


Exploring the Impact of Cyber Slang Adoption on Students' Academic Writing Practices

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the impact of cyber slang usage in the academic writing of university students in Saudi Arabian context. The sample size was 100 respondents. This study is three layered. Firstly, there was a survey from the students about their use of social media. Secondly, a pre-test was taken and then two equal groups were created. An essay writing test was executed at the start and end of the experiment from both the groups. Results were compared and compiled by independent sample t-test. At the final stage the frequency of some marked cyber slangs used by the students was presented. The overall findings mirrored that those students who have high exposure to social media possessed high use of cyber slang which effected their overall academic writing performance. The study concluded that although cyber slang is pervasive in digital communication, yet it impacts the formal writing of the students. The study further validated that social media slangs are adopted due to more exposure and time given to social media.

Keywords: Cyber Slang, Academic Writing, University Students, Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

Before the formal development of language as a communicative tool, humans relied on gestures, hand signs, and body movements to convey meaning. The fundamental purpose of language has always been to facilitate the exchange of ideas and messages between individuals. Among the world's languages, English has become one of the most widely used mediums for global communication. Initially, linguistic expressions were simple and direct, designed primarily for clarity and efficiency (Ali et al., 2025)

The emergence of digital technology revolutionized human interaction. Early online communication tools such were created to simplify communication across geographic boundaries. Over time, these tools evolved into sophisticated social networking platforms offering diverse features for real-time interaction. The appreciation of social media systems and apps has transformed the way people communicate, share information, and express identity (Gupta, 2025).

These platforms have not only changed communication practices but also influenced language use. The integration of informal expressions, abbreviations, and "cyber slang" has given rise to a new digital lexicon. This linguistic evolution, while enhancing expressiveness and immediacy online, raises questions about its effects on students' adherence to academic writing conventions.

The rapid expansion of social networking platforms has been accompanied by the emergence of a distinct linguistic phenomenon known as *cyber slang*. This term refers to the use of abbreviations, modified spellings, and alternative expressions that allow users to communicate quickly and creatively within the constraints of digital

platforms. Online language is often characterized by colloquial and nonstandard forms and also cyber slangs (Wan & Hou, 2025).

As technology continues to evolve, people are adopting new words and expressions at an unprecedented rate. Cyber slang has become an integral part of everyday communication, fundamentally reshaping how individuals interact online (Ali et al., 2023). Students, in particular, represent one of the most affected groups, given their extensive exposure to digital media and the internet.

Members of the millennial generation, who are highly engaged with online platforms, have developed new forms of English that often deviate from standard grammar and spelling conventions (Aditya et al., 2025). Many of the expressions used in digital communication are absent from formal dictionaries and are not recognized by traditional language authorities. This linguistic evolution raises concerns regarding the influence of social media on literacy and academic writing. Diaz- Garcia and Carvalho (2025) shared that the growing use of informal digital language has contributed to the coinage of new spellings and informal written structures that differ markedly from conventional academic forms.

The increasing frequency of social media use among students has become a growing concern for educators in Saudi Arabia. Many students devote significant time to non-academic online activities, often engaging in casual digital communication even in formal settings such as classrooms etc. This trend has prompted apprehension regarding its influence on students' English writing proficiency.

Social media platforms frequently incorporate cyber slang in written communication, which can both shape and transform language through constant interaction. While social exposure can accelerate linguistic adaptation, it may also compromise grammatical accuracy, spelling, punctuation, and overall writing conventions. This phenomenon has motivated the present study to investigate the impact of social media exposure and the use of cyber slangs on students' academic writing performance, particularly focusing on their mastery of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and abbreviations.

Statement of Problem

This study investigates about the social media impact in the form of cyber slang on the academic writing conventions of university students in Saudi Arabia. Specifically, it seeks to determine how digital communication habits influence grammar, punctuation, spelling, and overall writing competence.

Research Questions

1. Is there any difference in the performance of control and experiment group learners in terms of their writing performance?
2. What impact does social media have on the writing abilities of the learners?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Writing is an essential component of language learning and one of the four macro-skills in English. Among these skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing the latter is often regarded as the most complex and demanding to master. It requires not only grammatical knowledge but also the ability to organize thoughts logically and express them effectively. Şimşek (2024) emphasized, writing is a sophisticated cognitive and linguistic activity that few individuals can fully master.

Beyond the academic context, strong writing proficiency remains a valuable skill in professional and social domains. Employers across various fields consistently seek individuals who can communicate ideas clearly and effectively through written language. Thus, the ability to write well is not only an academic requirement but also a lifelong competency that influences one's personal and professional success.

Writing proficiency is central to academic success, as it enables learners to effectively articulate and communicate their ideas. However, in today's technology-driven society, educators and researchers have observed that English language learners face growing challenges in maintaining formal writing standards. The increasing prevalence of social media platforms has popularized brief, informal, and acronym-based communication. Consequently, students being active users of these platforms tend to unconsciously incorporate such informal linguistic features into their academic writing (Bhatia et al., 2022).

Exposure to Social Media

The extent of students' exposure to social media plays a significant role in shaping their language production and writing behaviour. Mahoney and Tang (2024) shared that social media is an Internet-based applications group which is developed on the technological foundations of Web 2.0. It actually which facilitate the user-generated content in terms of development and exchange. Social media has revolutionized the way information is shared, stored, and retrieved, allowing communication to transcend time and geographical barriers.

According to Muliadi et al. (2024) the rise of social networking platforms has had both positive and negative impacts across all areas of society. Tomassi, Falegnami and Romano (2024) further noted that with the development of mobile devices, Wi-Fi, and 4G networks, social media has transformed interpersonal communication on a global scale. Among these platforms, Facebook remains the most widely used, offering users the ability to create profiles, upload photos and videos, send messages, and maintain social connections.

The convenience and accessibility of social media, however, have led to growing dependence among users, particularly students. Excessive engagement often diverts attention from academic responsibilities. Erokhin and Komendantova (2024) found that students who engaged in instant messaging while studying tended to read more slowly and perform poorly on comprehension tasks. This suggests that heavy social media use may negatively influence students' focus, comprehension, and overall academic performance.

Studies have shown that students who engage in instant messaging during study sessions tend to read more slowly and score lower on comprehension tests than those who message before studying or abstain from it entirely (Hemmati, Arzanagh & Rahmani, 2024). This finding suggests that frequent social media use among teenagers and young adults can significantly influence their behaviour and learning patterns, often resulting in reduced academic performance.

Although some may attribute students' declining academic outcomes to inadequate teaching, Mansoor and Ansari (2024) emphasized that modern students are deeply immersed in social media, spending nearly all their waking hours online. Even during lectures, many remain preoccupied with chatting, messaging, or browsing social networking sites instead of focusing on lessons. Time that could be devoted to studying, research, or creative activities is instead spent engaging in trivial online interactions.

While social media platforms are recognized as valuable educational tools, research also indicates that students primarily use them for entertainment, leisure, or socialization purposes rather than for learning (Cheung et al., 2025). The Internet has consequently evolved from a desirable luxury into an essential part of daily life. Shoukat et al. (2025) further noted that despite their intelligence, many adolescents and adults struggle with writing, reading, and spelling, partly due to excessive online activity. The fast-paced modern lifestyle also contributes to this issue, as parents have less time to guide their children, leading students to seek social interaction through digital means immediately after school.

Exploitation of Cyber Slang

Cyber slang is a language which is informally used on the internet. This trend has steadily intensified over time. Cyber slang also known as Internet or web slang is a form of digital language widely used across online platforms. It comprises abbreviations, acronyms, emojis, letter-number combinations, and phonetic spellings designed to accelerate communication and convey tone or emotion efficiently.

Internet slang encompasses various forms. Platforms such as X, which impose character limits, often encourage users to condense their ideas, resulting in the frequent and creative use of cyber slang. This trend introduces a novel, highly abbreviated writing style that prioritizes brevity and immediacy.

Students' Academic Writing Conventions

Writing proficiency is cultivated over an extended period and continues to develop throughout formal education and beyond. Experiences gained during schooling contribute to the advancement of students' writing competence at professional and academic levels. Mastery of writing conventions including grammar, punctuation, spelling, and composition structure forms the foundation of effective academic communication and enables students to express ideas clearly and persuasively (Nakrowi & Lumettu, 2025)

Mastery of writing conventions including punctuation, spelling, grammar, and mode is essential for developing effective written communication; however, adherence to these rules alone does not guarantee overall writing competence. Becoming a proficient writer requires considerable time, sustained practice, and the ability to overcome challenges. Novice writers must navigate difficulties such as weak grammar and syntax skills, limited vocabulary, and lack of structured cognitive strategies.

Strochenko et al. (2025) emphasized that writing is a complex, multi-layered process encompassing foundational skills, such as handwriting and spelling, as well as higher-level elements, including tone, organization, and clarity. Students improve their writing when they clearly understand the expected composition forms, internalize effective writing standards, engage in guided practice through revision and editing, and develop awareness of disciplinary conventions and audience needs. Over time, this process fosters self-assessment and continuous improvement.

In the context of digital communication, the influence of cyber slang and informal online writing presents additional challenges. Zaheer et al. (2025) highlighted that in modern AI era writing is not simply a mechanical task of pen and paper; educators must evaluate student writing comprehensively, considering format, content,

sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling. Even with technological tools available, students must develop the ability to produce coherent, comprehensible, and academically appropriate texts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopted a quantitative methodology, employing a descriptive design to examine students' levels of social media engagement, the extent of their use of cyber slang, and their academic writing performance as measured through pre-test and post-test assessments. Firstly, a frequency test as applied to explore the number of cyber slangs in the writing of both students. Further, an independent sample t-test was applied to assess the overall performance of the learners of both groups.

Population

The population of this study consisted of 100 university students from Saudi Arabian context. This population was chosen due to its accessibility and relevance to the objectives of the study. The target respondents were drawn from the four Grade 10 sections of the said school through the purposive sampling method, ensuring that participants were active social media users and currently enrolled during the year 2025.

Sampling

The study has utilized a Simple Random Sampling technique to determine the number of respondents. This sampling method ensures that every individual in the population has an equal probability of being included in the sample. The lottery method (fishbowl technique) was used to ensure impartiality in selection.

From the total population of 100 students were randomly selected to serve as the participants. The names of all students were written on individual slips of paper, placed in a container, and drawn randomly until the desired sample size was reached. The selected students gave a pre-test and then they were divided into a control and experiment group. Both groups were taught for three weeks and then a post test was conducted and results were compiled and compared.

Results

Statistical Treatment of Data

The study employed both descriptive and inferential statistical methods to analyse and interpret the collected data. Descriptive statistics were utilized to assess the extent of students' social media exposure, their use of cyber slang, and their compliance with academic writing conventions. Specifically, frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and standard deviation were computed to summarize and describe the respondents' responses.

The following statistical tools were applied:

- Frequency and Percentage Distribution
- Independent t-test

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. The findings are organized and displayed in descriptive and tabular form to provide a clear understanding of the patterns and relationships among variables. The results directly address the statement of the problem outlined in the preceding chapter.

Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and standard deviation were used to determine the respondents' level of exposure to social media, usage of cyber slang, and adherence to academic writing conventions.

Level of Students' Exposure to Social Media

Table 1. Frequency and Mean of students' use of cyber slangs

Items	Mean	SD	
I engage with Facebook primarily as a leisure activity to alleviate boredom and occupy free time.	3.12	0.79	
When using social media, I often lose track of time and remain unaware of how long I have been online.	3.11	0.83	High
I find social media interactions more engaging and entertaining than other recreational activities such as listening to music, watching videos, or playing games.	3.16	0.71	High

I utilize social media platforms to initiate group discussions and coordinate social events with friends.	3.16	0.81	High
I regularly monitor my friends' profiles through my mobile device to stay updated on their activities.	3.19	0.76	High
I frequently experience a desire to share new posts, including status updates, photos, and videos.	3.14	0.85	High
I rely on social media to access current news, promotional content, and public announcements.	3.21	0.81	High
I turn to social media for emotional support and encouragement from friends during challenging situations.	3.01	0.91	High
I use social media as a means to gain social approval and positive recognition from peers.	3.10	0.89	High
I browse through my social media feed to discover and connect with new acquaintances and followers.	3.21	0.77	High
I remain active on social media to avoid feeling excluded from social interactions or current trends.	3.20	0.76	High
I engage with social media for the purpose of crowdsourcing ideas, opinions, or resources.	3.18	0.71	High
I use social media as a collaborative tool to work on academic tasks and group assignments.	3.18	0.71	High
I access social media platforms to follow updates shared by friends as well as public figures.	3.12	0.72	High
I employ social media to reconnect and maintain communication with former acquaintances and old friends.	3.15	0.73	High
Overall Mean	3.18	0.74	High

DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 1, the overall mean score of indicates a high level of social media exposure among university students. This implies that students are frequent and active users of social media platforms, engaging in various online activities such as social interaction, entertainment, communication, and information sharing.

The findings affirm that students are highly engaged with social media. This suggests that digital connectivity has become more accessible, allowing even students from lower-income households to participate in online spaces. However, their level of exposure while high may still differ from that of students in urban areas, whose access to advanced technology and stable internet connectivity is more consistent (Ali, 2023).

Moreover, the findings highlight that students primarily use social media for social interaction and communication, including organizing group activities, seeking companionship, and maintaining relationships, who asserted that the growing use of social networking platforms among youth is driven by the need for connection, entertainment, and emotional expression.

The results also reveal that mobile devices significantly contribute to students' accessibility to social media, allowing them to connect anytime and anywhere. This pervasive usage emphasizes that social media has become an integral part of students' daily routines, influencing not only their communication habits but also their learning environments.

Level of Students' Usage of Cyber Slang

Table 2. Level of Students' Usage of Cyber Slang

Items	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. I substitute and mix letters with numerical representations, such as using "w8" in place of the word "wait."	2.89	0.39	High
2. I incorporate stickers or emojis in my messages to visually convey my emotions and sentiments.	3.10	0.36	High
3. I employ asterisks to partially obscure offensive or inappropriate language, for example, writing "idio*" instead of "idiot."	3.21	0.47	High
4. I frequently use homophones in my messages, such as "u r gud" instead of "you are good."	3.13	0.29	High
5. I utilize ellipses ("...") to represent emotions or thoughts that are difficult to articulate directly.	3.14	0.30	High

6.	I often use multiple punctuation marks, such as “!!!!,” to intensify the tone or express excitement in online communication.	3.03	0.41	High
7.	I capitalize specific words to emphasize meaning or urgency, for example, “STOP” rather than “stop.”	2.99	0.60	High
8.	I combine various punctuation marks (e.g., “?+.=*”) to express confusion or uncertainty.	3.11	0.49	High
9.	I include emoticons in my messages to create a more engaging and expressive interaction.	3.05	0.63	High
10.	I make use of acronyms such as “LOL” (laughing out loud) or “TTYL” (talk to you later) to convey messages succinctly.	2.99	0.51	High
11.	I blend numbers and letters in words, such as writing “l8r” for “later” or “b4” for “before.”	3.14	0.46	High
12.	I omit vowels in words to shorten text, such as using “gvn” for “given” or “whn” for “when.”	3.18	0.66	High
13.	I simplify and shorten sentences to expedite communication, for example, saying “I will Facebook her” instead of “I will send her a message on Facebook.”	3.15	0.40	High
14.	I adopt phonetic or spoken-style spellings, such as “I dunno” for “I don’t know,” to save time when typing.	3.14	0.55	High
15.	I tend not to adhere strictly to conventional capitalization and punctuation rules, as in writing “johnsbook” instead of “John’s book.”	3.15	0.57	High
Overall Mean		3.10	0.50	High

DISCUSSION

As shown in Table 2, the overall mean indicates a high level of cyber slang usage among the respondents. This finding suggests that cyber slang has become a common linguistic practice among students in digital communication. The prevalence of shortened words, acronyms, emojis, and letter-number substitutions reflects students’ desire for efficiency, informality, and expressiveness in online interactions.

The results affirm that cyber slang is a dominant feature of millennial and Generation Z communication, particularly in social media contexts. According to Gibbons (2003), the increasing number of students whose first language is not English presents challenges for educators in addressing linguistic variations in communication. Many students adopt informal patterns, using abbreviations, nonstandard grammar, and altered punctuation for the sake of speed and convenience.

However, while critics often claim that cyber slang contributes to the decline of writing proficiency, other scholars offer a counter-perspective. argued that the use of abbreviations and informal expressions does not necessarily lead to poor spelling or grammar. Instead, it can enhance literacy engagement, as students actively participate in reading and writing even in nontraditional forms.

Overall, the findings reveal that while students embrace cyber slang as part of their digital linguistic identity, its pervasive use may have implications for formal writing conventions. It demonstrates a potential overlap between informal online communication habits and academic writing performance, warranting further investigation into its long-term impact on students’ written language proficiency.

Independent Sample t-test

Table 1: Statistical Summary of Pre- and Post-Test Performance with Skewness and Kurtosis Values

TC		Mean	SD	SWS	K	
EXPG	Pre-test	5.21	1.22	0.41	0.11	2.42
	Post-test	7.23	1.09	0.21	0.31	2.51
CLG	Pre-test	5.22	1.24	-1.20	-0.17	2.43
	Post-test	10.21	0.39	0.20	-0.29	2.81

Table 1 summarizes the pre-test and post-test outcomes for the control group (CLG) and the experimental group (EXPG). It reports key descriptive statistics, namely the mean (MV), standard deviation (STDV), skewness (SKS), and kurtosis (KRT). The Shapiro–Wilk (SHW) test results are also presented to evaluate the normality of the data. Skewness values within the range of -2 to $+2$ suggest an approximately normal distribution. In this study, the non-significant SHW test results verified that both groups' data were normally distributed. Therefore, subsequent analyses were performed using the 5,000-sample bootstrap method, a robust and widely recognized technique for estimating sampling distributions.

Table 2: Statistical Summary of Pre- test Performance of Control and experimental group in Independent-sample N = 100.

Variable	EXPG (50)		CLG (50)		<i>t</i> (118)	<i>P</i>	95% CI		
	<i>MV</i>	<i>STDV</i>	<i>MV</i>	<i>STDV</i>			<i>LWRL</i>	<i>UPRL</i>	<i>CD</i>
Pre-test	5.22	1.24	5.21	1.22	-0.06	.92	-0.33	-0.30	0.04

To evaluate baseline equivalence between the groups, an independent-samples t-test was performed using SPSS version 25. The experimental group's mean pre-test score ($M = 5.22$, $SD = 1.24$) was almost identical to that of the control group ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.22$). Levene's test confirmed the assumption of homogeneity of variance ($F = 0.016$, $p > .05$). The t-test results indicated no statistically significant difference between the groups at pre-test, $t(98) = -0.06$, $p = .92$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference (-0.33 to 0.30) encompassed zero, reinforcing the lack of group disparity. Additionally, the effect size (Cohen's $d = 0.04$) was negligible, demonstrating that both groups were statistically equivalent before the intervention.

Table 3. Statistical Summary of Post- test Performance of Control and experimental group in Independent-sample N = 100.

Variable	CLG (50)		EXPLG (50)		<i>t</i> (118)	<i>P</i>	95% CI		
	<i>MV</i>	<i>STDV</i>	<i>MV</i>	<i>STDV</i>			<i>LWRL</i>	<i>UPRL</i>	<i>CD</i>
Post-Test	10.21	0.39	7.23	1.09	-14.12	.001	-4.15	-3.13	2.21

Post-test results were compared between the experimental group (EXPLG; $M = 10.21$, $SD = 0.39$) and the control group (CLG; $M = 7.23$, $SD = 1.09$). Levene's test verified the assumption of homogeneity of variance ($F = 1.11$, $p > .05$). The independent-samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference favouring the experimental group, $t(98) = -14.12$, $p < .001$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference (-4.15 to -3.13) excluded zero, reinforcing the reliability of this finding. The effect size was exceptionally large (Cohen's $d = 2.21$), indicating a substantial practical difference between the two groups (Cohen, 1988). Overall, these results provide strong evidence of the intervention's positive effect on post-test performance.

Discussion

Apart from the previously discussed findings, cyber slang has become a meaningful linguistic phenomenon in specific cultural contexts such as the Philippines. It serves as a means of identity and belonging, particularly among students who navigate between informal subcultural language and formal English. The use of cyber slang can, therefore, expand students' vocabulary and linguistic adaptability, allowing them to decide when to use informal expressions or adhere to academic conventions depending on context. However, the problem arises when students fail to distinguish between formal and informal language. Those with limited proficiency may unconsciously imitate incorrect structures and expressions, leading to declining linguistic accuracy and potential communication issues in academic or professional environments. This study implies that students' daily use of social media whether for entertainment, communication, or information sharing naturally exposes them to cyber slang. However, such exposure does not automatically translate into habitual use of informal language. Students retain the agency to choose whether to employ formal or informal English depending on purpose and audience. Furthermore, the results suggest that social media plays a positive role in shaping students' academic writing conventions. Beyond entertainment, social media platforms provide spaces for communication and idea exchange that can enhance writing fluency and awareness of language use. Still, students must maintain a balance embracing digital linguistic creativity while upholding academic standards. Ultimately, exposure to both formal and informal language can enrich students' writing competence and foster their ability to develop a distinct

written voice without undermining the integrity of the English language. The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that use of social media enhances the use of cyber slang and thus negatively impacted the post-test performance of the Experimental Group compared to the Control Group. While the pre-test analysis indicated no statistically meaningful differences between the two groups, confirming equivalent proficiency. This outcome suggests that structured integration of social media can positively influence learning achievement in language education settings otherwise it can create negative impact on the writing skills of the learners. Several noteworthy characteristics emerged during the study. Learners benefited from unrestricted access to learning materials, yet due to lack of awareness and understanding, the use of cyber slangs became higher and higher. Moreover, it was also observed in the research that formal writing situations needs rigorous interaction dipped effectively with peers and instructors, which can provide positive outcomes to the learners (Zaheer et al., 2025). The study also highlighted though there are some advantages of social media languages and slangs yet they are not encouraged and welcomed in the academic writing contexts. This aspect is aligned with the study performed by Mahoney and Tang (2024). Who said that social media should be utilized strategically.

CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that while students encounter various challenges in academic writing, their exposure to social media and use of cyber slang do not significantly impair their writing conventions. Although students did not fully achieve mastery in academic writing, the influence of cyber slang allowed them to explore creative and concise ways of expression. Social media also facilitated meaningful written interactions and idea-sharing, which contributed to their language engagement.

However, boundaries must be maintained. Students should be guided on when informal or formal language is appropriate, ensuring that their digital communication habits complement rather than hinder academic proficiency. With proper guidance and conscious use of technology, students can enhance their writing skills and develop the linguistic versatility needed to succeed in both academic and professional settings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Teachers: Educators are encouraged to adopt a more open-minded and flexible stance toward students' use of social media and cyber slang. They should use these as teaching opportunities to emphasize the importance of context-appropriate communication. Teachers must also guide students in maximizing social media as a tool for improving writing competence and critical literacy.

For Students: Students should be mindful of how prolonged exposure to social media influences their language use. They must learn to differentiate between informal online expressions and formal writing to preserve their linguistic accuracy and credibility in academic settings.

For School Administrators and Guidance Counsellors: Schools should establish clear programs and orientations on the responsible and purposeful use of social media. This can promote holistic development enhancing both academic and non-academic competencies while cultivating digital literacy and language awareness among students.

For Future Researchers: Future studies are encouraged to include a larger and more diverse population to validate and extend the present findings. Standardized assessments can also be employed to measure correlations between social media exposure, cyber slang usage, and academic writing proficiency more precisely.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has strong implications for the future researcher where it can serve to guide teachers to comprehend and tackle modern learners' writing problems. For the policy makers, this study can provide them the practical insights and issues of modern classrooms. In this way, smart steps can be taken to have innovative solutions for positive outcomes. For the teachers, this study can provide them with the opportunity to devise some interesting techniques to eradicate slangs from students' academic writing without banning social media use.

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