

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Background of the Study

The digital revolution of the 21st century has transformed communication patterns, especially among young people. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have become central to how students interact and express themselves. As stated by Boyd (2022),

social media serves as a powerful medium that shapes language and communication norms, influencing both written and spoken discourse. This transformation has led to the emergence of a new linguistic culture, where speed and brevity are prioritized, often at the expense of grammatical accuracy and formal writing standards. For students at Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin, the use of social media is a daily reality. According to Oladipo and Adewole (2021), young adults and students in Nigeria spend a significant portion of their time on social media, which has influenced their language use and writing habits. The use of abbreviations and shorthand, such as "btw" (by the way), "u" (you), and "smh" (shaking my head), has become pervasive. These abbreviations, initially developed to overcome character limitations on platforms like Twitter or to increase the speed of typing on mobile devices, have now become part of everyday communication. However, the prevalence of these linguistic shortcuts has sparked concerns among educators and language experts. As stated by Johnson (2023), there is growing evidence that the frequent use of abbreviated language on social media platforms negatively impacts students' academic writing. The casual nature of social media communication can blur the lines between formal and informal writing, leading to a decline in students' ability to produce well-structured and grammatically sound academic work. Similarly, Adu and Ojo (2021) found that students who frequently engage in social media conversations often struggle with spelling, vocabulary, and the construction of coherent sentences in their academic assignments.

This phenomenon is not unique to Kwara State Polytechnic but is a global issue. In their study on social media's impact on writing skills, Ngugi and Mwangi (2021) reported that students who are active on platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram often transfer informal language conventions into academic writing. The study highlighted that the use of abbreviations and emojis in online communication has become so ingrained that students sometimes forget to switch to formal language when required. This trend raises questions about the long-term implications for language education and academic performance.

Moreover, the influence of social media extends beyond mere language use; it affects cognitive processes related to writing. As observed by Greenfield (2021), the constant exposure to fragmented and abbreviated content on social media may reduce students' attention spans and ability to engage in deep, reflective thinking, which is essential for academic writing. This concern is echoed by Adekunle (2022), who argues that the decline in students' writing skills can partly be attributed to the instant gratification and rapid feedback loops created by social media platforms. Despite these concerns, some scholars recognize the potential benefits of social media in enhancing communication skills. For instance, Lopez (2023) suggests that the use of digital

platforms encourages creativity and adaptability in language use, as students learn to express themselves in diverse ways. However, the challenge lies in ensuring that students can compartmentalize their informal online language practices from their formal academic writing. In summary, the increasing use of social media among students of Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin, has brought about a shift in language use, particularly the widespread adoption of abbreviations. While social media has undeniably made communication more efficient, it has also introduced linguistic habits that may undermine academic writing skills. The need to understand and address this issue is more pressing than ever, given the central role of writing in academic success and professional communication.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The widespread use of social media has introduced new linguistic norms, including the habitual use of abbreviations and shorthand language. This trend has been observed among students, who may unintentionally incorporate these informal language features into academic work, resulting in writing that lacks clarity, formality, and grammatical accuracy. Teachers at Kwara State Polytechnic have raised concerns about a decline in students' writing quality, with assignments often containing errors influenced by social media language practices.

The problem, therefore, lies in understanding the extent to which social media use affects students' writing skills, specifically through the use of abbreviations. If this issue is not addressed, it could have long-term negative effects on students' academic performance and professional communication abilities. Thus, this study seeks to examine the impact of social media on the writing skills of Kwara State Polytechnic students, focusing on the use of abbreviations.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to explore the impact of social media on the use of abbreviations and overall writing skills among students of Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin. The study seeks to achieve the following specific objectives:

- 1: To investigate the extent to which students at Kwara State Polytechnic use abbreviations influenced by social media in their academic writing.
- 2: To analyze how social media usage affects students' understanding and application of grammar, syntax, and punctuation in formal writing.
- 3: To determine students' awareness of the differences between appropriate language use for social media and the formal language required for academic writing and professional communication.
- 4: To identify strategies that can be implemented by educators and students to mitigate the negative effects of social media language on academic writing, while also leveraging any potential benefits.

1.4 Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1: How does social media usage influence the use of abbreviations among students of Kwara State Polytechnic?

- 2: What impact does social media have on students' grammar, vocabulary, and spelling?
- 3: Are students aware of the distinction between formal academic writing and informal social media language?
- 4: What measures can be implemented to reduce the negative effects of social media on students' writing skills?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research is significant for several reasons:

1. Educational Impact: The findings will provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers at Kwara State Polytechnic to address writing challenges linked to social media influence.
2. Student Awareness: It will raise awareness among students about the importance of maintaining formal writing standards and how to balance social media language use.
3. Literature Contribution: The study will contribute to existing literature on the impact of social media on language use, particularly in an academic context, and may inspire further research.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the students of Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin. It examines the impact of social media usage on their writing skills, with particular attention to the use of abbreviations. The study will analyze how social media influences grammar, vocabulary, and spelling, as well as the students' ability to differentiate between formal and informal writing styles.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This study, while comprehensive, has certain limitations that may affect its generalizability and applicability:

Geographical Scope: The research is limited to students at Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin, and does not account for the experiences of students in other institutions or regions, which might have different social media usage patterns and linguistic influences.

Sample Size: The study's findings are based on a specific sample size of students, which may not represent the broader student population. This constraint could impact the ability to generalize results to all Nigerian students.

Time Constraints: The study was conducted within a fixed academic timeframe, which limited the depth of longitudinal analysis on how social media influences language habits over an extended period.

Focus on Abbreviations: While the study emphasizes the impact of social media on abbreviations, other language aspects such as tone, sentence complexity, and critical thinking in writing are outside its scope.

Self-Reported Data: Some data relied on self-reported information from students, which could introduce biases, as participants may not accurately recall or report their language practices on social media.

Technological Evolution: The dynamic nature of social media platforms and their features means that trends influencing language use may evolve rapidly, potentially making some findings less relevant over time.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

1: Social Media: Digital platforms used for communication and information sharing, such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp.

2: Abbreviation: A shortened form of a word or phrase commonly used in social media communication.

3: Writing Skills: The ability to write clearly, correctly, and effectively in an academic or formal context.

4: Kwara State Polytechnic: A tertiary institution in Ilorin, Nigeria, where this study is conducted