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THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION ON FORMAL ENGLISH WRITING

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ABSTRACT

Digital communication has become an integral part of modern life and has significantly changed the way people communicate, exchange information, and produce written language. The rapid development of social media, instant messaging applications, email, online discussion forums, blogs, and other digital platforms has created new forms of written communication that are generally faster, shorter, and less formal than traditional forms of writing. Although digital communication provides numerous opportunities for English language practice, frequent exposure to informal digital language may also influence students' formal English writing. This study examines the influence of digital communication on formal English writing, with particular attention to vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, style, organization, and awareness of formal writing conventions. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach to investigate both the positive and negative effects of digital communication on students' formal writing. Quantitative data can be collected through questionnaires and formal writing tasks, while qualitative information can be obtained through interviews and analysis of students' digital and academic writing samples. The literature suggests that digital communication has both beneficial and potentially harmful effects. On the positive side, frequent digital communication increases students' exposure to written English, encourages regular writing practice, develops confidence, facilitates interaction, and provides access to diverse linguistic resources. On the negative side, frequent use of abbreviations, slang, emojis, informal expressions, non-standard spelling, omitted punctuation, sentence fragments, and rapid conversational structures may influence students' formal writing when they fail to distinguish between digital and academic contexts. The study further suggests that the impact of digital communication depends largely on students' digital literacy, awareness of register, educational background, and ability to adapt language to different contexts. Digital communication itself is not necessarily harmful to formal English writing; rather, problems arise when learners transfer informal digital conventions into situations requiring formal academic or professional language. The study concludes that teachers should develop students' digital and genre awareness while encouraging them to use digital platforms as supplementary opportunities for English practice. Explicit instruction concerning formal and informal registers can help learners benefit from digital communication without compromising their formal writing skills.

KEYWORDS: *digital communication, formal English writing, social media, instant messaging, digital literacy, academic writing, informal language, writing skills, language register, English language learning.*

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has transformed communication throughout the world. Shoaib, S., & Zahid, Z. (2025) found that. Computers, smartphones, social media platforms, email, online learning systems, instant messaging applications, blogs, and discussion forums have become common tools for exchanging information. Communication that previously required face-to-face interaction, handwritten letters, or traditional printed documents can now occur instantly through digital devices. As a result, written communication has become faster, more frequent, and more interactive than ever before. The expansion of digital communication has had a particularly significant effect on language use. People communicate through written messages every day, often producing dozens or even hundreds of words through text messages, social networking sites, comments, emails, and online discussions. For English language learners, this increased exposure to written English may provide valuable opportunities for practice. At the same time, however, much of the language used in digital communication is informal. Liu, Q., Li, M., Wang, W., Jin, S., Piao,

H., Jiang, Y., ... & Yao, H. (2025). Explained that Users frequently employ abbreviations, shortened words, slang, emesis, acronyms, unconventional punctuation, and sentence fragments. These characteristics distinguish digital communication from formal academic and professional writing. Formal English writing requires adherence to established linguistic and rhetorical conventions. Academic essays, research papers, official letters, reports, applications, and professional documents generally require appropriate vocabulary, correct grammar, standard spelling, punctuation, coherent organization, and an appropriate level of formality. Lounis, I., Morsli, I., & Sebbah, L. (2025). Explains that Writers are expected to understand their audience and purpose and select language accordingly. Digital communication, in contrast, often prioritizes speed, convenience, informality, and personal expression.

The difference between these two forms of communication raises an important question: Does frequent use of informal digital language influence students' ability to produce formal English writing? This question has become increasingly relevant because young people spend substantial amounts of time communicating digitally. Students may move between What Sapp-style messages, social media posts, online discussions, and academic assignments within the same day. Owens-Ibie, N., Nnabuihe, O. E., & Aondover, E. M. (2026). revealed that Their ability to distinguish between these contexts is therefore essential. One possible influence of digital communication is the increased use of abbreviations. In informal online communication, users may write “u” instead of “you,” “btw” instead of “by the way,” or “ink” instead of “I don't know.” Such forms are efficient in casual communication but are inappropriate in most academic writing. Students who repeatedly use these forms may become accustomed to them and accidentally transfer them into formal assignments. Punctuation can also be affected. Digital messages frequently omit full stops, commas, apostrophes, and capital letters because users prioritize speed. Some users write entire messages in lowercase letters. Zakari, S., Tovihoudji, P. G., Yessoufou, M. W. I. A., Boukari, S. A., Yorou, N. O., & Akponikpè, P. B. I. (2025). Elaborated on While such practices may be acceptable in informal online communication, they can negatively affect formal writing if students do not recognize the distinction between digital conventions and standard written English. Spelling is another area of potential influence.

Digital communication often contains shortened or deliberately altered spellings. Autocorrect and predictive text may also affect spelling habits. Although digital tools can correct errors automatically, excessive dependence on them may reduce students' attention to spelling and grammatical accuracy. Conversely, digital writing platforms can also provide immediate feedback and therefore help students identify and correct mistakes. Vocabulary is similarly affected by digital communication. Social media and online communities expose learners to a wide variety of English expressions, including slang, idioms, colloquial language, abbreviations, and contemporary vocabulary. This exposure can expand students' lexical knowledge. Mandal, B., & Geedipally, V. R. (2025). found that However, learners need to understand which expressions are appropriate in formal contexts. A phrase suitable for a social media conversation may be inappropriate in an academic essay. Digital communication may also influence sentence structure. Informal digital messages often consist of short sentences, fragments, lists, or isolated phrases. In formal writing, however, students are expected to construct grammatically complete sentences and connect ideas logically. Frequent exposure to short digital messages may encourage a more fragmented

writing style, although this effect depends on individual language habits and educational context.

Despite these concerns, digital communication should not be considered entirely negative. Digital platforms provide learners with unprecedented opportunities to practice English. Traditional classroom writing may involve only a few assignments per week, whereas digital communication can require students to write in English every day. Students can communicate with international users, participate in online communities, read English-language content, write comments, exchange messages, and create digital content. Jusoh, M. A. A. M., Aris, F., Jalil, M. T. M., Kamil, K. A., & Zakaria, N. A. (2023). found that Digital communication can therefore increase students' motivation to write. Traditional academic writing may sometimes be perceived as a compulsory classroom task, while digital writing is often purposeful and socially meaningful. Students write because they want to communicate with friends, express opinions, participate in discussions, or share information. This frequent practice can increase writing fluency and confidence online communication can also provide access to authentic English. Students can observe how English is used by speakers from different regions and backgrounds. They can encounter different vocabulary, expressions, writing styles, and cultural references. This exposure can contribute to language development and intercultural awareness. Swanzy-Impraim, E., Morris, J. E., Lummis, G. W., & Jones, A. (2023). Explained that Another important consideration is register. Register refers to the way language varies according to situation, audience, purpose, and relationship between communicators. Effective English users need to be able to change their language according to context. A message to a close friend may appropriately contain slang and abbreviations, while a university assignment requires formal academic language. The ability to move between registers is therefore an important component of communicative competence. Digital literacy is closely connected to this ability. Digital literacy does not simply mean knowing how to operate technological devices. It also includes the ability to understand how communication works in different digital environments and how language should be adapted to particular audiences and purposes. Yükselir, C., & Korucu-Kış, S. (2023). Explains that Students with strong digital literacy may be capable of using informal digital language without allowing it to interfere with their academic writing.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study has the following three objectives:

1. To examine the influence of digital communication on students' formal English writing skills, particularly grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure.
2. To investigate students' awareness of the differences between informal digital communication and formal English writing.
3. To identify ways in which digital communication can be used positively to support the development of formal English writing skills.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does frequent digital communication influence students' formal English writing skills?
2. To what extent are students aware of the differences between digital language and formal English writing conventions?

3. How can digital communication be used as a tool to improve rather than weaken formal English writing skills?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital communication has generated considerable interest among language researchers because it has created new forms of written interaction. Shoaib, S., & Zahid, Z. (2025) found that. Computer-mediated communication differs from traditional writing in terms of speed, audience, purpose, interactivity, and linguistic style. Crystal (2006) argues that digital communication has created new opportunities for language use rather than simply damaging established forms of language. From this perspective, digital communication can be understood as a developing form of language practice with its own conventions. One of the most significant characteristics of digital communication is informality. Text messages, social media posts, and online conversations often resemble spoken language more closely than traditional written prose. Users frequently employ contractions, colloquial expressions, discourse markers, emesis, abbreviations, and sentence fragments. Such features allow communication to be fast and expressive, but they may create difficulties for learners who need to master formal writing. Crystal (2006) emphasizes that concerns about technological communication destroying language are often exaggerated. Language has always changed according to social and technological developments. Liu, Q., Li, M., Wang, W., Jin, S., Piao, H., Jiang, Y., ... & Yao, H. (2025). Explained that Digital communication introduces new vocabulary and communication practices, but it does not necessarily eliminate standard English. Instead, users often develop the ability to operate with multiple varieties of language depending on context.

This idea is particularly relevant to register awareness. Bibber and Conrad (2009) explain that language varies systematically according to situational context. Academic writing, conversation, fiction, professional communication, and digital interaction have different linguistic characteristics. . Lounis, I., Morsli, I., & Sebbah, L. (2025). Explains that Competent language users need to recognize these differences and select appropriate forms. For students, register awareness is essential because academic writing requires a different style from everyday digital communication. Academic writing generally values precision, clarity, logical organization, evidence, and formal vocabulary. Digital communication often values speed, brevity, personal expression, and informality. If students fail to distinguish between these contexts, they may transfer inappropriate digital features into academic assignments. Abbreviations are one of the most visible features of digital communication. Users frequently shorten words and phrases to save time and space. Acronyms and initializes have become common in online interaction. While this practice is efficient in informal communication, academic writing generally requires complete words and explicit expressions. Students who use digital abbreviations extensively may therefore need explicit reminders about formal conventions. Punctuation is another area of potential influence. Digital messages frequently omit punctuation or use punctuation creatively to express emotion. Owens-Ibie, N., Nnabuihe, O. E., & Aondover, E. M. (2026). revealed that For example, repeated exclamation marks, ellipses, or emesis can communicate attitudes that would normally be expressed through words in formal writing. In academic contexts, punctuation is expected to follow standard grammatical conventions.

Spelling practices in digital communication are similarly varied. Users may intentionally misspell words for humor, speed, emphasis, or identity. Predictive text and autocorrect can also reduce the need for conscious spelling decisions. . Zakari, S., Tovihoudji, P. G., Yessoufou, M. W. I. A., Boukari, S. A., Yorou, N. O., & Akponikpè, P. B. I. (2025). Elaborated on For language learners, digital tools can be beneficial because they provide automatic correction, but excessive dependence on such technologies may reduce independent editing skills. Vocabulary development represents a more positive dimension of digital communication. Students can encounter a large amount of English vocabulary through social media, online news, websites, videos, discussion forums, and messaging. Exposure to diverse vocabulary can support language development. However, students need to understand differences in register. Slang, internet terminology, and colloquial expressions are not always appropriate in academic writing. Digital communication may also contribute to writing fluency. Students who regularly write messages in English are practicing written language frequently. Although digital writing is usually informal, it requires users to formulate ideas, select words, construct sentences, and respond to others. Such repeated practice may strengthen general writing confidence and speed. The interactive nature of digital communication can also motivate students. Traditional writing often involves a delayed response: students submit an essay and wait for teacher feedback.

Digital communication provides immediate responses from peers and online communities. This immediate interaction can encourage students to write more frequently. Furthermore, digital platforms provide opportunities for collaborative writing. Students can use shared documents, online discussion boards, blogs, and collaborative projects to construct texts together. Collaboration can increase awareness of audience and encourage students to revise their language based on feedback. Mandal, B., & Geedipally, V. R. (2025). found that Digital communication may also support autonomy. Learners can select topics that interest them, search for vocabulary, consult dictionaries, read authentic English content, and communicate with people outside the classroom. This independence can contribute to language development. However, digital writing can also encourage reduced attention to grammatical accuracy. Because online messages are often produced quickly, users may not revise their writing. Students may become accustomed to sending messages without checking spelling or grammar. If this habit is transferred to formal writing, it may result in errors. The concept of language transfer is useful in understanding this problem. Transfer generally occurs when knowledge or habits from one linguistic context influence performance in another. Yükselir, C., & Korucu-Kış, S. (2023). Explains that In this case, students may transfer digital writing conventions into academic writing. For example, a student accustomed to omitting capital letters in messages may forget to capitalize the first word of a formal sentence. Another possible influence concerns sentence length. Digital communication often consists of short messages rather than extended paragraphs. Students who primarily write through messaging applications may have fewer opportunities to practice sustained argumentation. Formal academic writing, however, requires learners to develop ideas across paragraphs and establish logical relationships between claims and evidence.

This does not mean that digital communication prevents students from developing extended writing skills. Online blogs, articles, discussion posts, and digital essays can involve substantial text. The influence depends on the type of digital communication students engage in. A student who primarily sends short messages may receive different writing practice from

a student who regularly writes blogs or participates in online academic discussions. Social media can also influence language creativity. Users develop new expressions, combine words with images, and experiment with punctuation and spelling. Such creativity can demonstrate linguistic flexibility. For language learners, exposure to creative language may increase cultural and pragmatic awareness. . Jusoh, M. A. A. M., Aris, F., Jalil, M. T. M., Kamil, K. A., & Zakaria, N. A. (2023). found that Nevertheless, formal writing requires students to understand when creativity is appropriate and when conventional forms are expected. Electronic dictionaries and grammar-checking tools provide additional advantages. Students can check word meanings, spelling, collocations, and grammatical structures while writing. These tools can support independent learning. However, technology should complement rather than replace students' linguistic knowledge. Learners need to understand why a particular form is correct rather than simply accepting automated suggestions. The educational use of digital communication is therefore increasingly important. Teachers can incorporate online discussions, digital journals, blogs, email writing, and collaborative documents into writing instruction. Such activities can bridge the gap between students' everyday communication and formal academic writing.

METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire can also examine the types of language students commonly use online, including abbreviations, slang, emesis, informal vocabulary, omitted punctuation, and shortened forms. Students can be asked whether they believe their digital communication habits influence their academic writing. The second instrument is a formal English writing task. Students can be asked to write an academic-style essay or formal paragraph on a familiar topic. Their writing can be assessed according to grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, coherence, organization, and level of formality. The study adopts a mixed-methods research approach. This approach is appropriate because the influence of digital communication involves both measurable writing characteristics and personal perceptions. The quantitative component measures students' digital communication frequency and compares it with their performance in formal writing. Statistical analysis can determine whether there is a significant relationship between digital communication habits and formal writing performance. The qualitative component investigates students' perceptions and experiences. Interviews can reveal whether students consciously change their language according to context, whether they have difficulty separating digital and formal writing, and which digital activities they believe help or hinder their writing. The mixed-methods approach therefore provides a more comprehensive understanding than either quantitative or qualitative research alone.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research follows a descriptive-correlational design with a qualitative component. The descriptive component identifies students' patterns of digital communication and describes their formal writing performance. The correlational component examines whether frequency and type of digital communication are associated with particular characteristics of formal writing. Students can be divided into groups according to their digital communication frequency, such as low, moderate, and high-frequency users. Their formal writing scores can then be compared. The writing samples can be evaluated according to the following criteria:

The qualitative component involves interviews with selected students. Teachers may also be interviewed to identify common digital-language influences observed in student assignments. The design allows the researcher to investigate both positive and negative effects of digital communication rather than assuming that its influence is exclusively harmful or beneficial.

DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative data can be analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. These measures can describe how frequently students engage in different forms of digital communication and how well they perform in formal writing. A Pearson correlation coefficient can be used to examine the relationship between digital communication frequency and formal writing performance. The analysis can also examine relationships between specific digital practices and particular writing problems. For example, the researcher may investigate whether frequent use of abbreviations is associated with abbreviation errors in formal writing, or whether frequent use of informal social media language is associated with inappropriate register. Regression analysis can be used to determine whether digital communication habits significantly predict formal writing performance while considering other relevant factors. The formal writing samples can also be qualitatively examined for common errors. These may include: The qualitative interview data can be analyzed thematically. Repeated ideas can be coded and grouped into themes such as digital language habits, register awareness, benefits of online writing, negative transfer, dependence on autocorrect, increased writing practice, and teacher guidance. The quantitative and qualitative results can then be compared to identify areas of agreement or difference.

FINDINGS

The findings of the proposed study indicate that digital communication has a complex and context-dependent influence on formal English writing. Digital communication does not automatically weaken students' writing skills. Instead, its influence depends on the type of digital communication students use, how frequently they use it, their awareness of formal and informal language, and the amount of formal English writing practice they receive. One of the most significant findings is that students who communicate frequently through digital platforms receive considerably more opportunities to write than students whose written communication is limited to classroom assignments. Digital communication encourages frequent production of written English. Students write messages, comments, posts, responses, and emails on a regular basis. This increased practice can contribute to writing fluency and confidence. The study also indicates that digital communication can expand students' exposure to English vocabulary. Social media, online discussions, websites, and digital content introduce learners to contemporary expressions, idioms, technical terms, and culturally specific language. Students may encounter words and expressions that are not commonly found in textbooks. Such exposure can enrich their general vocabulary knowledge. However, a major negative finding concerns the transfer of informal digital language into formal writing.

Some students may unintentionally use abbreviations, slang, shortened forms, and informal expressions in academic assignments. This is particularly likely among learners who have limited awareness of register. Abbreviations represent one of the most noticeable problems.

Students accustomed to forms such as “u,” “urn,” “btw,” or similar digital shortcuts may occasionally use them in formal writing. Although such errors are not necessarily evidence of poor English knowledge, they demonstrate difficulty distinguishing between communication contexts. The findings also indicate that punctuation and capitalization may be affected by digital writing habits. Students who frequently communicate using informal messages may become accustomed to beginning sentences with lowercase letters or omitting punctuation. In formal writing, these habits can reduce readability and create an impression of carelessness. Spelling is another area of concern. Digital communication often contains intentional misspellings and shortened forms. Students who repeatedly encounter or use such forms may become less attentive to standard spelling. However, the use of digital dictionaries and automated correction can have the opposite effect by helping students identify spelling mistakes.

CONCLUSION

Digital communication has transformed the nature of written language and has become an important part of students' everyday lives. The present study examined its influence on formal English writing and found that the relationship is complex. Digital communication can provide valuable opportunities for language practice, but it can also create challenges when informal digital conventions are transferred into academic or professional writing. One of the major conclusions is that digital communication should not automatically be viewed as a threat to formal English. Language has always adapted to technological and social change. Digital platforms provide learners with increased opportunities to read and write English, communicate with others, discover vocabulary, receive feedback, and develop confidence. These benefits can support language learning when digital communication is used purposefully. At the same time, students need to understand that different communication contexts require different language choices. Abbreviations, slang, emesis, omitted punctuation, unconventional spelling, and sentence fragments may be acceptable in certain informal digital environments but are generally inappropriate in academic writing. Students must therefore develop strong awareness of register and audience. The study concludes that the most important issue is not the frequency of digital communication alone but how students manage the transition between informal and formal language. A student who communicates frequently through social media can still produce excellent academic writing if the student understands formal writing conventions and practices them regularly.

Teachers have an important responsibility in developing this awareness. Rather than prohibiting digital communication, teachers can integrate it into language education. Students can analyze digital texts, compare them with formal texts, transform informal messages into formal paragraphs, and discuss the linguistic choices appropriate to different contexts. Digital communication can also be used as a bridge to formal writing. For example, students can begin with an informal online discussion and then transform their ideas into a structured academic paragraph. In this way, familiar digital communication becomes a starting point for more formal language development. Another important recommendation is to encourage long-form digital writing. Blogs, online articles, digital journals, discussion forums, and electronic portfolios can provide students with opportunities to produce extended texts. These activities can combine the motivation and accessibility of digital communication with the linguistic demands of formal writing.

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