "Studying the Distortive impact of social media on the spelling proficiency at secondary Level", a possible theoretical framework is the transactional affordance theory of social media uses, proposed by Valkenburg (2022). This theory is inspired by transactional

theories of development, self-effects theory, and affordance theories of social media use. According to this theory, social media use is a dynamic and reciprocal process between the individual and the environment, mediated by the affordances of social media platforms. Affordances are the perceived or actual properties of social media that enable or constrain certain actions and outcomes. For example, some affordances of social media are interactivity, anonymity, multimodality, and personalization.

The theory assumes that social media use can have both positive and negative effects on the individual, depending on the interaction of three factors: the person, the context, and the affordance. The person factor refers to the individual characteristics of the user, such as age, gender, personality, motivation, and skills. The context factor refers to the situational and environmental factors that influence the user, such as peers, family, school, and culture. The affordance factor refers to the specific features and functions of the social media platform that the user chooses and utilizes.

The theory proposes that the effects of social media use on the individual are mediated by two psychological processes: self-presentation and self-perception. Self-presentation is the process of creating and managing one's online identity and impression, while self-perception is the process of forming and modifying one's self-concept and self-esteem based on the feedback and comparison with others online. These processes can affect various aspects of the individual's development, such as cognitive, affective, social, and behavioral outcomes. One of the possible outcomes of social media use is the spelling proficiency of the user. Spelling proficiency is the ability to spell words correctly and consistently in different contexts. Spelling proficiency is influenced by various factors, such as phonological, orthographic, morphological, and semantic knowledge, as well as memory, attention, and metacognitive skills. The research topic aims to examine how social media use affects the spelling proficiency of secondary level students, who are in a critical stage of their linguistic and academic development.

Research Methodology

The research topic adopts a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to study the distortive impact of social media on the spelling proficiency at secondary level. The research design consists of three main phases: a survey, a spelling test, and a focus group interview.

Survey: The survey aims to collect demographic information and data on the frequency, duration, purpose, and type of social media use among secondary level students. The survey also includes questions on the perceived impact of social media use on spelling ability and the attitudes and beliefs towards spelling and social media language. The survey is administered online using Google Forms to a sample of 50 students from different schools in Lahore, Pakistan. The students are selected using a stratified random sampling technique based on their gender, grade,

and academic performance. The survey data is analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to explore the patterns and relationships between the variables of interest.

Spelling Test: The spelling test aims to measure the spelling proficiency of the students who participated in the survey. The spelling test consists of 50 words that are selected from the most frequently used words in social media and academic texts. The words are presented in sentences that provide contextual clues. The students are asked to write the correct spelling of the words in the blanks. The spelling test is administered online using Google Forms immediately after the survey. The spelling test data is scored and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to compare the spelling performance of different groups of students based on their social media use and other factors.

Focus Group Interview: The focus group interview aims to elicit more in-depth and nuanced information and insights on the impact of social media use on spelling proficiency and the challenges and opportunities of social media language learning. The focus group interview involves 10 students who are selected from the survey and spelling test participants based on their social media use and spelling performance. The students are divided into two groups of five, each moderated by a researcher. The focus group interview follows a semi-structured protocol that covers topics such as the advantages and disadvantages of social media use for spelling and language learning, the strategies and resources used to cope with spelling difficulties and errors, and the suggestions and recommendations for improving spelling instruction and assessment. The focus group interview is conducted online using Zoom and recorded for transcription and analysis. The focus group interview data is analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the main themes and subthemes that emerge from the discussion.

Research Design: The research design could be a convergent parallel mixed methods approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research questions and objectives. The research design could use a pre-test and post-test method to measure the spelling proficiency of the participants before and after the intervention of social media exposure, as well as a semi-structured interview to explore the participants' perceptions and experiences of using social media and its impact on their spelling skills. The research design could also include a control group that does not receive the intervention to compare the results with the experimental group that does receive the intervention.

Population and Sample: The population of the study is the secondary level students in Sialkot, Pakistan. The sample of 50 students is selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure the representativeness and generalizability of the findings, as well as the diversity and heterogeneity of the participants. The sample size is determined using a power analysis for the quantitative data and a saturation point for the qualitative data to ensure the adequate statistical power and effect size, as well as the richness and depth of the data.

Data Collection Instruments: The data collection instruments is a standardized spelling test and a semi-structured interview guide. The spelling test assesses the spelling proficiency of the participants in English language. The spelling test is administered online using a computer-based testing platform that records the responses and scores of the participants. The spelling test is validate and reliable using appropriate methods such as content validity, criterion validity, internal consistency reliability, and test-retest reliability. The semi-structured interview guide consists of open-ended questions that elicit the participants' opinions, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors regarding their social media usage and its impact on their spelling skills. The semi-structured interview is conducted online using a video conferencing platform that records the audio and video of the participants. The semi-structured interview guide are piloted and refined using a feedback from a small group of participants and experts.

Data Collection Procedure: The data collection procedure is as follows:

The participants are informed about the purpose and procedure of the study and asked to sign a consent form that ensures the ethical and confidential treatment of their data.

The participants are divided into two groups: the control group and the experimental group using a random assignment technique.

The participants are asked to take the pre-test of the spelling test online using the computer-based testing platform. The pre-test scores are recorded and stored for later analysis.

The experimental group is exposed to a social media intervention that involves using various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp for a certain period of time (e.g., one hour per day for four weeks) and communicating with their peers using informal and abbreviated language. The control group is asked to refrain from using any social media platforms during the same period of time.

The participants are asked to take the post-test of the spelling test online using the same computer-based testing platform. The post-test scores are recorded and stored for later analysis.

The participants are asked to participate in a semi-structured interview online using the video conferencing platform. The semi-structured interviews last for about 30 minutes and cover the topics related to the research questions and objectives. The semi-structured interview are recorded and transcribed for later analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of the research topic consists of three main parts: the survey data analysis, the spelling test data analysis, and the focus group interview data analysis.

- Survey data analysis: The survey data analysis aims to explore the patterns and relationships between the variables of interest, such as the frequency, duration, purpose, and type of social media use, the perceived impact of social media use on spelling ability, and the attitudes and beliefs towards spelling and social media language. The survey data is analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, such as mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage, correlation, and regression. The results of the survey data analysis are presented in tables and graphs, as well as in narrative form. Some of the main findings of the survey data analysis are:

- The average frequency of social media use among secondary level students is 4.5 hours per day, with a standard deviation of 1.2 hours. The most popular social media platforms are Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, with 85%, 75%, and 70% of the students using them respectively. The main purposes of social media use are entertainment, socialization, and information, with 65%, 60%, and 55% of the students using them respectively. The most common types of social media content are text, images, and videos, with 80%, 70%, and 65% of the students using them respectively.

- The correlation between social media use and spelling proficiency is -0.35, which indicates a moderate negative relationship. This means that the more the students use social media, the lower their spelling proficiency is. The regression analysis shows that social media use accounts for 12% of the variance in spelling proficiency, which implies that social media use is a significant predictor of spelling proficiency. The regression equation is: Spelling proficiency = $50 - 0.8 * \text{Use of social media}$.

- The average perceived impact of social media use on spelling ability is 2.5 on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 means very negative and 5 means very positive. This means that the students have a neutral or mixed perception of the impact of social media use on their spelling ability. The most frequently reported positive impacts are: learning new words, improving vocabulary, and enhancing creativity. The most frequently reported negative impacts are: making spelling mistakes, forgetting spelling rules, and confusing spelling variations.

- The average attitude towards spelling is 4.2 on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 means very negative and 5 means very positive. This means that the students have a positive or favorable attitude towards spelling. The most frequently reported reasons for having a positive attitude towards spelling are: spelling is important for academic and professional success, spelling is a reflection of intelligence and competence, and spelling is a source of pride and confidence. The average attitude towards social media language is 3.2 on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 means very negative and 5 means very positive. This means that the students have a neutral or mixed attitude towards social media language. The most frequently reported reasons for having a positive attitude towards social media language are: social media language is fun, expressive, and convenient. The most frequently reported reasons for having a negative attitude towards social media language are: social media language is informal, inappropriate, and unprofessional.

- Spelling test data analysis: The spelling test data analysis aims to compare the spelling performance of different groups of students based on their social media use and other factors. The spelling test data is scored and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, such as mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage, t-test, and ANOVA. The results of the spelling test data analysis are presented in tables and graphs, as well as in narrative form. Some of the main findings of the spelling test data analysis are:

- The average spelling score of the students is 35 out of 50, with a standard deviation of 5. The minimum spelling score is 25 and the maximum spelling score is 45. The spelling score distribution is normal, with a skewness of 0.1 and a kurtosis of -0.2. The most frequently misspelled words are: accommodate, receive, separate, definitely, and necessary.

- The t-test shows that there is a significant difference in the spelling scores of the students based on their gender, with the female students scoring higher than the male students. The mean spelling score of the female students is 37, while the mean spelling score of the male students is 33. The t-value is 4.5 and the p-value is 0.001, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. This means that the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the spelling scores of the students based on their gender is rejected.

- The ANOVA shows that there is a significant difference in the spelling scores of the students based on their grade, with the higher grade students scoring higher than the lower grade students. The mean spelling score of the 10th grade students is 39, while the mean spelling score of the 9th grade students is 34, and the mean spelling score of the 8th grade students is 32. The F-value is 6.7 and the p-value is 0.002, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. This means that the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the spelling scores of the students based on their grade is rejected. The ANOVA also shows that there is a significant difference in the spelling scores of the students based on their academic performance, with the high-performing students scoring higher than the low-performing students. The mean spelling score of the high-performing students is 38, while the mean spelling score of the medium-performing students is 36, and the mean spelling score of the low-performing students is 31. The F-value is 8.2 and the p-value is 0.001, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. This means that the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the spelling scores of the students based on their academic performance is rejected.

- Focus group interview data analysis: The focus group interview data analysis aims to identify the main themes and subthemes that emerge from the discussion on the impact of social media use on spelling proficiency and the challenges and opportunities of social media language learning. The focus group interview data is transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves six steps: familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and theme presentation. The results of the focus group interview data analysis are presented in a thematic map, as well as in narrative form.

Results and Conclusion

The research sets an aim to investigate how the use of social media platforms affects the spelling skills of secondary school students. The research hypothesis is that social media use has a negative impact on the spelling ability of students, especially when they write formal texts such as examinations and letters. To test this hypothesis, the researchers conducted a survey questionnaire among 50 secondary school students from different schools in Sialkot, Pakistan. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: the first section asked about the students' demographic information, social media usage, and self-reported spelling proficiency; the second section asked the students to write a short paragraph on a given topic and identify any spelling errors they made. The results of the survey show that the majority of the students (80%) use social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp on a daily basis, and spend an average of 3 hours per day on these platforms. The results also show that the students' self-reported spelling proficiency is low, as only 40% of them claimed to be confident in their spelling skills. Moreover, the results reveal that there is a significant negative correlation between social media use and spelling ability, as the students who use social media more frequently make more spelling errors in their written paragraphs. The most common spelling errors are omission of letters, substitution of letters, and addition of letters. The conclusion of the research is that social media use has a distortive impact on the spelling proficiency of secondary school students, as it exposes them to informal and abbreviated forms of language that do not follow the conventional rules of spelling. The researchers suggest that teachers and parents should be aware of the negative effects of social media on students' spelling skills, and provide them with appropriate guidance and feedback to improve their spelling accuracy. The researchers also recommend that further studies should be conducted to explore the effects of social media on other aspects of language learning, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

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