Chapter 8
The Implications of Text-Messaging for Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

The impact of text-messaging on the form of students’ writing was examined using a quantitative approach with a correlational research design to arrive at the findings. A total of 80 students in a Jamaican high school constituted the sample, which was randomly selected. The findings of this research revealed that the Grade 9 students in the sample used a minimal number of text forms in their academic writing. The students who used text forms in their academic writing tend to score high academically. Therefore, texting was found to have a slightly positive impact on students’ writing. There was no relationship between the students’ gender and their texting patterns. The findings of this study can assist teachers of English to better meet the needs of students who use text-messaging and become a tool for building phonemic awareness and improving literacy.

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INTRODUCTION

Internet and computer technology use has upsurged globally. Some studies projected that by the year 2012 almost half of the world’s population would be online and most of these online users were expected to be adolescents (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008). Some linguists are theorizing that texting is a language register in its own right (Mower, 2011; Vosloo, 2009) and, so, should be regarded as an emergent genre, as Coiro et al., (2008) suggested as well. Students have been observed to use various textisms in their writing. Evidently, students’ texting habits are likely to have an impact on their achieving competence in spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. Some scholars, such as Everett (2016), have found that text messaging is having a significantly positive correlation with student writing assessment outcomes. The implication of this is that some students observe or choose to ignore the rules of English grammar as a result of texting.

Additionally a popular school of thought sustains that a correlation between the frequency of students’ texting and their academic outcomes exists. Carrington (as cited in Everett, 2016) asserted that, in the advent of students frequently engaging in texting, which he calls an “abnormal intruder,” it will inevitably lead to addiction and a subsequent decline in students’ capacity to “shift” to standard English, in this case, as the context may demand. There seems also to be a difference in the impact of texting on the academic outcomes of each gender. Perhaps, text-messaging is not the cause of students’ writing problems; rather, it might be a useful tool to help them to develop the habit of writing.

Research findings suggest that text messaging may have a positive impact on students’ literacy levels (Wood, Kemp, & Plester, 2016). Other studies show no significant impact of text messaging on students’ writing (Bernicot, Goumi, Bert-Erboul, Volckaert-Legrier, 2014; Zebroff, 2018). Current language issues impacting the complex Jamaican and Caribbean language situation(s) include the use of standard English, Jamaican, and, now, textisms. There seems to be a growing trend in the use of textisms among students, not only in the Caribbean, but globally, which is enhancing their phonemic awareness, which, subsequently, increases literacy levels.

In 2001 it was estimated that 90% of school children in Britain owned cell phones. Further, 96% of these school children communicated using text messages (Plester, Wood, & Joshi, 2009). Anderson and Jaing (2018) also found that 95% of American teenagers either owned or had access to smart phones. A similar 72% of 15-18 year olds reportedly engaged frequently in texting, in America (Thomas, O’Bannon, & Bolton, 2013). Fryer, Kinzie, Whitaker, and Hofer, postulated that like texting, instant messaging (IM) is likely to impact and even play a role in shaping school performance (as cited in Finch, 2008). Evidence indicates that the area impacted significantly is students’ writing. Thomas et al., (2013)
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