Developing Autonomy Through Student-Centered English Language Learning Process for Engineering Students. [1]

Desarrollo de la autonomía a través del proceso de aprendizaje del idioma inglés centrado en el estudiante para estudiantes de ingeniería.

Marian Lissett Olaya[2*]
Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, Colombia

Abstract

This article focuses on how the incorporation of autonomy into university students' learning process improves their English language performance. The participants of this study were 25 students of engineering programs in a public university. Data collection was done through observation, a survey, and a group interview. Two categories that emerged after the data analysis supported the main finding that technology-based activities can be conceived as a starting point for the incorporation of autonomous learning in the English language education at the university.

Key words: autonomous learning, language education, technology-based activities

Resumen

Este artículo está enfocado en como la incorporación de la autonomía en el proceso de aprendizaje de estudiantes universitarios mejoran su desempeño en el idioma inglés. Los participantes de este estudio fueron 25 estudiantes de los programas de ingeniería. Los procedimientos de recolección de datos fueron hechos a través de observación de clase, encuestas, y una entrevista grupal. Dos categorías que surgieron después del análisis de datos que sustentan los

resultados; las actividades basadas en tecnología pueden ser concebidas como el punto inicial de la incorporación del aprendizaje autónomo en la enseñanza de inglés en la educación superior.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje autónomo, educación de idiomas actividades basadas en tecnología.

Resumo

Este artigo está focado em como a incorporação da autonomia no processo de aprendizagem de estudantes universitários melhoram o seu desempenho no idioma inglês. Os participantes deste estudo foram 25 estudantes dos programas de engenharia. Os procedimentos de coleta de dados foram realizados através de observação de aula, enquetes, e uma entrevista grupal. Duas categorias que surgiram depois da análise de dados que sustentam os resultados; atividades baseadas em tecnologia podem ser concebidas como o ponto inicial da incorporação da aprendizagem autônoma no ensino de inglês na educação superior.

Palavras chave: aprendizagem autónoma, educação de idiomas atividades baseadas em tecnologia

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Introduction

Being able to learn independently has become imperative two or three decades ago because of the technological revolution with the desire of fostering autonomy, but it is not the only cause for it. Educators and trainers who are willing to explore autonomous learning courses often have questions about the skills needed to be an effective self-regulated learner because students today are more dynamic and spend many hours online or using social networks. A blended learning approach combines face to face classroom methods with computer-mediated activities to form an integrated instructional approach. According to Yigit, Koyun, Yuksel, and Cankaya (2014, p.808) "The term 'blended' has a broad meaning and it includes the integration of e-learning and traditional learning. The blend of these learning models depends on the online materials, the needs of the students, and the instructor requirements". There are established skills that students need to be familiarized with to be part of the student-centered learning approach, and one of the most important is setting their own learning goals. Unfortunately, many people have not learned how to decide what is important for their lives or their learning process, even how to select from different learning possibilities.

According to Long (as cited in Eslaminejad & Nakhaee, 2012, p. 41) "These individuals have become accustomed to having questions and problems identified for them and not developing the cognitive ability to engage themselves in problem identification and problem-solving. As a result, they may also have limited observational skills that inhibit their ability to determine what is important in their learning environment". This has been the case of Engineering students at a public university who do not see much importance of determining what is beneficial for them in their current living situation as students. Moreover, there are some cases when students are about to graduate and start their English courses because it is a requirement for job interviews.Therefore, some changes are required to develop these skills before a person becomes a successful autonomous learner; when we are working with students with little experience in autonomous learning, careful attention should be given to help them to select possible outcomes of their learning, and then encourage them to know what to choose from multiple attractive goals and why.

A successful self-regulated learner has an active role in their learning performance. "Self-regulated learners take on challenging tasks, practice their learning, develop a deep understanding of the learning material, and exert extra effort, which leads to academic

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success" (Perry, Phillips, & Hutchinson, 2006 as cited in Kan'an & Osman 2015, p. 791). Therefore, engineering students should develop the ability to identify their weaknesses and strengths as learners, to know if they can call up additional strategies of concentration, to know their ability to use a different approach, to know what is important in their learning environment, to know the importance of a given learning activity, to know when they need assistance, to have a realistic perception of their ability to achieve their learning goal and finally to show them they can easily become autonomous learners.

Justification

Teaching students to be responsible not only for their lives but also for their academic performance is an imperative task. In the case of language teachers, they encounter students in their classes with several personality differences, learning strategies and cultural domains which interfere with the learning process; therefore, educational programs must be reoriented or redesigned.

"in the classroom, there is practical implementation of an SCL approach that includes a number of following components: problem-based learning, group project work, student-centered active learning, resource-based learning, use of the case method, role plays, classroom workshops, group presentations, use of a web-conferencing environment, particularly in distance education, small group work that enables students to learn how to work in a team, in the process of which they identify and fill the gaps in their knowledge. They also stress the importance of involving students after the task is completed, making self-assessment comments, making peer-assessment feedback comments, suggesting self-assessment grades and negotiating self-assessment grades" (Marinko, Baužienė, Daniels, Gołębiowski, Hughes, & Rees, 2016 p.17).

It means, in higher education, especially English courses, which are not mandatory in the university, need some changes to involve students in a more interesting educational method to support their real needs based on their interests.

Engineering students in the context of this study are people who need orientation in self-motivation, self-regulation, and time management in their process of learning English. They are very motivated to the career they are studying but when they talk about the process of learning English the attitudes are totally different. It

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was evidenced during the project observation stage in which 74 % of the students did not know what they were good or bad at in terms of English, they did not know the kind of activities that facilitated their learning, and they were constantly complaining about their lack of time to focus on their English learning process.

A diagnostic survey was implemented to find out students' attitudes and perceptions about the English courses in the university and 74 % of students affirmed that they see 6 subjects per semester, which affects their grade average and they do not dedicate time for learning English because it does not affect their grade average.

On the other hand, 43% of students admitted English courses need reorientation in terms of including content related to their majors. Therefore, as it was mentioned before, one of the alternatives for the students to take part in making good decisions that shape their learning is their inclusion in a set of self-regulated technology-based learning activities that strengthen their skills and affirm their attitudes to the adaptation to the English courses. "Students need a sense that the education they are receiving and the activities they are completing will enable them to pursue the career they want or make other personal goals" (Herman, 2012, p. 372.).

The aim of the present study was to examine the role those student-centered learning activities might play in facilitating the English learning process to the busy Engineering students. Its purpose was to conduct students through a process to become more independent learners and aware of their own learning process in the course of improving their writing skills, so they could produce their own articles related to any research they are involved in. They were enrolled in the student-centered learning environment in which instructional materials were transferred electronically or through the Internet with the help of technology-based activities, social networks, Web 2.0 tools, and computer-related tools.

These conditions encouraged Engineering students to engage in their own knowledge construction by integrating new information into their English courses, and by associating and representing it in a meaningful way.

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Literature Review

Student-centered learning

Student-centered learning refers to the variety of activities that are oriented towards the student learning process to meet students' needs and interests. "The concept of student-centered learning is to bring the classroom and students to life. The teacher is considered a "guide on the side, assisting and guiding students to meet the goals that have been made by the students and the teacher" (Overby, 2011, p.109)

When student-centered activities are implemented, two behaviors are evidenced: the first autonomous behavior is when learners can select from a variety of activities that call up their attention and they present the results as they decide to. It shows that when they take responsibility for their own learning process the results are impressive. Eslaminejad & Nakhaee (2012, p.40), affirmed that a "self-directed learner is responsible for development of her/his learning skills and deciding when and how she/he going to learn. The benefits of self-directed learning include having a greater control over learning and an increase in self-concept, motivation, and sense of self-control"

The second behavior is centered on the students' desire for taking responsibility for their learning. Becoming autonomous learners is a continuous process and it involves different factors. First, the possibility to work collaboratively (Reeves, Herrington & Oliver, 2004, p. 53) believe that by being able to collaboratively solve authentic tasks online "the learning outcomes accomplished by these learners will be of the highest order, including improved problem-solving abilities, enhanced communication skills, continuing intellectual curiosity, and robust mental models of complex processes inherent to the performance contexts in which their new learning will be applied"; second, to reinforce other learning skills, Kim and Davies (2014, p.7) affirmed "The ultimate goals of student-centered learning are more closely related to the facilitation of higher-order thinking skills (i.e. comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of knowledge) rather than knowledge and recall of facts". And finally, a self-evaluation process, "Course objectives and learning goals will be clearly stated, and students will be taught to assess their own work and that of their peers by asking critical questions in a constructive manner" (Wright, 2011, p.95).

Consequently, the term student-centered involves many factors that help a young learner to take direction into their own learning performance. In the case of Engineering students in the university, the course was designed and presented to promote autonomous decisions

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based on their needs, and interests, and to encourage them to create a positive learning environment.

Learners' autonomy

Benson (2001, p.2) stated "the concept of autonomy is grounded in a natural tendency for learners to take control over their learning". It does not mean isolated work; instead, students control their decisions and work without any pressure. For the purposes of this project, autonomy was a crucial factor because students are teacher-dependent, and in many cases, students are not interested in the topic or the activities proposed. Engineering students in the context of this study need to foster their autonomy because they do not have much classroom contact time for English classes. Autonomy involves students in a range of activities that are an essential role in becoming professionals.

Rao (2016, p.5) established "Autonomous learning, based on the theoretical foundations of both humanism and constructivism, takes the effect on learners into account and encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning". Therefore, autonomy must be conceived as the routinized process (it is daily and continuous) in which learning is the result of the integration of self-sufficiency into their learning process. It means, if students participate in autonomous learning activities daily, the results will show independent, self-evaluator and responsible learners.

There are many benefits of the incorporation of autonomy into a learning process such as learning from the environment, learning from the experiences, and making mistakes. In the process of learning a language, autonomy reveals the ability to take responsibility of their own learning process, it means, to use strategies, methods or tools to foster their language proficiency. Fotiadou, Angelaki and Mavroidis (2017, p.97) mentioned "It is essential that the students have acquired studying strategies and habits that will enable them to define the learning steps and master their own learning". Therefore, teachers should encourage learners to build that knowledge and skills to fulfill the requirements of the autonomous learning process.

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Technology in language education

When learning a language, it is frequent to find different teaching styles; for that reason, it is important to have tools for teaching that impact all students learning process. Technology appears to be one of the latest tools to increase students' motivation through autonomous

learning processes because nowadays learners are more active and dynamic than before because of the use of technology. Costley (2014, p.2) stated, "Due to the large use of technology in the world in which we live, the use of technology in teaching and learning is essential if we are to make a lasting impact on how students learn". Thanks to the incorporation of technology and by changing students' learning attitudes and enhancing their self-confidence, students' performances are improved. The incorporation of technology has many benefits in the process of English language learning because learners become aware of what they are learning and can self-monitor their performance. New technology enables students to collect information and interact with resources, such as images and videos. Teachers can promote students' participation and their engagement in the class. In this study, blogs were the main technological tool used. It allowed learners to build their knowledge by past English language learning experiences that have influenced their English performance and for developing new ideas, for example: making decisions, fostering collaborative work and using the language in different situation and contexts. In addition, the use of blogs in language learning contributes to gaining cultural knowledge, provides opportunities to explore the target culture, and increases cultural awareness (Hauck, 2007).

Blogs

For the present study, I decided to use blogs to motivate students towards autonomous behaviors. The reason for choosing this tool is because students are willing to use technology on a daily basis and I want them to use it to foster their future professional development path. According to Tíscar (2015), "blogs are free virtual spaces thanks to which anyone can have access to them without having to pay anything" (p. 9). Vurdien (2013) argued that blogs and blogging are extensively explored by the researchers because they can be used for various pedagogical purposes, encourage learners to express their ideas, help teachers to ask their learners questions, and provide the opportunity for collaboration.

There are different advantages of using blogs not only because it is a technological tool but also because it shapes autonomous behaviors. Among the benefits, I can say that students are exposed to authentic reading and writing material and, using blogs increases the sense of working collaboratively. Blackstone, Spiri, and Naganuma (2007) argued "Within the scope of classroom-based blog activities, assignments can require the student blogger to communicate closely

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with a particular group of student bloggers. Moreover, the exchange can be almost instantaneous (during class time) or at the leisure of the student bloggers" (p. 2). By the incorporation of spontaneous and planned activities, blogging becomes an engaging communicative activity which fosters the use of English language in the classroom.

Research Design

Type of research

This research is a qualitative case study research which, according to Yin (as cited in Kohlbacher 2005, p.4), "[it] allows investigators to keep the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events". The need for this project arose from the aim to understand how autonomy would help Engineering students to foster their English language competences. For the purpose of this case study, three instruments were considered to analyze data, observation, interviews, and surveys. Once I had collected the information, I analyzed it and triangulated it to find common topics.

Data Collection Procedures

To develop this research and collect the data, three instruments were used; class observations, a survey for students, and a group interview. These instruments were valuable because I could collect information about students' perceptions, attitudes, and opinions towards the use of technology-based activities especially blogs and the way they see the concept of autonomy after being involved in that kind of learning process.

Class observation: According to Turnock and Gibson (2001), "Observation is a way of gathering data by watching behavior, events, or noting physical characteristics in their natural setting" (p.43). It was the first step to find out students' perceptions and needs about the English learning process at the university. It was a crucial factor because the idea to design an autonomous course was born from these observations. (See Appendix 1)

Survey: Fowler (2013, p.1) established that "the purpose of a survey is to produce statistics, that is, quantitative or numerical descriptors about some aspects of the study population". This instrument was designed to collect information, especially the interest in learning English and the perception of the autonomous course by Engineering students. (See Appendix 2)

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Group interview: Kelly (2003, p.50) stated that "group interviews are designed to elicit perceptions, information, attitudes and ideas from a group in which each participant possesses experiences with the phenomenon under study". It was implemented during and at the end of the course to find out students' attitudes and perceptions of the incorporation of autonomy in the English language teaching process (See Appendix 3)

Participant

The participants come from a public university which offers a variety of programs for the community. Sogamoso branch is characterized by the high quality of the Engineering majors. It means most of the students are students of Systems, Industrial, Electronic, Mining, and Geological Engineering. Engineering students and engineers have expressed long-term dissatisfaction with their English ability (Wattanasakunpusakon, 1996; Kittidhaworn, 2001). Besides, language teachers play an important role in teaching English to future engineers because of the challenges of the Engineering faculties in general; Ramírez, Borja and López (2018, p. 149) stated "This new teacher, in the Engineering context, must have the ability to investigate the reality, intervene in it, by proposing innovations and changes in the institutions that offer this kind of programs". With that in mind, the need for modifying the English courses in the university is determined by students' interests and expectations. The last two semesters students have asked the language institute which is in charge of the English course within the university, to offer other kind of syllabus and methodology that fulfills their needs as future engineers. It seems that courses offered to these students have serious problems considering their specific needs.

The participants of the project have said they need more technical vocabulary to be able to keep a conversation or do a job interview and most of them have said they must be able to write articles about research they always do as a daily process in their subject' matters. According to Shrestha, Pahari, and Awasthi (2016):

> "In the field of Engineering education also, the English language is being used as a common means of communication all over the world whether it is for acquiring knowledge from books or publishing their research reports, or for giving oral presentations or for presenting papers at the seminars and conferences" (p.182)

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In this sense, the ability to communicate in formal and informal contexts is essential for the education of engineers. I consider that the incorporation of dynamic English activities plays an imperative role in the professional development of future engineers. However, one of the weaknesses was the lack of motivation when this project was implemented.

Another important issue is time; these students spend much time doing lab work and internships, and they are enrolled in projects which need many hours of effort. For that reason, they do not attend English courses regularly, their reason is that an English course does not affect their average grade, it is just a requirement and they need time to focus just on their core subjects. It has been a great concern in the university because students are unmotivated, they do not see English as a subject as important as the others.

For that reason, I chose a group of 25 Engineering students who accepted to enroll in an autonomous and blended English learning process. A blended approach instead of a traditional face to face course means that the class meets once per week instead of the usual three-session format. Learning activities in class can be used to encourage students to ask questions, clear up doubts and reinforce the communication with the rest of the class. Blended learning also allows education 24/7; it reaches a bigger number of learners; and it ensures a learning environment which is independent of time and places (Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2004). Based on that, the best way of meeting the challenges of tailoring learning and development to the needs of Engineering students was by integrating the innovative and technological advances offered by online learning with the interaction and participation presented in the best of traditional learning that served to fulfil their needs. Maguire (2005) stated that "In order to meet the requests of the various types of students who prefer to attend courses via distance learning, either for convenience, preference of learning style, etc., higher education administrators must find ways to motivate and support faculty in their development and teaching of online courses and programs" (p.6).

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Pedagogical Intervention

A variety of technology-based-activities were designed with the purpose of involving students in a process in which they must be responsible for their learning process taking into account instructions for the outcomes they are expected to do, especially, blogs.

Writing lab reports was the central skill. White and Arndt (as cited in Alves, 2008, p. 5) viewed:

"writing as a form of problem-solving which involves such processes as generating ideas, discovering a 'voice' with which to write, planning, goal-setting, monitoring and evaluating what is going to be written as well as what has been written and searching for language with which to express exact meaning".

They suggest that producing a text involves six recursive ways. As it is a process, each stage was divided into three mandatory activities to become autonomous learners and succeed in writing scientific articles as a requirement of their majors. Engineering students must write a lab report considering the demands of scientific texts: Introduction, methods (hypothesis), and results.

During the implementation of the activities certain autonomous behaviors were taken into consideration. The behaviors were: Cooperating with partners, self-assessing their process of learning, defining clear goals and organizing learning processes. Doing a lab experiment involves the autonomous behaviors mentioned; learners must define their goals or objectives, students must work in cooperation with their partners, and finally, they have to evaluate their performance during the activity.

Syllabus design

The autonomous English course was designed based on the student -centered learning foundations and it was divided in three main stages to be implemented during the academic semester which has 16 working weeks. Table 1 shows a summary of the activities implemented.

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Table 1. Summary of activities implemented

Week	Activity
1	Assign task one
	Teaching how to create a blog
2	Peer check-list on task one
	To chat about doubts on the task
3	Talk about task one
	Group interview
4	Assign task two
	Doing lab experiments based on their majors and interest
5	Create a blog
6	Peer check-list
	Group discussion about task two
7	Assign task three
	Collaborative work to improve blogs
8	Group check-list
	Group discussion on task three
9	Oral presentation of lab experiments on the blog
10	Written lab report check list
	Visiting all the blogs of the group
11	Group interview
12	Self-assessment
13	Grouped assessment
14	Final feedback
15	Final group discussion

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Data Analysis and Results

As I mentioned before, the data of the three instruments were validated by doing content analysis. According to Babbie (2001, p.304), "content analysis can be defined as the study of recorded human communications". That analysis allowed me to determine similarities and differences in the information gathered and it finally revealed common codes that were transformed into two main categories. The first related to feelings, and attitudes toward English language learning through a self-directed model and the second related to the incorporation of technology, collaborative work and becoming an autonomous learner. The preliminary findings obtained during the process of analysis were classified as shown in *Figure 1*:
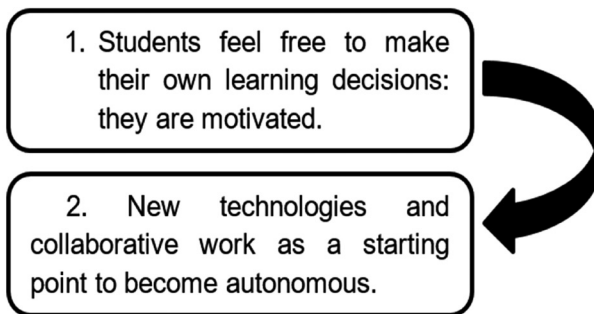
Figure 1. Categories that emerged after data analysis

Students feel free to make their own learning decisions: they are motivated.

While the project was implemented, students showed a positive attitude towards the incorporation of technology in their English learning process; during the interview one of the students said, "working online helped me because I did the activities when I was free and I wanted to practice English at home" (extracted from interview); it means they showed a significant responsibility towards their own learning process. Encouraging learners to make their own learning decisions also helps them to maximize their control of making good decisions. Pingxiao (2017, p. 357) said "Positive classroom environment can stimulate and maintain students' interest in learning, promote students' autonomous learning. The creation of classroom environment here is not only a physical environment suitable for students to study, but also a learning atmosphere suitable for students' autonomous learning".

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Some of the students said during the group interview:

- "I liked that kind of activities because I see the need of writing lab reports in the subjects of my career, if I see I need to write in English for my career, I will enjoy and take advantages of the English courses". (translated by the author)

Promoting learner autonomy is a vital factor of motivation because students do not have a language teacher available all the time; a language learner to be proficient in a foreign language needs someone who assists them at any time; for that reason, the incorporation of technology-based activities promoted opportunities for them to practice and self-evaluate.

In the group interview, student "D" argued:

- "The job interview helped me a lot because I could check my pronunciation mistakes and record the interview again; I will never forget that pronunciation".

Students who were never enrolled in this kind of English learning activities required a special support, in this sense; autonomy was reflected as a continuous adapting process. At the beginning, students did not know what to do or what activities really met their language needs. At this point, it is imperative to mention those language teachers need patience to transfer responsibility to the learners gradually.

The importance of learners' understanding the purpose of classroom activities is crucial when developing autonomy because they show their motivation to learn. They start seeing the importance of communication in another language for their future professional development. In terms of self-directed learning, Kan'an and Osman (2015, p.795) stated "rewarding for the students to be academically successful in not only science subjects, but also other subjects as well as be successful in the business of life". Another important issue is the need to practice in their own time not to complete any assignment but to reinforce the abilities acquired. It means that the incorporation of active learning activities must be conceived as a continuously engaging process.

Learning the language autonomously showed that students feel greater confidence when reporting their activities because they have given importance to their attitudes and capabilities for learning a language. These students have made an important step to their language development process, according to Froyd and Simpson (2008, p.3) "positive influences of student-centered learning approaches to teaching on academic performance, attitudes toward learning, and persistence in programs".

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From that perspective one student said during the interview that "I realized that I liked watching videos related to the topic more than reading, and the results are better".

New technologies and collaborative work as a starting point to become autonomous.

As I mentioned before, when the project was implemented; the autonomous learning behaviors considered were: first, learners chose from different set of activities based on their interests, it means that the activities let students choose the kind of activities of their preference. Second, students cooperate with their partners; the incorporation of technology-based activities gave students the opportunity to work with other students and evaluate their performance. Third, learners self-assess their process of learning; each student had the opportunity to evaluate their own results from a neutral perspective. Finally, students define clear goals, this behavior was shown at the final stage of the project because students set their objective and the activities they were going to present; this step was the final proposal designed by the students to improve their language level.

During the implementation of the project, students showed a good attitude toward the fact of changing the way language teachers at this university usually teach. Most of the students argued in the survey that autonomous activities improved their learning outcomes because they were free to do the activities they were interested in. The integration of technology in language education in the context of the study was quite challenging because it was time-consuming and kind of frustrating at the beginning. However, this kind of active environment encouraged students to learn when they were willing to, instead of going to a traditional class and sit for two or more hours just working on the mandatory English book.

The most important finding in this category is that students started to feel more confident about them; they could work collaboratively and develop a higher level of thinking skills. During the last class observation, a student said "it was clear that at the beginning the process is not as easy (as regular face-to-face classes) as I thought but the good thing was that I was excited because I love working on my computer, and during the process I found out I was good at creating conceptual maps and I enjoyed a lot watching the videos of my classmates on the web". student's comments allowed me to state that the incorporation of technology in a blended English course facilitated the learning of the English language in terms of a proper teaching context based

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on students' interests; the participation and interaction among the participants were also active and clear in the blogs.

Based on the experience of implementing this project, it can be said that students start being motivated to learn and use English in their daily activities. However, becoming a self-directed learner in the contexts of this public university requires time, effort, and support of administrators so students start being conscious of the need to speak another language.

Limitations of the study

In general terms, when I implemented the project based on the main constructs of autonomy, student-centered learning and technology-assisted strategies:

First, it became a limitation to control the effect and efficiency of technology because I could not know if students received any extra help or if they did all the activities on their own. To monitor and control students work at home, there should be more financial resources which are too difficult to obtain.

Second, when working online there is always a limitation because all the work depends on the type of connection students have. Some students in this public university do not have the best economic conditions which means, they do not have access to Internet. That issue was presented when the project was implemented, so some students had to stay in the university to accomplish the activities.

Conclusions

Working with a student-centered approach and the use of technology-based activities to foster autonomy in a blended course could be conceived as one of the many alternatives language teachers should bear in mind, so learners can construct an effective and a positive learning environment. From my personal point of view, I consider students need opportunities to learn English in an easy way. I want to highlight that this easy way means where they become motivated, responsible for their own learning process, and learn in more flexible time. Consequently, it is important to incorporate technology-based activities in Engineering students learning process to expand their possibilities to learn autonomously.

Overall, autonomy in language depends on the capacity of how critical learners can become and how process of self-reflection and independent work appears. In the case of Engineering students in the context of this study, the implementation of activities such as reports, interviews, and the teacher's comments let students understand autonomy as a social ability. They had the opportunity to interact with other students and the teacher to find information regarding the task assigned, to assess their performance, to participate in planning and designing the activities, to focus on learning cooperatively, and to learn how to learn to face future learning challenges.

Results also showed that language programs need to incorporate a different kind of instruction based on what students need, expect, and are good for. The use of technological tools such as blogs was suitable to help learners to take control of their own decisions based on their interests and needs as future engineers because all the activities allowed them to choose from real and authentic situations about their learning process.

The use of a student-centered approach encouraged students to self-regulate their learning process; they showed an improvement in the autonomous behaviors selected (cooperation with their partners, self-assessing their process of learning, defining clear goals, and organizing their learning process). Students had the opportunity to listen to their own videos, and to see how their writing improved. Collaborative work was helpful because students had the opportunity to share ideas, construct new knowledge based on their needs, past experiences, and interests. Self-assessing their learning process was supportive as it helped students to develop skills to become objective critics.

The findings of this project have implications on the role of the teachers and the implementation of different technology-based activities in their teaching practice. First, administrators should provide necessary support and facilitate the integration of technology; second, teachers should improve cooperative skills; and third, language should train in implementing technology-supported projects. It is also important to keep on researching about the building of blended courses for higher education.

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Author

*Marian Lissett Olaya holds a B.A in Foreign Languages from Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia. She also holds a M.A in English Language Teaching for Self-directed Learning from Universidad de La Sabana. She has been an English Language teacher for nine years in which she has gained a lot of experience teaching English for engineering programs. Her research experience is focused on how reflective teaching strategies fosters students' language learning. She is currently the coordinator of the International Language Institute in the city of Sogamoso. She is currently the coordinator of the International Language Institute of Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia.

Appendix 1.

Class observation checklist

Class observation criteria			
Autonomous behavior	**Always**	**Sometimes**	**Never**
Students look for materials or strategies to learn in a better way			
Students use internet to develop the tasks			
Students use internet to learn about their interests			
Students prefer to do the task by using internet that using text books			
Students showed a better attitude when choosing the topics of the tasks			
Students help their classmates when they do not understand			
Students develop their activities in a better way when their classmates help them			
Students give suggestions to their classmates to improve their tasks			
Students showed a good attitude when working with partners			
Students liked to received suggestions			

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Appendix 2.

Survey on Students´ attitudes and perceptions towards the English language courses

Questions	I agree	I somewhat agree	I don't agree
Do you like the new English language course?			
Do you enjoy working online?			
Do you prefer text books?			
Do you prefer working on activities of your selection or guided activities?			
Do you like helping to your classmates?			
Do you like receiving suggestions?			
When you finish an activity, you check it			
When I receive feedback, I correct the mistakes			
After I finish an activity, I think how it can be improved			
When I start a task, I know the goal			
When I finish an activity, I self-assess			
If I do not accomplish my goals, I do other activities to improve			
I follow a schedule to develop the activities			
I manage my time			
I set my goals before looking for some information online			

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Appendix 3.

Group interview questions

Do you like the new English language course? Why?

Do you prefer sitting in a traditional language class or being enrolled in a blended course? Why?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of this blended course?

Did you like working with colleagues? Why?

What criteria did you use to choose from the variety of activities?

How did you set your own goals? Explain

What criteria did you use to do the self-evaluation?

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Impact of Social Media on the English Language Writing Abilities of Undergraduates in Ekpoma, Nigeria[1]

El Impacto de las Redes Sociales en las Habilidades de Redacción en Inglés de Estudiantes Universitarios en Ekpoma, Nigeria

Osakue Stevenson Omoera, Oluranti Mary Aiwuyo,
John Edemode and Bibian Anyanwu[2]
Ambrose Alli University, Nigeria

Abstract

This article examined the impact of social media on the writing abilities of Nigerian youths in English, which is the language of mass communication in Nigeria. Deploying cultivation theory of the media, this study used quantitative and qualitative methods to unpack the Nigerian youths' opinions on the impact of the use of social media on their writing abilities, using undergraduates in Ekpoma, Nigeria as a study case. To do this, data was collected through the use of 110 copies of a survey questionnaire administered to selected students. Additional information was garnered from focused group discussions (FGDs) with students and in-depth interviews (IDIs) with some tertiary institutions' lecturers as well as the researchers' direct observation of the issue under investigation. The study discovered that a majority of the youths adopt a certain option/brand of English which cannot be located within the matrix of Standard English (SE) or even popular Nigerian English variant which is called Pidgin English (PE). Consequently, expressions such as 'u' for 'you' 'gr8t' for 'great', 'ur/urs' for 'your/yours', among other deviational patterns, have crept into their writing consciousness in classes and examinations, which make a lot of 'sense' in informal settings among the youths, but smacks of sub-literacy in formal

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writing situations under which they are being trained. This development can have serious implications for effective and efficient writing among Nigerian youths, especially in formal situations. The study recommends, amongst others, that further studies should be carried out on the deviational patterns of English words and phrases which are commonly used by youths in Nigeria and elsewhere, with a view to possibly getting the 'new words' standardized by the relevant educational authorities to ensure uniformity in usage, and to keep pace with the dynamically trendy social media culture.

Keywords: Social media, English language in Nigeria, Writing skills, Nigerian undergraduates, Cultivation theory, Educational authorities

Resumen

Este artículo examina el impacto de las redes sociales en las habilidades escritas en jóvenes nigerianos en el uso de inglés en el que el idioma es usado como comunicación masiva en Nigeria. Desplegando la teoría del cultivo de los medios, este estudio usó métodos cuantitativos y cualitativos para descomprimir las opiniones de los jóvenes nigerianos sobre el impacto del uso de redes sociales en sus habilidades escritas, usando a estudiantes universitarios en Ekpoma, Nigeria como un estudio de caso. Para realizar esto, los datos se recopilaron a través del uso de 110 copias de una encuesta administrada para seleccionar estudiantes. Información adicional se obtuvo de discusiones grupales enfocadas (DGE) con estudiantes y una entrevista exhaustiva a profesores de instituciones terciarias. También se tomó en cuenta la observación directa de los investigadores sobre el tema de interés. El estudio descubrió que la mayoría de los jóvenes adoptan una determinada opción de inglés el cual no se puede ubicar dentro de la matriz de inglés estándar ni la variación popular de inglés nigeriano llamado inglés Pidgin (PE). Por consiguiente, las expresiones tales como "u" para "you", "gr8t" para "great", "ur/urs" para "your/yours" entre otros patrones de desviación, se han colado en su conciencia de escritura en clases y exámenes, lo que da mucho "sentido" en contextos informales entre los jóvenes, pero da a entender una sub- alfabetización en contextos formales de escritura en el cual están siendo entrenados. Este desarrollo puede tener serias implicaciones para la escritura eficiente y efectiva entre los jóvenes nigerianos, especialmente en contextos formales. El estudio recomienda que estudios adicionales sea realizados sobre los patrones de desviación de las palabras y frases en inglés que son usadas comúnmente por los jóvenes nigerianos y en otras partes con la opción de posiblemente obtener "nuevas palabras" estandarizadas por las autoridades relevantes educativas y así asegurar uniformidad en su uso y para seguir el ritmo de la cultura de las redes sociales dinámicamente de moda.

Palabras clave: redes sociales, inglés en Nigeria, habilidades para la escritura

Resumo

Este artigo examina o impacto das redes sociais nas habilidades escritas em jovens nigerianos no uso de inglês no qual o idioma é usado como comunicação massiva na Nigéria. Desdobrando a teoria do cultivo da mídia, este estudo usou métodos quantitativos e qualitativos para descomprimir as opiniões dos jovens nigerianos sobre o impacto do uso de redes sociais em suas habilidades escritas, usando a estudantes universitários em Ekpoma, Nigéria como um estudo de caso. Para realizar isto, os dados se recopilaram através do uso de 110 cópias de uma enquete administrada para selecionar estudantes. Informação adicional se obteve de discussões grupais enfocadas (DGE) com estudantes e uma entrevista exaustiva a professores de instituições terciárias. Também se teve em consideração a observação direta dos pesquisadores sobre o tema de interesse. O estudo descobriu que a maioria dos jovens adota uma determinada opção de inglês, o qual não se pode situar dentro da matriz de inglês padrão nem a variação popular de inglês nigeriano chamado inglês Pidgin (PE). Em consequência, as expressões tais como "u" para "you", "gr8t" para "great", "ur/urs" para "your/yours" entre outros padrões de desvio, infiltraram-se consciência de escritura em aulas e exames, o que dá muito "sentido" em contextos informais entre os jovens, mas dá a entender uma sub-alfabetização em contextos formais de escritura na qual estão sendo treinados. Este desenvolvimento pode ter sérias implicações para a escritura eficiente e efetiva entre os jovens nigerianos, especialmente em contextos formais. O estudo recomenda que estudos adicionais sejam realizados sobre os padrões de desvio das palavras e frases em inglês que são usadas com frequência pelos jovens nigerianos, e em outros lugares com a opção de possivelmente obter "novas palavras" padronizadas pelas autoridades relevantes educativas e dessa forma assegurar uniformidade no seu uso, e para seguir o ritmo da cultura das redes sociais dinamicamente de moda.

Palavras chave: redes sociais, inglês na Nigéria, habilidades para a escritura, estudantes universitários, teoria de cultivo, autoridades educativas.

Introduction

Millions of people around the globe, including Nigerian youths, through social networking are building online local, regional, and global communities to communicate their shared interests and activities, disseminate information, learn and interact through a variety of web-based tools. There appears to be an adversative streak to this publicized social media among Nigerian youths, with regard to their writing abilities in Standard English, which is the language of mass communication in Nigeria. While the mass media and the new media are powerful communication systems that are arguably meeting most of contemporary society's communication and information needs (Meribe, 2015), there appears to be some issues in terms of their impacts on human populations, especially the youth which deserve scholarly attention. This, perhaps, explains why Eggermont and Roe (2014) argue that "recent developments in digital communication have fundamentally affected the research agenda in the field as witnessed by the huge groundswell of studies addressing a broad spectrum of issues from the risks associated with the social media...." Social media is quickly arising as a new, popular form of media. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn are some examples of an inordinate number of social media services that are loved and used by people of all walks of life for various purposes such as sharing news, expressing opinions, documenting thoughts, launching political campaigns, maintaining and developing friendships or professional connection courtesy of Web 2.0 technologies.

Okoro, Diri, and Odii (2013) affirm that "Web 2.0 features enable consumers or ordinary people to publish their own websites or weblogs, or feed content into the mainstream media among many other features." Indeed, the Web 2.0 on which the 'citizen journalism,' 'I-report,' 'global instant message,' 'short message service' (SMS), among other phenomenal operations are based has some peculiar features. Campbell, Martin and Fabos (2007) point out that "some of the characteristics often noted as descriptive of Web 2.0 include blogging, RSS-generated syndication, social networking sites like YouTube, Facebook, mash-ups, wikis like Wikipedia and other collaborative applications and interactive encyclopedias and dictionaries…." Without a doubt, the world would continue to experience globalisation and technological innovations, with social networking sites (social media) becoming the chief communication tools to everyone, including the learning youths. The social media, with the help of Web 2.0 technologies, have enabled citizens to be active participants in the processes of news gathering and distribution (Okoro, Diri, & Odii, 2013). Some

key characteristics of social media include low entry barrier, instant updates, instant gratification, and a large numbers of friends, free entry, and anonymity. The last two properties make people comfortable to become users but also make social media vulnerable to activities of ill intentions where all kinds of persons can do whatever they like without fear of being caught, arrested or prosecuted for real and unreal offences committed. The multiplicity of these platforms and the accessibility that growing populations around the world, including Nigeria seems to have implications on their writing abilities.

Apart from the varying types of social media platforms (SMPs) of the internet, namely, Facebook, Twitter, RSS, My Space, Skype, 2go, WhatsApp, Yahoo, etc., that Okhakhu and Omoera (2010); Oyedele (2015); and Ehiemua and Omoera (2015) earlier identified, we have several other kinds of SMPs or networks such as Wer-kennt-wen, Sonico, Tumblr, Telegram, Instagram, Badoo, Friendster, Mixi, StudiVZ, Orkut, Hi5, Tagged, Google+, WordPress, BlogSpot, WeChat, and Sina Weibo today, with huge following and use among youths. While some of these social media networks could be said to be really emerging (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.), others appear to be receding (e.g., MySpace, 2go, etc.) and it has been argued that "social media have done as much as harm as good to the peace and stability of the world" (personal communication with Kingsley Ehiemua, a literary technician and social media commentator on 22 December, 2017 in Ekpoma). This is consistent with the earlier observation of Freeborn Odiboh who argued that "some posts seen on social media spaces do not do credit to the writing ability or expressional capacity of those who send them to the media space. The dent or damage that such errors do to the perception by others; and image of the writer of such posts with grammatically skewed structure is incalculable" (Prof Freeborn Odiboh 9 July 2015 on his Facebook page).

The foregoing remark, to a large extent, captures the use of English (in school) in a non-native speaker (NNS) context such as Nigeria, which is fraught with many issues. Interestingly, the native speaker (NS) situation also leaves much to be desired. Humphreys (2007) while looking at the United Kingdom experience on what he calls "…How texting is wrecking our language," notes that:

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> It began with some fairly obvious and relatively inoffensive abbreviations: 'tks' for 'thanks'; 'u' for 'you'; 4 for 'for'. But as it has developed its users have sought out increasingly obscure ways of expressing themselves which, when you think about it, entirely defeats the purpose. If the recipient of the message has to spend ten minutes trying to translate it, those precious minutes

are being wasted. And isn't the whole point to 'save' time? …
Then there's the problem of ambiguity. With my vast knowledge
of text language, I had assumed LOL meant 'lots of love', but
now I discover it means 'laugh out loud'. Or at least it did the last
time I asked.

In today's Nigeria, the youth population, especially undergraduates
in universities are head over heels with these social media websites and
platforms because by simply acquiring smart phones they are almost
instantly catapulted into the virtual world where they can do whatever
they like in whatever language they like too. This development appears
to have had ripple effects on their educational activities if the reports
from various examining bodies in the country are anything to go by.
In the *National Mirror* of 16 Nov 2015, poor command of English,
and spelling errors were linked to the mass failure of Nigerian
students in WAEC exams in recent times. Abimbola Adegboye, an
English language lecturer at Samuel Adegboyega University, Ogwa
(personal communication in 2017) agreed that this situation may not
be unconnected with the fact that a growing number of these students
spend hours daily on social network sites where they use 'special
forms' of English to communicate among themselves. Her position
is consistent with the outcome of the study carried out by Ravhuhali,
Baloyi, Mutshaeni & Mashau (2015), which claims that learners are
addicted to social networking and that social networking is disturbing
them when studying since they spend most of their time chatting to
friends.

However, Ekundayo (2014) argues that the methods of SMS
and e-mail will not ruin effective communication in English. Rather,
the methods display a new interesting variety according to a "techno-
linguistic" dimension. This variety refers to the creative redeployment
of extant language rules and items as constrained by the dynamics of
technological or mechanical devices, which should be isolated and
taught as such in Standard English, or Educated Nigerian English in
this case. Accordingly, he conceptualizes this habit as the intraference
of linguistic symbols and rules (Ekundayo, 2014). Other scholars such
as Crystal (2009) and Eco (2002) have previously noted this possibility.
Nonetheless, while examining the influence of social media on the
sociology of youth behaviour, Crystal (2009) argues that no other
linguistic phenomenon has generated the amount of curiosity, fear,
suspicion, confusion, fascination, excitement, and antagonism that
texting on SMPs has aroused in a very short space of time, yet very
little reliable information is available on it. It is this noticeable gap in
scholarship that this article seeks to fill, with specific reference to the

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impact of the use of social media on the writing abilities of Nigerian undergraduates in English language.

Research Questions

Do students use coinages and shortened forms of English words to communicate on social media networks?

Do undergraduates use social media coinages and shortened forms of English words in writing term papers, assignments and communicating with their colleagues or other students about their course work?

Does the use of social media coinages and shortened forms of English words by undergraduates have effects on their writing or spelling abilities?

Theoretical Grounding

We have elected to use a social theory called the cultivation theory (also known as cultivation analysis or cultivation hypothesis), which was originally put forward by Gerbner (1973) to foreground the examination of the impact of social media on the writing abilities of Nigerian youths in English language, using undergraduates in Ekpoma, Nigeria as a basis of analysis and discussion. Although cultivation theory (CT) has been revised and updated severally by different communication and media scholars, its kernel still remains: a broad theory of the overall cumulative influence of the media on audiences (Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan, 1980; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2012; Russell, Russell, Boland, & Grube, 2014). It is on this intellectual nub that this work is anchored.

It does appear that communicative ease facilitated by digitization and conveyed through the new media (social media) has somewhat further extended the 'freedom' of communication in different directions in contemporary world. Habitual users of the social media, as represented in this study, have created and are advancing the use of new, shortened linguistic and other forms of writing for older and more conventional writing. For example, 'U' for you, 'Ur' for your, 'C' for see, and 'D' for the, are gaining widespread usage and some extent of acceptability among younger populations, especially undergraduate students in Nigerian universities. There is thus an emergent transfer of novel and unconventional writing style to the formal context by these students as a consequence of their use of social media.

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Within the broader concerns of media effects, the emphasis has always, for obvious reasons, been on mainstream print and broadcast media. Comstock, Chaffe, Katzman, McCombs and Roberts (1978); Russell, Russell, Boland, & Grube (2014) have hypothesised concerning consistent viewer exposure to violent television content with a corresponding behaviour in real life. A consistent finding is that heavy cumulative exposure to media messages shapes viewers' concept of reality, attitudes, and behaviour. In the same vein, Gerbner (1973); Signorelli and Morgan (1990); Morgan & Shanahan (2010); Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli (2012) have put forward the media cultivation hypothesis whose kernel is that audience exposure over time to specific media perspective or point of view (POV) has the potential of making such audience appropriate the media perspective or POV or tendency in everyday living or activities.

One of the main tenets of the CT is that television and media cultivate the status quo, they do not challenge it. Oftentimes, the viewers or users are unaware of the extent to which they absorb media message(s), many times viewing themselves as moderate viewers or users when, in fact, they are heavy viewers or users who are likely to adopt whatever they are exposed to in the media (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli & Jackson-Beeck, 1979; Miller, 2005; Russell, Russell, Boland, & Grube, 2014). It is in this connection that this study is anchored on the media cultivation theory, albeit with a slight departure from the position of Comstock, Chaffe, Katzman, McCombs and Roberts (1978); Russell, Russell, Boland, & Grube (2014). Even though it is recognised that deviational patterns of writing in English by some Nigerian youths on social media platforms (SMPs) could be disruptive in some way, we are essentially focused on a non-violent consequence of media exposure.

Social Media and its Impact on Contemporary Youth Populations

Globally, studies have been carried out on the impact of social media. Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich (2013) report that a survey of teachers who instruct American middle and high school students finds that digital technologies are impacting student writing in myriad ways and there are significant advantages from tech-based learning. Some 78% of the 2,462 advanced placement (AP) and National Writing Project (NWP) teachers surveyed by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project say digital tools such as the internet, social media, and cell phones "encourage student creativity and personal expression." In addition, 96% agree that digital technologies "allow students to share

their work with a wider and more varied audience" while 79% agree that these tools "encourage greater collaboration among students." According to the teachers, students' exposure to a broader audience for their work and more feedback from peers encourages greater student investment in what they write and in the writing process as a whole (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Robinson, Callahan, Boyle, Rivera and Cho (2017) affirm that social media as a fairly recent major technological revolution has altered the way humans communicate and share information and outlined four different social media platforms that are popular among people to include Facebook, Twitter, Blogs and client hosted forums. They further noted that just as the case in most countries, young adults form the bulk of users on social media networks. Perhaps, this explains why the pervasive use of multiple technological tools (i.e., TV sets, laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc.) to engage with media; and political content has deeply altered the way citizens around the world consume information and discuss public affair issues, even as findings reveal that young people tend to second screen more than older counterparts (Gil de Zúñiga & Liu, 2017). This position, though in a slightly different context, shows that digital tools, particularly social media, play a central role in the lives and education of young people in most contemporary societies.

Imade, Elogie and Ikenwe (2016) examined the influence of social media utilisation and addiction on self-perception of undergraduate students at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. The study, which adopted the survey method of ex-post-facto design, found that self-perception had a significant positive relation to social media utilisation just as social media addiction was found to relatively contribute significantly to self-perception of undergraduate students. Ehiemua insisted that social media appears to be a mixed bag, a potpourri of 'the good, the bad and the ugly' in Nigeria and elsewhere (personal communication, 2017). Apart from being the fastest means of disseminating information and peddling unfounded and fake news (fastest rumour mills); they serve as predatory sites for paedophiles, sexual perverts and the like. Curiously, the good sides are also legion. For instance, the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration (NAFDAC) recently acknowledged that the social media in Nigeria helped the organization in tracking the imported Garri – cassava flour - illegally brought into Nigeria from India without the approval of NAFDAC, one of Nigeria's food regulatory bodies (*NTA Newsline*, Feb. 26 2017).

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In spite of the above, the situation is becoming worrisome by the inventive social media stylized linguistic abbreviations; where, in its worst and very annoying forms, smileys or emoticon symbols are used in lieu of words by many persons, especially the youth. In a study carried out by Cingeland Sunder (2012), it was found that the perpetual use of mobile devices by adolescents has fuelled a culture of text messaging, with abbreviations and grammatical shortcuts, thus raising a number of questions in the minds of parents and teachers. But the chief question is: does increased use of text messaging engender greater reliance on such 'textual adaptations' to the point of altering one's sense of written English grammar?

Observably, with the popularity of English language and the increasing consciousness to learn it in non-English speaking countries all over the world, English is likely to be the language of choice for international discourse and communication. This is particularly so because college students or undergraduates are taking social media to a new level, using websites such as Facebook to communicate with other students about their coursework, and this is usually done in the English language (Rice, 2011). Hence, whatever disruption in the writing abilities of growing children in English could spell doom because research has demonstrated how writing effectively and efficiently can improve comprehension of content in any discipline.

Materials and Methods

The study adopted the descriptive survey design while the population of the study comprised all the undergraduate students from a public university in Ekpoma, Nigeria. Our choice of the undergraduates as the focus population is because they constitute the prime or active users of social media in Nigeria and other developing and developed societies. A 14-item Likert format questionnaire was used for data collection. The simple random sampling technique was used to administer 135 copies of questionnaire of which 120 were retrieved. However, 10 out of the 120 were not properly filled. Consequently, the properly filled 110 copies of questionnaire were used for analysis in this study.

The questionnaire was validated by research experts in the Departments of Theatre and Media Arts, English Language and Educational Foundations and Management in a public university in Ekpoma, Nigeria. The Cronbach Alpha, a measure of scale consistency, was used to determine the reliability of the instrument and it yielded correlation coefficient of 0.97 which showed that the instrument was

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highly reliable to elicit information for the study. The data was analysed using mean scores and standard deviations to answer the research questions such that if an item scored more than 2.50 cut-off point, the social media had impact on the writing abilities of undergraduate students under investigation.

Additional information was garnered from in-depth interviews (IDIs) with lecturers from within and outside Ambrose Alli University and focused group discussion (FGDs) with some students of the institution as well as the researchers' direct observation of the issue under investigation. In this regard, a total of one thousand three and fifty six examination scripts, aside three hundred forty four assignments and term papers of undergraduate students from the Departments of Theatre and Media Arts, English, Educational Foundation and Administration at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, were randomly selected and closely examined by the researchers and the spelling errors or deviational writings patterns were noted over a period of ten years.

Result

Qualitative Research

Procedure for the FGD Session and In-depth Interview

The FGD guide consists of sentences, in the form of questions, that the researchers asked the participants. The guide helped the researchers in moderating the sessions of the FGD. The guide was used to obtain the required information and ideas from participants, which were used to arrive at each of the research questions. A total number of 8 students (four male and four female undergraduates) were randomly selected as participants in the FGD. After familiarisation, explanations of the essence of the research were handed down to the participants, the researchers sought for the consent of the participants before proceeding with the session. The researchers also told the participants that they are free to opt out during the proceedings if any of them felt uncomfortable with the discussions. Thereafter, participants were given opportunity to respond to what the moderator posed in relation to writing abilities of undergraduates. Information and opinions gathered from the FGDs were synchronised into statements in accordance with the theme of the study. In-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with lecturers from within and outside the university. These IDIs served the purpose of complementing the information provided during the FGDs. The same FGD guide was used during the interview sessions with slight modifications. For instance, "Have you ever come across any of these

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shortened forms of English words or abbreviations ('u' for 'you' 'gr8t' for 'great', 'ur/urs' for 'your/yours') when marking your students' scripts?" "Do you think they use such words unconsciously in their writings," etc.

The three research questions posed for the study were analyzed as follows:

Research Question One

Do students use coinages and shortened forms of English words to communicate on social media networks?

Table 1: Mean ratings and standard deviations of respondents on the use of coinages and shortened forms of English words on social media network.

Item No	Item description	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
1.	Surfing the internet is my favourite pastime	50	40	18	2	3.25	0.795	Accepted
2.	I visit the internet mainly for social network activities	27	30	44	9	2.68	0.938	Accepted
3.	I use of social media to communicate	64	36	8	2	3.47	0.713	Accepted
4.	I do not use correct spelling while chatting	35	46	15	14	2.93	0.983	Accepted
5.	I use short forms or misspelled words while chatting to save time	62	34	12	2	3.42	0.759	Accepted
	Cluster Mean/ Standard Deviation					2.62	0.83	

Table 1 showed that items 1,2,3,4 and 5 have mean ratings of 3.25, 2.68, 3.47, 2.93 and 3.42 with standard deviation of 0.795, 0.938, 0.713, 0.983 and 0.759; all are greater than the cut-off point of 2.50 which implied that surfing the internet was the students' pastime. Students visit the internet for social network activities and to communicate among themselves. They also do not use correct spellings while chatting because they believe that using short forms of words or coinages or deliberate wrong spellings while chatting saves time. The cluster mean of 2.62 and standard deviation of 0.83 which is greater than the cut-off point of 2.50 implied that the population under investigation use coinages and shortened forms of words on social media networks.

Research Question Two

Do undergraduates use social media coinages and shortened forms of English words in writing term papers, assignments and communicating with their colleagues other students about their course work?

Table 2. Mean ratings and standard deviations on the use of social media coinages and shortened forms of English words in writing term papers, assignments and examinations.

Item No	Item description	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
1.	It does not matter if we use social media language when writing assignments, term papers or examinations	6	17	25	62	1.70	0.924	Rejected
2.	We deliberately use misspelled words or shortened forms of English words because it is convenient to do so	10	15	25	60	1.77	1.001	Rejected
3.	We intentionally use shortened forms of English words and sentences because they save time	11	26	23	50	1.98	1.049	Rejected
	Cluster Mean /Standard Deviation					1.81	0.99	

Table 2 showed that items 6, 7 and 8 have mean ratings of 1.70, 1.77 and 1.98 with standard deviation of 0.924, 1.001 and 1.049. The mean for each item is less than 2.50 which implied that the use of social media language when writing assignments or examinations matters to the students. Nonetheless, in items 7 and 8, the finding indicates that they do not deliberately misspell words or use short forms of words or sentences while writing their assignments and examinations. Also, they do not believe that the deliberate use of short forms of words and sentences while writing term papers or assignments saves time. It is likely that the sampled population is grandstanding as in-depth interviews conducted with some tertiary institutions' lecturers revealed that there are many instances of students using coinages, short forms of words and abbreviations in their term papers and assignments.

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Research Question Three

Does the use of social media coinages and shortened forms of English words by undergraduates have effects on their writing or spelling abilities?

Table 3. Mean ratings and standard deviations of respondents on the effect of social media coinages and shortened forms of English words on their writing abilities.

Item No	Item description	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
9.	Students' writing/spelling abilities are enhanced by their activities on social media	22	34	29	25	2.48	1.056	Rejected
10.	Lecturers complain about students' spellings	7	9	39	55	1.71	0.871	Rejected
	Cluster Mean /Standard Deviation					2.095	0.961	

Table 3 showed that items 9 and 10 have mean ratings of 2.48 and 1.71 with standard deviation of 1.056 and 0.871. Here, the data shows that the sampled students' opinion is not necessarily what is really happening. A majority of them opine that social media activities have not impinged on their writing or spelling abilities in English. They further say that their lecturers do not complain about their spellings. However, this position is inconsistent with the outcome of the IDIs with lecturers, and the researchers' direct observation of the situation on the ground: undergraduate students tended to use shortened forms of English words or abbreviations in writing assignments, term papers and examinations.

Discussion

The first finding of the study revealed that students use coinages and shortened forms of English words to communicate on social media. Many a time, students tend to abbreviate or use acronymic words while chatting on social media platforms. The second finding showed that students are aware that it is inappropriate to use social media language when writing assignments and examinations but some traces of deviational patterns of writing which are inconsistent with standard English are a common feature in many of their writings both on social

media and in many of the terms papers, class assignments and essays which students submit to us as university lecturers in the last ten years.

Furthermore, in the FGDs that we conducted with some students, we found that in spite of the fact that many undergraduates are aware that it is inappropriate to use social media coinages many of them still do in their writing unknowingly or unconsciously. The presupposition here is that a majority of the youths adopt a certain option/brand of English which cannot be located within the matrixes of Standard English or even its Popular Nigerian English (PNE) variant which is called Pidgin English. Consequently, expressions such as 'u' for 'you' 'gr8' for 'great', 'ur/urs' for 'your/yours', among other deviational patterns, have crept into their writing consciousness in classes and examinations, which make a lot of 'sense' in informal settings among the youths, but smacks of sub literacy in formal writing situations under which they are being trained. As well, these deviational patterns of writing or spelling in English among undergraduates that is occasioned by their use of social media are common sights in their term papers, assignments and examination scripts as our direct observations indicate.

The third finding revealed that the students reported what they think but that is not necessarily a true position because the IDIs and the researchers' direct observation show that many undergraduate students do use shortened forms of English words in writing assignments, term papers and examinations. From the foregoing, it is likely that over time the sampled students' writing skills or spelling abilities could be impacted harmfully by their activities on social media. In fact, students' frequent use of coinages and shortened forms of English words on social media does not improve their writing abilities as undergraduates in any considerable manner. As well, it is the opinion of the sampled population that the lecturers, who teach and examine their term papers and assignments, do not complain about their spelling. This result is inconsistent with the outcome of the in depth interviews (IDIs) conducted among some three lecturers in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Samuel Adegboyega University, Ogwa and Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, who roundly complained about students' frequent use of short forms of words or coinages such as 4gt, wch, gr8, etc., in the term papers, examination scripts and other formal communications between them and their students. The possible explanation for the conflictual opinions between the lecturers and students may be located in the view that the sampled students' population is grandstanding and wanting to be on the defensive. However, the result also speaks to the need for further research to be carried out on the matter among other students'/

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lecturers' populations to either confirm or disconfirm the outcome of this investigation.

Conclusion

This study has examined the impact of social media on the writing abilities of Nigerian youths by mainly using the opinions of undergraduate students in Ekpoma, Nigeria as fulcra of analysis and discussion. The study discovered that a majority of the youths tend to adopt a certain brand of English which cannot be located within the matrix of Standard English (SE) or even popular Nigerian English variant which is called Pidgin English (PE). Consequently, expressions such as 'u' for 'you' 'gr8t' for 'great', 'ur/urs' for 'your/ yours', among other deviational patterns, have crept into their writing consciousness in classes and examinations, which make a lot of 'sense' in informal settings among the youths, but smacks of sub-literacy in formal writing situations under which they are being trained. This development can have serious implications for effective and efficient writing among Nigerian youths, especially in formal situations. The study recommends, amongst others, that further studies should be carried out on the deviational patterns of English words and phrases which are commonly used by youths in Nigeria and elsewhere, with a view to possibly getting the 'new words' standardized by the relevant educational authorities to ensure uniformity in usage, and to keep pace with the dynamically trendy social media culture.

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Authors

*Osakue Stevenson Omoera, Ph.D., is of the Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria, where he teaches and specializes in Sociology of the Media and Nollywood Studies with a particular focus on the social impacts of the media, and African film and cultural studies. Dr. Omoera is widely travelled and has over a hundred publications in specialist books and leading journals. He is credited to have pioneered scholarly inquiry into the Benin video-film rib of Nollywood Studies. Also, he enunciated the "Active Volcano Paradigm" for the study of English as a language of mass communication, with reference to broadcast media news in Nigeria. He has served as a resource person to the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC), the European Union Technical Assistance to Nigeria's Evolving Security Challenges (EUTANS) Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Media Roundtable, among others.

Oluranti Mary Aiwuyo is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Educational Foundations and Management, Faculty of Education, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria, where she also teaches educational planning and management courses. She has an abiding research interest in the management of post-primary education for effective delivery, early childhood education, organizational communication, among other areas of educational sciences. She has attended many conferences and published articles in reputable local and international outlets.

John O. Oyarebu Edemode holds a Ph.D. in communication from the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. He has over three decades of teaching experience in polytechnic and university mass communication departments. He is published in reputable national and international journals. His research interest and specialty is development communication wherein he has authored three books. Dr Edemode has, at various times, been Head, Department of Mass Communication, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State, Nigeria, pioneer Head of Mass Communication Department, Benson Idahosa University, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, and Special Adviser in Communication, Federal Inland Revenue Service, Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria.

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Bibian Onyebuchi Anyanwu, Ph.D., a Nigerian, teaches linguistics in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria, where she is, at present, the head of department. Dr Anyanwu is an Associate Professor with special research interest in sociolinguistics. Her research areas include: multilingualism, language variations, language endangerment, language planning, and ethnographics. She is the author of several books including, *Multilingualism in Warri, Nigeria: Socio-Psychological Perspectives* (2016), and *An Introduction to Research Methods in the Humanities* (co-authored with C.O. Isiramen, E.C. Emordi, O.S. Omoera, E. Imafidon, and M.O. Idemudia, 2016). She is also the editor of AZILO: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, which is published in Nigeria. She has to her credit numerous publications in various peer reviewed national and international journals.

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Appendix

Focused Group Discussion (FGD) Guide

Are you familiar with social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, etc?

How often do you use social media networks?

Do you use any of the social media platforms to communicate with your course mates and friends?

Do you misspell or use shortened forms of English words such as 'u' for 'you' 'gr8t' for 'great', 'ur/urs' for 'your/yours', etc., while using social media platforms?

If yes, do you intentionally or unintentionally use such non standard English words while conversing with friends and course mates on the internet?

Would you say that your intentional or unintentional use of such deviational patterns of English words have positively affected your writing abilities as an undergraduate?

Would you say that your intentional or unintentional use of such deviational patterns of English words have negatively affected your writing abilities as an undergraduate?

Have your lecturers complained about your spelling or writing of English words in your assignments, terms papers, and examination scripts?