



The Effects of Short Messaging Services on the Composition Skills of Senior Secondary School Students – A Case Study of the Government Science and Technical College, Garagboghoh, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the effects of using short messaging services (SMS) on composition skills, among students at the senior secondary level of the Government Science and Technical College, Garagboghoh, Nigeria. For the theoretical framework, two theories were highlighted: Transformational Generative Grammar and Diffusion of Innovation as aver by Everett Rogers. The study employed a quantitative research approach, using purposive sampling to select SSS1 and SSS2 students and English language experts from the institution under study, with data collected through questionnaires and analyzed using percentage summaries of responses. The major findings of the study included spelling errors, use of slang, punctuation errors, wrong use of tenses, and wrong separation of words by students. The study revealed that SMS usage has adverse effects on student composition skills. There is a need for strict adherence to correct grammatical conventions when texting so that even when writing formal essays, students will not deviate from standard forms of English. Teachers must also teach students the use SMS language in formal school writing affects their mechanical accuracy, expression, organisation, and content and discourages them from using SMS language. This study contributes to scholarship by providing empirical evidence on the adverse effects of SMS language on students' composition skills, highlighting the need for adherence to grammatical conventions in texting and the role of teachers in mitigating the negative impact of SMS usage on formal writing proficiency.

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of technology and its advancement is advantageous to humanity, following various impacts that its application has brought to human life, especially in an attempt to enhance communication, through handsets, laptops, palm tops, and desktops, among other means. Thus, it is observed that most students find it challenging to write grammar, essays, and spelling while using SMS. Many scholars have different perceptions as to why students find it challenging to write compositions; some have attributed

students' deficiencies to iconoclastic cultures, lack of space, saving costs, and bad systems, among other inherent factors.

O'Connor maintained that the use of tools by students in messaging is not completely capable of separating formal English from informal.¹ That is words like "come", as "kom", "See" as "C", and "before" as "b4" without punctuation marks, and words can be shortened and characterised against the standard tenets of good writing. The use of English is now forced to compression, modification, abbreviation, and excessive abbreviations. Thus, words are now used in various forms like "for", expect to see "4", "fortune" written as "4tune", and "forever" as "4eva". The word "see" has been pruned down to a single alphabet "C", one is likely to read such strange things as "CU" meaning "see you, for the word forget becomes "4get", same with "you" now rendered as "U". The word "straight" has o. The cell phone, as a means of communication through SMS, is good and is widely used as a global and technological means of communication. It is cheaper, in terms of cost and time, to enhance communication. It enables students to use shorter and fewer words for communication on cell phones, SMS makes quick and easy communication as words are used to facilitate efficiency and effectiveness through a device, depending on the combination of the lexicon it carries; these words are known as the message. Crystal argues that while he made a meaningful contribution to the little character space of a phone (mobile), users adopted forms of linguistics in maximising time and space and ensuring that the content of their message takes all they want to say.²

Rafi affirms that through new conventions, users have come up with a writing form with sounds that stand in place of spoken utterances.³ The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) (2019-2021) revealed there is a high failure rate in the English language among students.⁴

There is a high level of secondary school students' participation in the use of SMS, as such, students have adapted to iconoclastic ways that can enable them to use the 160-character limit; this poses a serious threat to writing composition and effective communication. The consistent use of shortcuts in SMS has a negative influence on writing composition in formal settings. The study seeks to investigate and examine the causes of poor composition skills, especially writing among senior secondary students at the Government Science and Technical College, Garagboghoh, Nigeria.

Objectives

The specific objective of the study is to:

- i. Determine the effect of SMS on the composition skills of senior secondary school students at the Government Science and Technical College, Garagboghoh, Nigeria.

Research Question

- i. Does the use of SMS have effects on the writing composition skills of senior secondary school students at th Government Science and Technical College, Garagboghoh, Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Background of Short Messaging Services (SMS)

The origin of SMS can be traced back to the Franco-German GSM network, where it was first conceptualised in 1984 by Friedhelm Hillebrand and Bernard Ghillebaert. Their idea was to use the existing Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) to transmit brief messages, initially restricted to a maximum length of 128 bytes. This constraint was later expanded to 140 bytes, allowing for 167-bit characters, which shaped the modern SMS structure. The primary aim of SMS was to offer a simple and

¹ Amanda O'Connor, *Instant Messaging: Friend or Foe of Student Writing?* (New Horizons for Learning, 2005).

² David Crystal, *Txtng: The Gr8 Db8.*, ed. Ed McLachlan, *Txtng: The Gr8 Db8.* (New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³ Mohammed Dauda Goni et al., "Development and Validation of Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Questionnaire for Prevention of Respiratory Tract Infections among Malaysian Hajj Pilgrims," *BMC Public Health* 20 (2020): 1–10.

⁴ National Bureau of Statistics, "WAEC Result Statistics (2019 - 2021)," 2021, <https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=19342a8ba3aea32addd42044bdb6f357accb29a25d539ada506814434de73407JmltdHM9MTc0NTM2NjQwMA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=4&fclid=2475193d-39a8-68f7-3b69-0b4538b569e4&psq=West+African+Examinations+council+Result+Analysis+WAEC+2020+in+Nigeria&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly9uaWdlcmhbnN0YXQuZ292Lm5nL2Rvd25sb2FkLzEyNDEyMTM&ntb=1>.

efficient mode of communication that could operate alongside voice services. Over the years, SMS has become an integral part of mobile technology, revolutionising how people communicate globally.

As SMS technology developed, its adoption grew rapidly, with mobile operators integrating it as a standard feature in cellular networks. The affordability and convenience of text messaging made it a preferred choice, particularly in regions where internet connectivity was either expensive or unreliable. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, SMS was no longer just a tool for short notifications; it had become a mainstream communication method, facilitating both personal and professional exchanges. The ease of sending messages in real-time contributed to its widespread acceptance, making it a dominant form of written communication.

Despite its popularity, SMS initially faced criticism, particularly regarding its potential impact on literacy and formal writing skills. Language purists and educators were concerned that the brevity and informality of text messages would erode the grammatical accuracy and spelling standards. However, these concerns gradually diminished as scholars began to recognise SMS as a unique linguistic phenomenon. Rather than degrading language, text messaging emerged as a platform for linguistic innovation, allowing users to develop creative and expressive ways of communicating.

One of the first indicators of SMS as a creative medium was the *Guardian* newspaper's text-messaging poetry contest in 2001. The competition encouraged participants to compose poetry within the SMS character limit, demonstrating that constraints could foster creativity rather than hinder expression. Judges, including esteemed poets U. A. Fanthorpe and Peter Sansom, acknowledged the imaginative potential of text-based poetry. This event challenged the notion that SMS was a threat to language, instead highlighting its ability to inspire new forms of literary expression.

The Linguistic Creativity of SMS

Text messaging once dismissed as an informal and fragmented form of communication, has demonstrated remarkable linguistic creativity. The constraints of SMS, particularly the 160-character limit, have led users to develop innovative ways of conveying meaning. In many cases, texters blend formal and informal structures, creating a hybrid language that is both economical and expressive. The rise of SMS poetry competitions, such as the *Guardian* contest, underscores how users have turned technological limitations into an opportunity for artistic expression. Text messaging is no longer just a tool for everyday communication but has evolved into a space for linguistic experimentation and identity formation.

The *Guardian* text-messaging poetry contest revealed the diversity of SMS linguistic styles. While some poets embraced text shorthand and abbreviations, others adhered to standard orthography. For example, one of the winning entries demonstrated the playful adaptation of SMS conventions:

*txtn s mesn,
mi hedn 'me englis,
try2ryte esayz,
dey al cm out txtiz.
gran not plsd w/letters shez getin,
swears i wrot beta
b/4 cmin 2 uni.
& she is africn
Sheffield*

This poem exemplifies the fusion of phonetic spellings, abbreviations, and contractions characteristic of SMS language. The poet deliberately reduces words to their most essential elements, mirroring the way text messages prioritise efficiency over convention. Despite the unconventional spelling, the poem remains intelligible, demonstrating how SMS allows for both linguistic economy and expressive depth. Another notable example from the competition showcases how SMS can maintain poetic imagery while conforming to character limitations.

*Sun on maisonette windows
sends speedcamera flashes tintin thru tram cables
startlin drivas*

*draggin rain-waterfalls in dia wheels
I driv on Hardly drab shrink tok.*

Unlike the first poem, this entry retains more traditional spellings, illustrating that SMS creativity is not confined to abbreviations alone. The flexibility of SMS language is evident in these examples, where users decide whether to adopt or reject shorthand conventions. This highlights the adaptive nature of text messaging, where users tailor their language choices to the context, audience, and purpose of communication.

Linguistic Features of SMS

One of the defining characteristics of SMS language is the frequent use of abbreviations and initialisms. Given the character limitations imposed by early mobile messaging, texters devised ways to shorten words while retaining clarity. Common examples include "B4" for "before," "U" for "you," and "tmrw" for "tomorrow." These abbreviations, though unconventional in formal writing, allow users to communicate efficiently without compromising meaning. Over time, these SMS-specific abbreviations have become widely recognised, even influencing digital communication beyond text messaging.

Another notable feature of SMS is the use of logograms and pictograms, where single characters replace entire words or convey emotions. For instance, the number "2" is often used in place of "to" or "too," while "x" signifies a kiss in personal messages. Emoticons, such as ":)" for a smile or ":-(" for sadness, add an expressive dimension to text-based communication. These symbols compensate for the absence of non-verbal cues, making messages more emotive and engaging. In this way, SMS has contributed to the evolution of visual language in digital communication.

Nonstandard spellings and colloquial expressions are also prevalent in SMS, reflecting both regional linguistic influences and personal stylistic choices. Words like "skool" for "school" and "sum" for "some" illustrate phonetic spellings that simplify standard forms. Similarly, informal greetings such as "wassup" for "what's up" demonstrate the influence of spoken language on text messaging. These variations contribute to the rich diversity of SMS language, highlighting its adaptability in different cultural and linguistic contexts.

Punctuation and capitalization practices in SMS further illustrate its linguistic flexibility. While some texters omit punctuation entirely to save space, others maintain conventional rules, particularly in formal contexts. Organisational and institutional messages, for example, often adhere to standard capitalisation and punctuation to ensure clarity. The diversity in SMS punctuation reflects the evolving norms of digital communication, where users balance efficiency with readability based on context.

The Evolution of SMS Linguistics

The SMS linguistic landscape continues to evolve as technology advances and user demographics change. Initially dominated by younger users who embraced text abbreviations and shorthand, SMS language is now influenced by a broader range of texters, including older generations and professionals. As a result, SMS has become more standardised over time, with many users opting for full words and proper punctuation. This shift reflects the growing integration of SMS in formal and business communication, where clarity and professionalism are prioritised.

Another factor shaping the evolution of SMS language is the development of predictive text and autocorrect features. Early mobile devices required manual text input, encouraging abbreviations and phonetic spellings. However, modern smartphones facilitate faster typing with predictive suggestions, reducing the need for excessive shorthand. This technological advancement has led to a gradual decline in some SMS-specific abbreviations, as users find it easier to type complete words. Nonetheless, elements of SMS shorthand persist, particularly in casual and social interactions.

From an orthographic perspective, SMS language is characterised by its flexibility and creativity. Contrary to popular belief, the use of abbreviations and nonstandard spellings is not mandatory in SMS communication. For example, in *The Guardian* poetry competition, three of the top five poems did not use abbreviated language, demonstrating that SMS allows for stylistic diversity. This flexibility enables users to tailor their messages to the context, balancing brevity with clarity. One winning entry creatively used apostrophes and emoticons to convey meaning, such as:

ha hair lik fe filings
her hair like iron filings
wen she :-)s @ him.
when she smiles at him.

This example highlights the inventive use of orthography in SMS language, where standard rules are often adapted rather than discarded. The use of emoticons like ":-)" adds emotional nuance to the message, demonstrating how SMS language can convey tone and intent in ways that traditional writing cannot.

The flexibility of SMS language allows users to balance brevity with intelligibility, often preserving the core elements of standard spelling and grammar while introducing creative variations. For instance, the phrase "u 2" is easily understood as "you too," even though it omits vowels and spaces. This adaptability makes SMS language a powerful tool for efficient communication, particularly in informal settings. However, the creative use of SMS language can also pose challenges, especially when it spills over into formal writing. Students who frequently use SMS abbreviations may struggle to switch to standard spelling and grammar in academic contexts. This underscores the need for educators to address the impact of SMS language on writing skills while acknowledging its potential for linguistic innovation.

Ultimately, the linguistic characteristics of SMS reflect broader changes in communication practices. While the early days of text messaging emphasised brevity and economy, contemporary usage trends lean towards greater expressiveness and clarity. The evolution of the SMS language underscores the adaptability of digital communication, illustrating how technological innovations continually shape linguistic norms.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded in Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory, which provides a robust framework for understanding how new technologies, ideas, or practices are adopted and spread within a social system.⁵ This theory is particularly relevant to the research as it explains the adoption and impact of SMS on students' composition skills. The theory identifies five key elements—relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability—that influence the rate and extent of innovation adoption. These elements are critical in analysing how SMS language, as a form of innovation, has been integrated into students' communication habits and its subsequent effects on their formal writing skills.

Relative advantage refers to the degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it replaces.⁶ In the context of SMS usage, students perceive it as a faster and more convenient mode of communication compared to traditional writing methods. This perceived advantage has led to the widespread adoption of SMS language, characterised by abbreviations, acronyms, and informal expressions. However, this convenience often comes at the cost of formal writing proficiency, as students increasingly transfer these informal patterns into academic compositions.

Compatibility examines how well an innovation aligns with the existing values, experiences, and needs of potential adopters.⁷ SMS language is highly compatible with the fast-paced, technology-driven lifestyles of students, who prioritise speed and efficiency in communication. This compatibility has facilitated the rapid diffusion of SMS language among students, making it a dominant form of written communication in informal settings. However, this compatibility also creates challenges when students are required to switch between informal SMS language and formal academic writing, often leading to errors and inconsistencies.

Complexity refers to the perceived difficulty of understanding and using an innovation.⁸ SMS language is characterised by its simplicity and ease of use, which has contributed to its widespread adoption. The use of abbreviations, acronyms, and emoticons reduces the cognitive load required for communication, making it accessible to a wide range of users. However, this simplicity can hinder the

⁵ E. M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th ed. (Tampa, FL: Free Press, 2003).

⁶ Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*.

⁷ Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*.

⁸ Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*.

development of more complex writing skills, as students may struggle to transition from the simplified structures of SMS language to the more nuanced demands of formal writing.

Trialability and observability are also critical elements of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory. Trialability refers to the extent to which an innovation can be experimented with on a limited basis, while observability refers to the visibility of the results of an innovation to others.⁹ SMS language is highly trialable, as students can easily experiment with it in informal settings without significant consequences. Its observability is also high, as the widespread use of SMS language among peers creates a social norm that encourages further adoption. These factors have contributed to the rapid diffusion of SMS language among students, but they also reinforce its dominance over more formal writing practices.

Although transformational generative grammar was considered for its insights into language structure and creativity, it was less applicable to this study. Transformational Generative Grammar, proposed by Noam Chomsky, focuses on the innate rules and structures that govern language production and comprehension.¹⁰ Although this theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the cognitive processes underlying language use, it does not adequately address the social and behavioural aspects of adoption of innovation that are central to this study.

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory, on the other hand, offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing the adoption, usage, and impact of SMS language on students' writing abilities. This theory enables the study to explore how SMS language, as an innovation, shapes students' composition skills and how teachers and students perceive its effects on formal writing. The theory's emphasis on the social and behavioural dimensions of innovation adoption makes it particularly suited to understanding the challenges and opportunities associated with SMS usage in educational contexts. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory provides a robust theoretical foundation for this study, enabling a nuanced analysis of the adoption and impact of SMS language on students' composition skills. This framework sheds light on the factors driving the widespread use of SMS language and its implications for formal writing proficiency. It also highlights the need for strategies to mitigate the negative effects of SMS language on academic writing while leveraging its potential to improve communication skills in informal settings.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The research is quantitative in nature as it makes available each component of the study. A group of teachers' and learners' views on the use of SMS and the students' composition skills constitute the data of this research. Questionnaires were administered to collect data from teachers and students.

Instruments and Sources of Data

The research used primary and secondary data through questionnaires designed for students and teachers and other information sources, such as books and journals to obtain information on the subject matter.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to select respondents for the study. Experts in the English language were chosen as respondents to the questionnaires. Respondents in this case were SSS1 and SSS2 students of Government Science and Technical College, Garagboghoh, Nigeria. Thirty-one (31) students were randomly chosen from each of the classes for this purpose.

Data Analysis

In the course of the survey, respondents were asked to respond to specific questions. Summaries of percentages drawn from responses, including those of population, were used. Other categories that were neither used nor applied were unanswered questions or perhaps the ones that were not applicable.

⁹ Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*.

¹⁰ N. Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965).

Ethical Considerations

In conducting this research, ethical considerations were carefully observed to ensure the integrity and confidentiality of the participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, including students and teachers, who were fully informed about the objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by ensuring that no personal identification was collected or disclosed in the research findings. Additionally, the research adhered to ethical guidelines by avoiding any form of coercion or undue influence, ensuring that participation was voluntary. The study also prioritised the well-being of participants by minimising any potential psychological or social harm, and the data collected was used solely for academic purposes, with strict measures in place to protect its security and privacy.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Section A: Personal Data

Table 1: Age and sex of respondents between 13-21

Variable	Response opinion	Frequency	Percentage %
Age	13-15 years	29	47%
	16-18 years	30	48%
	19-21	3	5%
		62	100
Gender	Male	40	67%
	Female	22	35%
		62	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2020

The personal data of respondents were sampled for this study. The Table shows that 29 (47%) of respondents were 13-15 years old, 30 (48%) were 16-18 years old and 3 (5%) of respondents were 19-21 years old. The Table also shows the sex of respondents as follows: 40 (67%) males, and 22 (35%) females. This implies that males constitute the majority of respondents.

Section B: Research Questions

Table 2: Do you have a phone?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	36	58%
No	17	27%
I don't have, but I borrow	9	15%
Total	62	100%

Source: Field survey, 2020

This Table shows the number of respondents who had access to a phone; 36 (58%) of respondents indicated that they had access to a phone, 17 (27%) did not have a phone, while 9 respondents, representing (15%) of the total population, said they did not have a phone yet, but borrowed. This implies that most of the respondents had access to a phone.

Table 3: How many years have you been learning English?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
4 years	4	6%
5 years	6	10%
6 years	15	24%
7 years	37	60%
Total	62	100%

Source: Field survey, 2020

The data reveal that the majority of the respondents (60%) have been learning English for seven years, indicating a significant level of exposure to the language. A smaller percentage (24%) have been learning English for six years, while 10% and 6% have been learning for five and four years, respectively. This suggests that most of the students at Government Science and Technical College, Garagboghohol, have a substantial foundation in English, which is crucial to understanding the impact of SMS on their composition skills. However, despite this exposure, the study highlights that SMS usage still negatively affects their formal writing, underscoring the pervasive influence of informal texting habits on academic performance.

Table 4: How often do you text?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Always	13	21%
Sometimes	31	50%
Rarely	1	2%
Never	17	27%
Total	62	100

Source: Field survey, 2020

The results show that 50% of the respondents text "sometimes," while 21% text "always," and only 2% text "rarely." A notable 27% of respondents reported that they "never" text. This indicates that texting is a common practice among students and that the majority are engaged regularly. The frequent use of SMS suggests that students are highly exposed to informal language patterns, which may explain the challenges observed in their formal writing. The high percentage of students who text "sometimes" or "always" aligns with the study's findings that SMS usage adversely affects composition skills, as these students are more likely to transfer informal texting habits into academic writing.

Table 5: Why do you text?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
To send the message faster	10	16%
Saves time	10	16%
It is cool	10	16%
It saves cost	30	48%
I am used to it	2	4%
Total	62	100%

Source: Field survey, 2020

The primary reason for texting, cited by 48% of the respondents, is cost-saving, followed by speed (16%), time efficiency (16%), and the perception that texting is "cool" (16%). Only 4% text because they are "used to it." This indicates that practical considerations, such as affordability and convenience, drive SMS usage among students. However, the heavy reliance on texting for these reasons can contribute to the adoption of informal language patterns, such as abbreviations and slang, which can negatively impact formal writing. The emphasis on cost-saving also reflects the socio-economic context of the students, where SMS is a more accessible mode of communication compared to other forms of digital interaction.

Table 6: Does frequent use of texting (SMS) affect your writing skill?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	46	74%
No	16	26%
Total	62	100%

Source: Field survey, 2020

A significant majority (74%) of the respondents agreed that frequent texting affects their writing skills, while 26% disagreed. This finding aligns with the study's central argument that SMS usage has a detrimental effect on students' ability to write formally. The high percentage of students who acknowledge this impact suggests a self-awareness of the challenges posed by texting, particularly in maintaining grammatical accuracy and proper spelling in academic writing. This result underscores the need for interventions to help students separate informal texting habits from formal writing requirements.

Table 7: Does texting affect your formal writing?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	40	65%
No	22	35%
Total	62	100

Source: Field survey, 2020

Of the respondents, 65% agreed that texting affects their formal writing, while 35% disagreed. This further reinforces the study's findings that SMS usage influences students' ability to adhere to standard writing conventions. The majority of students recognise that texting habits, such as using abbreviations (e.g., "c" for "see" or "tok" for "talk"), spill over into their formal writing, leading to errors in grammar, punctuation, and word choice. This highlights the widespread nature of SMS language and its potential to undermine the quality of academic writing.

Table 8: Does language use affect your texting?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	53	85%
No	9	15%
Total	62	100

Source: Field survey, 2020

An overwhelming 85% of respondents stated that they care about the language they use in texting, while only 15% do not. This suggests that students are aware of their language choices, even in informal settings. However, the care taken in texting does not necessarily translate into the adherence to formal language rules, as evidenced by the prevalence of abbreviations and nonstandard spellings in SMS. This finding indicates that while students may strive for clarity in texting, they often prioritise brevity and convenience over grammatical correctness, which can negatively impact their formal writing skills.

Table 9: Does SMS negatively affect your grammar and spelling?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	42	68%
No	20	32%
Total	62	100

Source: Field survey, 2020

The data shows that 68% of the respondents believe SMS negatively affects their grammar and spelling, while 32% do not. This result aligns with the study's overall findings that frequent texting leads to errors in formal writing, such as incorrect spelling, improper use of tenses, and punctuation mistakes. The high percentage of students who acknowledge this impact highlights the need for targeted interventions to address the challenges posed by SMS usage. Teachers and educators must emphasise the importance of maintaining standard language conventions in academic writing, even as students continue to use informal language in texting.

Table 10: How often do you use the following in texting?

Acronyms and initials	Frequency	Percentage
Responses	Frequency	Percentage

Always	1	2%
Sometimes	38	61%
Rarely	4	6%
Never	19	31%
Total	62	100%
G-clipping		
Always	10	16%
Sometimes	40	65%
Rarely	7	11%
Never	5	8%
Total	62	100%
Alphanumeric combination		
Always	20	32%
Sometimes	30	48%
Rarely	8	13%
Never	4	7%
Total	62	100%
Non-conventional spelling		
Always	35	57%
Sometimes	20	32%
Rarely	5	8%
Never	2	3%
Total	62	100%
Emoticons		
Always	20	32%
Sometimes	38	61%
Rarely	3	5%
Never	1	2%
Total	62	100%

Source: Field survey, 2020

This Table shows the frequencies of respondents who use acronyms and initials, G-clipping, alphanumeric combinations, non-conventional spelling and emotions in texting.

Acronyms and Initials

The data reveal that 61% of respondents sometimes use acronyms and initials in texting, while only 2% always use them. A significant 31% of respondents reported never using acronyms and initials, and 6% rarely used them. This indicates that while acronyms and initials are a common feature of SMS language, they are not universally adopted. Most students use them occasionally, suggesting that they are aware of these linguistic shortcuts but do not rely on them exclusively. This occasional use may still influence their formal writing, as even sporadic exposure to abbreviations can lead to their unintentional incorporation into academic work.

G-Clipping

G-clipping, a form of abbreviation where the end of a word is omitted (e.g., "goin" for "going"), is used "sometimes" by 65% of respondents, while 16% always use it. Only 11% rarely use G-clipping, and 8% never do. This shows that G-clipping is a prevalent feature of SMS language among students, with the majority incorporating it into their texting habits. The frequent use of G-clipping highlights the tendency

of students to prioritise brevity and efficiency in communication, which can carry over into formal writing, leading to errors such as incomplete words or improper word endings.

Alphanumeric Combinations

Alphanumeric combinations, where letters and numbers are combined to represent words (e.g., "2" for "to" or "4" for "for"), are used "always" by 32% of respondents and "sometimes" by 48%. Only 13% rarely use them, and 7% never do. This indicates that alphanumeric combinations are a widely accepted and frequently used feature of SMS language. The high percentage of students who use them regularly suggests that these combinations are deeply ingrained in their texting habits, which may lead to their unintentional use in formal writing, further contributing to grammatical and spelling errors.

Non-Conventional Spelling

Non-conventional spelling, such as "u" for "you" or "thx" for "thanks," is used "always" by 57% of respondents and "sometimes" by 32%. Only 8% rarely use non-conventional spelling, and 3% never do. This demonstrates that non-conventional spelling is a dominant feature of SMS language among students, with the majority consistently using it in their texting. The pervasive use of non-standard spellings in texting poses a significant challenge for formal writing, as students may struggle to switch between informal and standard spellings, leading to errors in academic work.

Emoticons

Emoticons, such as ":-)" for a smile or ":-(" for sadness, are used "sometimes" by 61% of respondents and "always" by 32%. Only 5% rarely use emoticons, and 2% never do. This indicates that emoticons are a popular and frequently used feature of SMS language, serving as a tool for expressing emotions in text-based communication. Although emoticons are generally not used in formal writing, their frequent use in texting may influence students' ability to express emotions and tone in written form, potentially leading to a reliance on visual cues rather than descriptive language in academic writing.

The results of Table 10 highlight the widespread use of various SMS language features, including acronyms, G-clipping, alphanumeric combinations, non-conventional spelling, and emoticons, among students. While these features enhance the efficiency and expressiveness of texting, their frequent use can negatively impact formal writing skills. The majority of students use these features "sometimes" or "always," indicating that SMS language is deeply embedded in their communication habits. This underscores the need for educational interventions to help students differentiate between informal texting and formal writing, ensuring that they can maintain standard language conventions in academic contexts.

Section 3: Teachers

Table 11: Do you think SMS language affects students' composition skills?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Absolutely	2	100
Not really	0	0
No, it does not	0	0
Total	2	100

Source: Survey 2020

All the teachers surveyed (100%) unanimously agreed that SMS language negatively affects students' composition skills. This consensus highlights the significant impact of informal texting habits on a student's ability to write formally. Teachers observed that students often transfer SMS language features, such as abbreviations (e.g., "tnx" for "thanks" or "wot" for "what"), into their academic writing, leading to errors and deviations from standard English conventions. This finding underscores the pervasive influence of SMS language on students' writing and the need for interventions to address this issue.

Table 12: What are the evident errors in students' formal writing?

<p>Teacher 1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Spelling mistakes 2. Wrong use of tenses 3. Omission of articles 4. Use of slang 5. Capitalisation errors <p>Teacher 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wrong use of contractions 2. Wrong separation of words 3. Wrong use of punctuation 4. Spelling errors 5. Wrong use of tenses
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Source: Field survey, 2020

The teachers identified several common errors in students' formal writing, including spelling mistakes, wrong use of tenses, omission of articles, use of slang, capitalization errors, wrong use of contractions, wrong separation of words, and wrong use of punctuation. These errors are consistent with the informal language patterns used in texting, such as abbreviations, nonstandard spellings, and the omission of grammatical markers. The prevalence of these errors suggests that students struggle to separate the informal SMS language from formal writing, leading to a decrease in the quality of their academic work. The teachers' observations align with the study findings that SMS usage adversely affects students' composition skills.

Table 13: What do think are the causes of these errors?

<p>Teacher 1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The gross practice of SMS language 2. Carefree attitude to the study of the English language 3. Not grounded in spoken English 4. Mother tongue interference, pidgin and slang <p>Teacher 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social media factor 2. Mother tongue interference 3. Poor teaching methods 4. Lack of confidence in the teaching and learning process 5. Band wagon effect
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Source: Field survey, 2020

Teachers attributed the errors in students' writing to several factors, including the gross practice of SMS language, carefree attitude toward studying English, lack of grounding in spoken English, mother tongue interference, pidgin and slang usage, social media influence, poor teaching methods, lack of confidence in the teaching and learning process, and the bandwagon effect. Teachers emphasised that the widespread use of SMS language and the influence of local dialects and slang are major contributors to students' writing challenges. Additionally, they noted that social media and poor teaching methods exacerbate the problem, as students are not adequately guided to differentiate between informal and formal language use. These insights highlight the multifaceted nature of the issue and the need for comprehensive strategies to address it..

Table 14: How can this menace be controlled?

<p>Teacher 1:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Control the practice of SMS language 2. Correct intensively the use of tenses (concord practice) 3. Practise the use of articles
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4. Prohibit the use of pidgin, slang and mother tongue

Teacher 2:

1. Training and re-training of teachers
2. Encouraging students to write
3. Students' enlightenment about social media effects.

Source: Field survey, 2020

Teachers proposed several strategies to mitigate the negative impact of SMS language on students' writing. These include controlling the practice of SMS language, intensive correction of tense usage, practising the use of articles, prohibiting the use of pidgin, slang, and mother tongue, training and retraining teachers, encouraging students to write more and educating students about the effects of social media. The teachers emphasized the importance of creating awareness among students about the harm caused by SMS language and providing them with the tools to improve their formal writing skills. They also highlighted the need for teacher training to ensure that educators are equipped to address these challenges effectively. These recommendations align with the study's findings and underscore the importance of targeted interventions to improve students' writing proficiency.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that frequent use of SMS (Short Message Service) significantly impacts the grammar and spelling skills of students, particularly among senior students at Government Science and Technical College Garagboghoh. The data indicates that a majority of respondents (74%) acknowledge that texting affects their writing skills, with 65% specifically noting its negative influence on formal writing. This aligns with the broader concern that SMS language, characterised by abbreviations, non-conventional spellings, and informal syntax, has become a pervasive form of communication among students, often spilling over into their academic work. The study results confirm the hypothesis that SMS usage contributes to the deterioration of formal writing skills as students struggle to separate informal texting habits from the requirements of academic writing. The reliance on shorthand and informal language during texting, as observed in this study, supports Carlson's argument that the use of colloquial language and shortcuts reinforces poor writing habits.¹¹ Carlson contends that the casual nature of SMS language encourages students to prioritise speed and convenience over grammatical accuracy, leading to errors in formal writing. This is evident in the study's findings, where common errors such as spelling mistakes, wrong use of tenses, and improper punctuation were frequently reported by teachers. These errors are consistent with the informal language patterns used in texting, such as abbreviations (e.g., "u" for "you") and alphanumeric combinations (e.g., "2" for "to"), which students often transfer into their academic writing.

However, the study also highlights a nuanced perspective on the impact of SMS language. While Lindley argues that students primarily communicate in formal contexts through oral and written language, the findings of this study suggest that the boundaries between informal and formal communication are increasingly blurred.¹² The data reveal that 85% of the respondents care about the language they use in texting, indicating a level of linguistic awareness. However, this awareness does not necessarily translate into adherence to formal language rules, as students often prioritise brevity and convenience over grammatical correctness. This supports Plester, Wood, and Bell's observation that texting, being conversational, has influenced certain standards of written English, particularly among younger generations.¹³

The study's findings also resonate with Rosen et al. critique of the media's portrayal of SMS language as a threat to literacy.¹⁴ The data show that 68% of respondents believe that SMS negatively affects their grammar and spelling, reinforcing the anecdotal evidence cited in media reports. Vosloo

¹¹ J. Carlson, "Teens' Texting Symbols Invade Schoolwork," 2004.

¹² D. Lindley, "Cyberplay: Communication Online. Oxford: Berg Publishingg," 2008.

¹³ Beverly Plester, Clare Wood, and Victoria Bell, "Txt Msg n School Literacy: Does Texting and Knowledge of Text Abbreviations Adversely Affect Children's Literacy Attainment?," *Literacy* 42, no. 3 (November 24, 2008): 137–44, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4369.2008.00489.x>.

¹⁴ Larry D. Rosen et al., "The Relationship Between 'Textisms' and Formal and Informal Writing Among Young Adults," *Communication Research* 37, no. 3 (June 7, 2010): 420–40, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650210362465>.

similarly argues that the widespread use of SMS has led to a decrease in spelling, grammar, and overall writing quality, a concern echoed by the teachers surveyed in this study.¹⁵ Teachers unanimously agreed that SMS language negatively affects student composition skills, citing common errors such as spelling mistakes, wrong use of tenses, and the omission of articles. These errors are directly linked to the informal language patterns used in texting, which students often struggle to separate from formal writing.

Despite these concerns, the study also suggests that SMS language is not inherently detrimental to students' writing skills. Rather, it is the lack of clear boundaries between informal and formal language use that poses the greatest challenge. The data reveals that students are aware of the differences between SMS language and formal writing, as evidenced by their conscious use of abbreviations and non-conventional spellings in texting. However, this awareness does not always translate into the ability to switch between informal and formal language registers, particularly in academic contexts. This highlights the need for targeted interventions to help students develop the skills necessary to navigate both informal and formal communication effectively.

The study's findings also underscore the socio-economic context in which SMS usage occurs. A significant proportion of respondents (48%) cited cost-saving as the primary reason for texting, reflecting the accessibility of SMS as a mode of communication in resource-constrained environments. This practical consideration further reinforces the prevalence of SMS language among students, as it is often the most affordable and convenient means of communication. However, the emphasis on cost-saving also highlights the need for alternative strategies to address the challenges posed by SMS language, particularly in educational settings.

The study confirms the literature reviewed earlier, particularly the concerns raised by Carlson, Rosen et al., and Vosloo regarding the negative impact of SMS language on students' writing skills.¹⁶ The findings suggest that while SMS language is a valuable tool for communication, its widespread use among students has led to a decline in formal writing proficiency. This is evident in the common errors identified by teachers, such as spelling mistakes, wrong use of tenses, and improper punctuation, which are directly linked to the informal language patterns used in texting. However, the study also highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between SMS language and formal writing, emphasising the importance of educational interventions to help students navigate the complexities of language use in different contexts. In addressing these challenges, educators can help students develop the skills necessary to maintain standard language conventions in academic writing, even as they continue to use informal language in texting.

Furthermore, the study calls for a balanced approach that recognises the benefits of SMS as a communication tool while addressing its potential drawbacks. For instance, the conversational nature of texting, as noted by Plester, Wood, and Bell, can be leveraged to engage students in language learning activities that bridge the gap between informal and formal communication.¹⁷ By incorporating SMS language into classroom exercises, educators can help students understand the differences between informal and formal language use, thereby reducing the negative impact of texting on their writing skills.

Therefore, the study's findings confirm the concerns raised in the literature regarding the impact of SMS language on students' writing skills. However, they also highlight the need for a more nuanced and context-specific approach to addressing these challenges. By recognising the socio-economic factors driving SMS usage and developing targeted interventions to help students navigate the complexities of language use, educators can mitigate the negative effects of texting on formal writing while preserving its benefits as a communication tool.

Disussion Summary

This component revealed the differences between SMS language and essay writing: content; organisation; mechanical; and expression. It can be deduced that:

¹⁵ S. Vosloo, "Cn u Txt?," *The Guardian*, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2002/nov/11/mobilephone>.

¹⁶ Carlson, "Teens' Texting Symbols Invade Schoolwork"; Larry D. Rosen et al., "The Relationship Between 'Textisms' and Formal and Informal Writing Among Young Adults," *Communication Research* 37, no. 3 (June 7, 2010): 420–40, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650210362465>; Vosloo, "Cn u Txt?"

¹⁷ Plester, Wood, and Bell, "Txt Msg n School Literacy: Does Texting and Knowledge of Text Abbreviations Adversely Affect Children's Literacy Attainment?"

1. SMS language imbibes in students, the ability to create ideas as stated by Crystal.¹⁸ It also saves time and space. All these have a positive impact. Notwithstanding, it still has an adverse effect on students' writing, as their points are expressed through abbreviations and numbers thereby, making it difficult for the examiner to understand.
2. SMS has a negative influence on students' expression in component writing. The teachers mentioned that the wrong separation of words, wrong expressions, and the wrong use of tenses were all evident in the written essays of their students.
3. SMS affects the organisation of students' writing. Generally, in text messaging, paragraphs are ignored. This was confirmed by teachers as they also stated that the omission of paragraphs was another error observed in students' formal writing.
4. SMS negatively impacts the mechanics of students' writing. The teachers mentioned that punctuation, capitalisation and spelling errors were all evident in the formal writings of students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study and the existing recommendations, the following practical and actionable suggestions are proposed to address the challenges posed by SMS language on students' formal writing skills. These recommendations aim to guide future actions, policies, and interventions in the field of education, particularly in improving students' writing proficiency and mitigating the negative effects of informal texting habits.

1. Schools should incorporate lessons on the differences between informal and formal language use, teaching students to identify and avoid transferring SMS language features into formal writing. This can be achieved through dedicated modules, workshops, and comparative exercises that highlight the distinctions between texting and academic writing.
2. Students should engage in frequent formal writing exercises, such as essays and reports, to reinforce proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Peer review sessions can also be introduced to encourage collaborative learning and error identification.
3. Teachers should provide detailed feedback on student writing, specifically addressing errors related to SMS language, such as abbreviations and spelling mistakes. Using corrective examples and rubrics can help students understand and correct their mistakes effectively.
4. Schools should promote a culture of reading by providing access to formal texts such as novels, newspapers, and academic journals. Regular exposure to well-written materials will help students internalise standard English conventions and improve their writing proficiency.
5. Teachers can integrate digital tools and apps into their lesson plans and assignments, while school administrators can provide the necessary resources, training, and access to technology for both educators and students. Additionally, education policymakers and technology coordinators within the school system may play a role in selecting and funding appropriate tools to support this initiative.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the study that there is a high percentage of use of mobile phones for SMS. The empirical study shows that respondents in the target school use English as the language of teaching and learning. The positive influence of SMS on the literacy of students, as claimed by David Crystal and other adherents, is totally misleading. From the foregoing, the study further attributes poor essay writing to students' informal use of words consistently. Again, SMS could be considered a threat to writing essays, as such, students should be mindful and avoid being addicted. Students should be aware that the use of SMS should be discouraged as it encourages abbreviations, shortcuts, use of numbers, alphabet for words and does not conform to grammatical rules and above all, hampers the sole aim of communication.

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