

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND WRITING SKILLS

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Abstract

The study was conducted in order to assess and evaluate the influence of social networking on the writing skills of learners in Tshwane North District public schools from the point of view of educators actively working in Tshwane North District public schools. The study was conducted by drawing a stratified random sample of size 147 from educators working in Tshwane North District public schools. Data was collected by using a structured, pretested and validated questionnaire of study. Data analyses were conducted by using methods such as frequency tables, cross-tab analyses and binary logistic regression analysis. Based on the criteria set out by Huhta, Alanen, Tarnanen, Martin and Hirvela (2014) for the assessment of writing skills in English with proper grammar and syllables, 85.71% of educators working in Tshwane North District public schools indicated that the use of social networking had a negative effect on the writing skills of their learners. The remaining 14.29% of educators indicated that the use of social networking did not have a negative effect on the writing skills of their learners. Multivariate analysis was performed by estimating odds ratios from logit analysis. The results showed that the writing skills of learners were significantly undermined by the length of time spent by learners on social networking, inability to read books in the library, and lack of commitment to reach out to poorly resourced learners, in a decreasing order of strength.

Key words: Tshwane North District public schools, English writing skills, Learners, Odds ratio

Introduction and background to study

According to Healy and Mulholland (2019), the writing skills of pupils and young learners in public schools are often undermined due to excessive use of social media. The authors have shown that failure to monitor and control the use of social media by young learners and pupils often leads to failure among learners to master proper writing skills. The problem is severe in public schools and poorly resourced public universities in developing nations. Learners often use short phrases and acronyms in school writing activities, and shortcuts together with abbreviations that are commonly used on social networking sites often result in poor written academic language. The study aims to assess

and evaluate the degree to which the writing skills of students attending public schools in Tshwane North District (TND) are negatively affected by social networking media activities. Examples of commonly used social media platforms are Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Yahoo messenger, Google, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, WhatsApp, TikTok and QQ. Learners are constantly distracted by these social media applications in which they are required to provide instant feedback to questions, comments, suggestions and queries from friends, family and peers. Attending to such demands takes a lot of valuable resources, time and energy away from basic learning, reading and writing in typical classroom situations. Learners

who use these social media platforms are constantly unable to focus and pay attention to teachers in classrooms. At home, such learners devote a lot of time and energy to social media platforms at the expense of doing their homework and preparing themselves adequately for lessons of the next day.

Chijioke and Nwala (2021) have shown that the basic writing skills of pupils and students who are adversely affected by the use of social media and networking. The authors have argued that teachers, parents and guardians have a duty to encourage and support children, pupils and students to spend enough time on reading books and writing English properly. The authors have shown that such support has made a significant difference in the writing skills of children, pupils and students. Shao, Shi and Zhang (2021) have shown that excessive social media activities are quite harmful to little children, pupils and students in all parts of the world. According to the authors, parents and educators have a duty to educate and mentor learners about abuses arising from the excessive use of internet based social media activities and abuses such as bullying and the wastage of valuable time and money.

Chan, Lee and Chen (2021) have shown that learners who are associated with excessive use of social media and the internet are distracted from basic writing skills and methods that are recommended for the proper use of the English language. Writing the English language properly requires the ability to use proper English language grammar and syllables. Based on a study conducted in the Philippines, Esman, Madrigal and Mascunana (2021) have shown that social media exposure, cellphones, gadgets and computer games distract public high school students from the task of writing English properly. The authors have shown that high school students spend a lot of time on social media platforms, and disregard basic English grammar rules while exchanging text messages in order to save time and cost. The key finding of the authors is that while social media platforms are valuable for communication, the use of social media platforms and applications must be strictly monitored and guided.

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Carmi, Yates, Lockley and Pawluczuk (2020) have shown that academic writing skills among learners in high schools and universities are affected significantly and adversely by excessive social media activities. The authors have pointed out that learners often take shortcuts in school writing activities, and that shortcuts and abbreviations that are commonly used on social networks often result in poor written language. The authors have also found that text-shortcuts and abbreviations are increasingly being used in formal written language. The aim of study is to assess and evaluate the degree to which the writing skill of high school learners at Tshwane North District (TND) is adversely affected by excessive use of social media networks.

Studies conducted by Minnaar and Heystek (2013) have found that there was a dire need for intervention in South African public schools in terms of leadership. The author clarified that lack of school level leadership had resulted to failure in the mastery of mathematics and science subjects in almost all South African public schools. This was one of very few studies in which the quality of teaching was assessed by collecting data from educators working in Tshwane North District public schools. The aim of study was to test the relevance and veracity of the theory proposed by Keles, McCrae and Grealish (2020) in which the authors advised that the use of social media by pupils should be strictly monitored by parents and teachers so that pupils develop and master proper language writing skills. The study had the potential for identifying and quantifying key factors that exacerbate the excessive use of social media among pupils in Tshwane North District public schools.

Objective of study

The purpose of study was to find out whether or not excessive social media participation adversely affects the ability of learners in secondary schools to master proper writing and reading skills in Tshwane North District public schools. The study had the following specific objectives:

- To assess and evaluate the perception held by educators about the relationship between excessive participation in social media activities and the writing and reading skills of learners in Tshwane North District public schools; and
- To identify factors that undermine the quality of education in Tshwane North District public schools.

Literature review

According to Chan, Lee and Chen (2021), social networking has brought people together regardless of geographical boundaries. The authors have pointed out that excessive use of social media has become harmful to young learners and leads to failure to master proper writing skills in the English language. The authors have further stated that social media activities have a negative effect on basic academic and scientific learning and writing skills. The study conducted by Adawiah and Rachmawati (2021) has shown that academic writing skills among learners in high schools and universities are affected significantly and adversely by social media activities. The authors have pointed out that learners often take shortcuts in school writing activities, and that shortcuts and abbreviations that are commonly used on social networks often result in poor written language. The authors have also found that text-shortcuts and abbreviations are increasingly being used in formal written language. The aim of study is to assess and evaluate the degree to which the writing skill of high school learners at Tshwane North District is adversely affected by social media experience.

According to Shao, Shi and Zhang (2021), more learners use mobile phones these days, and that they have immersed themselves in social networking activities. Learners are often seen to be quite busy working on their phones and laptops at Wi-Fi hotspots. The authors have shown that pupils often spend a lot of valuable time working on social media networks at the expense of mastering proper English language writing skills. Often, young pupils get distracted from practical writing lessons in class due to

excessive use of social media. Pupils often spend a lot of valuable learning and studying time with their faces glued to screens, continuously sending and receiving text messages at the expense of mastering proper writing skills. Tadros, Hutcherson and Greene (2021) have shown that the use of social media by pupils needs to be monitored by parents and educators alike strictly. Excessive use of social media by pupils is quite detrimental to pupils. Although communicating on social media systems allows users to send and receive messages from handheld, digital mobile phones, or from a computer to a mobile phone, excessive use of social media by pupils often results in distraction from the need to master proper writing skills in classrooms by paying full attention to teachers. Verheijen, Spooen and van Kemenade (2020) have pointed out that providing learners with free access to the internet prompts them to spend considerable time chatting and updating their social media pages. By so doing, they often ignore essential reading and writing exercises. According to Magness (2020), learners usually make use of social networks for personal use, and not for educational purposes.

Jacob and Lawan (2020) have shown that the reason why most learners use text messages is that it is quick, does not adhere to the rules of English grammar, is relatively cheap, more convenient, and allows creativity. Linguistic traditionalists worry that the use of informal written language will lessen the ability of learners to write correct English sentences and harm their ability to spell out phrases accurately. The authors have shown that little children and pupils alike must be supported adequately by their parents and teachers so that they master basic writing and academic skills that are essential for success at the level of primary schools.

According to Cunliffe-Jones (2020), the language used on social media sites does not observe grammatical and syntactic rules. As such, users often fail to communicate clearly and

effectively. This makes it difficult for educators to understand what is written by social media users. Wanniarachchi, Mathrani, Susnjak and Scogings (2020) have shown that communicating on social media sites involves taking immediate turns talking. According to Lipschultz (2020), learners are more interested in transferring information and less concerned about accurate spelling, proper use of grammar and punctuation. According to Healy and Mulholland (2019), excessive use of social media among pupils has the potential for distracting pupils from the discipline and commitment required to master proper writing skills in English. The authors have shown the need for a strict control by parents and teachers.

According to Esman, Madrigal and Mascunana (2021), there is a high addiction rate among social media users. Extensive use of social media takes up valuable studying time. It also abuses designated study time, and makes it difficult for learners to read and write properly. The authors have reported that there was a drop in the grades obtained by learners when they began participating in social networks regularly.

Moodie (2020) has reported that people communicating through social media platforms often use short sentences and abbreviations, and fail to use proper punctuations and capitalisations. This is done in order to speed up the pace of communication. According to Chijioke and Nwala (2021), most of the wordings are being reduced or substituted by symbols, words with a single letter or digits. The authors have stated that symbol are often used to represent human facial expressions. Some of those include: ☺ which indicates a smile, ☹ which indicates sadness, 4 for 'for or four', bcz for 'because' and short sentences like how r u?

Van Schalkwyk, Mouton, Redelinghuys and McKenna (2020) have shown that educators and parents often express concern that the writing and reading skills of their children are being sacrificed due to the demands of social networking. Celik (2020) has shown that social

networking is not bad, and that what is bad is the misuse of abbreviations, punctuation, and non-standard expressions and spellings. Such a failure has had a negative impact on the basic writing and reading skills of learners. Pai and Alathur (2020) have argued that language proficiency consists of the ability to read, write with comprehension, observing grammatical, syntactic as well as semantic rules governing the proper use of language.

Manivannan, Jogalekar, Kavitha, Maran and Gangadaran (2021) have shown that the closure of schools for various reasons often results in the loss of valuable teaching time and morale among learners and teachers alike. Interruption in the learning process leads to loss of discipline and morale among pupils. Zengele (2013) has shown that strike actions result in undesirable outcomes that include a high dropout rate of learners at the expense of the rights of learners to education and quality education. Sekhaulelo (2021) has shown that the high dropout rate among black learners in South Africa is attributed to strike actions, lack of good leadership and lack of accountability to learners. Trade unions often consume a portion of the budget allocated for teaching and learning. Curriculum change is not the only source of dropout from schools. Teacher unions also contribute in many ways to the loss of teaching days. Atteh, Assan-Donkoh, Mensah, Boadi, Badzi and Lawer (2020) have shown that teachers who are more unionised and more militant are working at the poorest schools and the quality of the teachers is of lower quality. There is always a spill over effect for the striking teachers. The effect will be the same for TND striking teachers. Findings by Willis (2015) show that less privileged schools are most affected by strike actions.

He, Huang, Li, Zhou and Li (2020) have shown the harmful nature of strike actions by teachers and learners, absenteeism and lack of punctuality to the proper education of learners who need to master written English. Strike actions deny learners the opportunity to be educated by their teachers. Strike actions deny learners the opportunity to read and write

English properly in public schools. Ndofirepi, Farinloye and Mogaji (2020) have shown that the quality of education in South African public schools is undermined due to strike actions, lack of good leadership, political interference, lack of accountability, and uncontrolled behaviour and lack of discipline by trade union leaders and student representatives. Kenway and Epstein (2021) have shown that graduates of South African public schools often lack competencies in English grammar and syllables due to interruptions in teaching and learning activities. The authors have argued that good leadership and accountability are needed to protect the right of learners to be educated with minimal interruption to the teaching curriculum.

Methods and materials of study

The response variable of study (Y) measures the ability to write English properly based on the criteria defined by Huhta, Alanen, Tarnanen, Martin and Hirvela (2014).

$$Y = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if English writing skill is inadequate} \\ 2 & \text{if English writing skill is adequate} \end{cases}$$

The independent variables of study are socioeconomic factors that affect the quality of education provided to learners who attend public schools in Tshwane North District (TND). Data was collected on 95 factors that are known to affect the writing skills of learners and the quality of education. Examples of such variables are gender, age, highest level of formal education, employment status, duration of employment, degree of job satisfaction, preparation and updating of lesson plans, participation in tutoring and mentoring learners, interaction with parents and pupils, the availability of teaching materials needed for teaching in class, the availability of laboratory equipment needed for teaching, perception on degree of support from the school leadership, access to training opportunities, the provision of work-related incentives, punctuality at work,

personal neatness, the degree of job satisfaction, the degree of pride taken in the profession of teaching, and the like.

The analyses of data sets was performed by using univariate methods of data analyses (frequency tables), graphical methods such as pie charts and bar charts, bivariate methods of data analyses (Sheskin, 2020) such as Pearson's two-by-two tests of associations and multivariate methods of data analyses such as ordered probit and logit regression analysis (Giri, 2019).

Data was collected on a 96 socioeconomic factors that affect the ability of school level learners to write English accurately with proper grammar and syllables based on the criteria defined by Huhta, Alanen, Tarnanen, Martin and Hirvela (2014). Examples of such variables are gender, age, highest level of formal education, employment status, duration of employment, degree of job satisfaction, preparation and updating of lesson plans, participation in tutoring and mentoring learners, interaction with parents and pupils, the availability of teaching materials needed for teaching in class, the availability of laboratory equipment needed for teaching, perception on degree of support from the school leadership, access to training opportunities, the provision of work-related incentives, punctuality at work, personal neatness, the degree of job satisfaction and the degree of pride taken by teachers in the profession of teaching.

Results of data analyses

Table 1 shows the general characteristics of the 147 participants of study. The table shows that the writing skills of about 86% of the 147 participants of study were significantly affected by excessive use of social media by the standards of Huhta, Alanen, Tarnanen, Martin and Hirvela (2014). About 60% of respondents were male. All educators who took part in the study were South African. About 50% of respondents had worked in Tshwane North

District (TND) public schools for about 5 years at the time of data collection.

Table 1: General characteristics of respondents (n=147)

Variable of study	Frequency (Percentage)
Effect of use of social media on writing skills in English with proper grammar and syllables	Significant: 126 (85.71%) Insignificant: 21 (14.29%)
Gender of respondent	Male: 88 (59.86%) Female: 59 (40.14%)
Age category of respondent	21 to 30 years: 36 (24.49%) 31 to 40 years: 45 (30.61%) 41 to 50 years: 31 (21.09%) 51 years or more: 31 (21.09%)
Highest level of education of respondents	Grade 12 or less: 1 (0.68%) Post-matric certificate: 9 (6.12%) Diploma: 43 (29.25%) Bachelor's degree: 69 (46.94%) Honours degree: 14 (9.52%) Master's degree: 10 (6.80%) Doctoral degree or above: 1 (0.68%)
Duration of service as educator in years	5 years or less: 75 (51.02%) 6 to 10 years: 34 (23.13%) 11 to 15 years: 18 (12.24%) 16 to 20 years: 10 (6.80%) 21 years or more: 10 (6.80%)
Nationality of educator	South African: 147 (100.00%) Foreigner: 0 (0.00%)

Table 2 shows frequency counts and percentages for the extent to which educators take pride in the teacher's profession. About 91% of educators take pride in the teacher's profession. About 92% of educators feel appreciated enough as an educator. About 91% of educators feel adored as an educator. About 88% of educators feel that they are provided with enough

resources at the workplace so that they can do a good job. About 90% of educators do not feel stressed out in the course of their duties at schools. About 90% of educators uphold their values and guiding principles at all times. About 53% of respondents felt that they were being led by competent leaders at the workplace.

Table 2: Taking pride in the teacher's profession (n=147)

Variable of study	Frequency (Percentage)
Taking pride in the teacher's profession	Yes: 134 (91.16%) No: 13 (8.84%)
Feeling appreciated for work done as an educator	Yes: 135 (91.84%) No: 12 (8.16%)
Feeling adored for work done as an educator	Yes: 134 (91.16%) No: 13 (8.84%)

Enough resources are provided to educators at the workplace so that they can do a good job in their classrooms	Yes: 130 (88.44%) No: 17 (11.56%)
Educators are not stressed out in the course of their duties at school	Yes: 128 (89.80%) No: 15 (10.20%)
Educators uphold values and guiding principles at all times	Yes: 128 (89.80%) No: 15 (10.20%)
Educators are led by competent leaders at the workplace	Yes: 77 (52.38%) No: 70 (47.62%)

Table 3 shows frequency counts and percentages for the extent to which educators viewed their leaders at the workplace as objective leaders. About 73% of educators viewed their line function managers as objective leaders. About 44% of educators viewed their line function managers as considerate leaders. About 56% of educators viewed their fellow colleagues as good team players. About 91% of educators viewed their line function managers as honest

leaders with personal integrity. About 92% of educators viewed their line function managers as courageous leaders who take appropriate disciplinary action against underperforming subordinates. About 88% of educators viewed their line function managers as leaders who take decisions in the best interest of learners with no fear or favour at all times. About 52% of educators look for guidance from their line function managers at all times.

Table 3: Objective leadership at the workplace (n=147)

Variable of study	Frequency (Percentage)
Recognition of line function managers as objective leaders	Yes: 107 (72.79%) No: 40 (27.12%)
Recognition of line function managers as considerate leaders	Yes: 64 (43.54%) No: 83 (56.46%)
Recognition of educators as good team players	Yes: 83 (56.46%) No: 64 (43.54%)
Recognition of line function managers as honest leaders with personal integrity	Yes: 134 (91.16%) No: 13 (8.84%)
Recognition of line function managers as courageous leaders who take appropriate disciplinary action against underperforming subordinates	Yes: 135 (91.84%) No: 12 (8.16%)
Making decisions in the best interest of learners with no fear or favour at all times	Yes: 130 (88.44%) No: 17 (11.56%)
Looking for guidance from line function manager at all times	Yes: 77 (52.38%) No: 70 (47.62%)

Table 4 shows significant relationships among pairs of socioeconomic factors that affect the use of social media among pupils.

Table 4: Significant two-by-two associations (n=147)

Obstacles to writing English with proper grammar and syllables	Observed chi-square value	P-value
Spending too much time on social media platforms (social)	14.9039	0.0000
Failure to read library books frequently (library)	13.6572	0.0000
Poor degree of commitment to academic activities (academic)	11.3397	0.0000
Poor degree of motivation to work on home works (homework)	8.4088	0.0000
Failure to be punctual at school (punctuality)	6.5162	0.0000

The above table shows 5 obstacles to writing English with proper grammar and syllables. These 5 obstacles are spending too much time on social media platforms, failure to read library books frequently, poor degree of commitment to academic activities, poor degree of motivation to work on home works, and failure to be punctual at school. The results show that it is essential to closely support learners who require extra lessons, coaching, mentoring and strict supervision. This task requires commitment from both educators and parents according to similar research work done previously by Sampasa-Kanyinga, Chaput and Hamilton (2019).

Adawiah and Rachmawati (2021) have shown that parents have a duty to protect children from harmful online based activities such as social media platforms and dangerous games. The authors have argued that the privacy of children must be protected both at home and school by way of encouraging parents and teachers to play

an active role in their lives. The authors have shown that children must be taught how to use their time wisely both at home and at school. The authors have recommended strict disciplinary measures on learners who disobey guidelines and regulations in order to protect the rest of the class.

Saha (2019) has shown that public school teachers must be willing to pay the sacrifice necessary for providing extra support to slow learners. One key obstacle in this regard is distraction by social media activities and excessive communication based on text messages that use coded phrases and expressions. These days, learners enrolled in public schools are constantly exposed to the abuse of their learning and studying time due to social media activities. This vicious cycle needs to be broken by parents and teachers by closely monitoring the manner in which learners use their times at schools and at homes.

Table 5: Estimates from ordered logit analysis (n=147)

Variable of study	Odds Ratio	P-value	95% confidence interval of odds ratio
Spending too much time on social media platforms	3.21	0.001	(2.33, 4.59)
Failure to read library books frequently	2.78	0.005	(2.15, 4.11)
Poor degree of commitment to academic activities	2.66	0.005	(2.12, 4.07)

The results displayed in Table 5 show that the ability of learners to write proper English (the ability to write English with proper grammar and syllables) is undermined by three obstacles. These are spending too much time on social media platforms, failure to read library books frequently, and poor degree of commitment to academic activities. The results suggest that the use of social media must be strictly monitored by parents and educators so that learners pay due attention to proper writing skills in public schools. The study shows that it is essential to closely support learners who require extra lessons, coaching, mentoring and strict supervision. This task requires enough commitment and good leadership from public school principals, teachers working in public schools, members of School Governing Boards (SGBs), educators, parents, teacher unions, student leaders and community leaders. These findings are in line with previous findings reported in the literature by Modiba and Kekwaletswe (2020), Worku (2019), Motsodisa (2019), Mouton (2013), and He, Huang, Li, Zhou and Li (2020).

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