



Journal of Educational Technology and E-Learning Innovations (JETELI)

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1 (2025)



PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

An Investigation of the Relationship between Language and Social Media (Metaphysical Perspective): A Case Study of Secondary School Students within the Bwaila Cluster

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Article Information

Received: April 07, 2025

Accepted: May 10, 2025

Published: June 30, 2025

Keywords

Adolescent Communication, Chichewa, Cultural Identity, Digital Communication, Digital Literacy, Educational Strategies, Emojis, Hashtags, Language Education, Language Mixing, Slang, Language Use, Linguistic Practices, Qualitative Research, Social Media, Thematic Analysis

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the metaphysical connectivity and nature of how language is used among students in this modern society of social media. The area of concern and concentration of this study was mainly students of the schools in Bwaila cluster of Lilongwe District in Malawi. Metaphysics basically looks at the ultimate principles of reality and how humans as well as other nature are affected by the mushrooming digital platforms which in turn influence most linguistic daily practices. The main focus was on interactions that have been observed in many popular digital platforms which include the famous Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok. Of great interest was identification of the patterns in language mixing, how slang is developed, and how new communication forms like emojis and hashtags are communicated. The study utilized a qualitative methodology. This involves conducting interviews as well as performing thematic analysis in order to understand students' social media habits and their implications for language skills and cultural identity. The study captured insights of how social media shapes language among adolescents and teenagers and the broader cultural contexts in which this occurs. Main findings of the research indicate that language is greatly influenced by social media. This in-turn influences the way young people understand language and its practices. Metaphysically, language plays a big role especially among the young generation through the facilitation of language learning and expression of cultural identities. The study revealed that most students as evidenced in the methodology chapter navigate complex linguistic landscapes by utilizing innovative forms of communication that reflect their social environments. In light of these findings, the study emphasizes the need for educational strategies in colleges and universities that should illuminate and enlighten lecturers on how to integrate the realities of digital communication into language education. By adapting teaching methods to incorporate social media trends, educators can enhance engagement and understanding, thereby leading to improvement in language learning outcomes. This research hereby contributes into modern areas of knowledge through the evolving nature of language in the digital age and offers practical recommendations for academicians from both secondary school levels to higher learning institutional levels. The target for this is to foster linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness among students.

INTRODUCTION

In an ever-changing society, metaphysics plays a great role in shaping how students interact at different levels in secondary schools. With language being an important element of communication, metaphysics which studies the ultimate principles of reality by exploring beyond what the ordinary eye can see and what the ordinary ear can hear, looks into language as evolutionary. On an epistemological point of view, it is the nature of man to keep searching for knowledge. This implies that the way one may perceive things today, may not be the same way in future times because critical thinkers, researchers, and great sages in other academic disciplines, keep exploring and investigating what seems doubt-able, problematic as well as challenging. It is in this view that this research investigated the concept of language and its relationship with social media.

Language is important for communication, helping people share thoughts, feelings, and ideas. As times change, the means of communication also evolve. In

today's world, social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram have changed the way we interact (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The effect of social media on language is clear. One major change is the rise of language mixing, where different languages and dialects are combined. This shows how connected the world is through social media (Androutsopoulos, 2015). Also, new ways of communicating, like emojis and memes, have appeared, giving new meanings and ways to share ideas (Danesi, 2016).

Social media is also important for learning languages but utmost at an informal level of either outside the classroom or within the classroom but out of the learning session or time. this includes break time and minutes of waiting for another teacher to come in with another subject according to the class timetable. Several social media platforms have educational resources like language lessons, grammar tips, and vocabulary exercises, which help people learn languages better (Lee, 2016). many of those who use online chatting sites through reading and

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making comments improve their language skills but also understand different cultures and ways of communicating. Today, social media has greatly helped to create online communities where people can practice and improve their language skills.

On the other hand, the way language is changing is also affecting many people through online interactions by availing both challenges and opportunities. Online communication is often informal, and expresses for instance English abbreviations like “LOL” (Laugh Out Loud) or “BRB” (Be Right Back). In some instances, emojis like 😊 or 😞 express feelings more quickly than words. In Chichewa, abbreviations like “MBJ” muli bwanji, meaning “How are you?” are also common through online conversations. These changes may not follow formal grammar rules, but they show how online language is evolving.

In the two schools studied in the Bwaila cluster, the mix of English and Chichewa on SM offered an interesting opportunity to explore how students use these languages online. This research looks at how students decide which language to use on different SM platforms and what factors influence their choices. The aim is to understand how these languages are used and what this means for education in a multilingual society.

Studies show that online communication often leads to new ways of using language, with informal styles and shortcuts becoming more common in both writing and speaking (Thurlow & Poff, 2013). As an example, the language of Chichewa in Malawi is often by students with shortcuts like “Mposi” instead of ndiposo which is an informal way of expressing themselves.

Purpose of the Study

To investigate the relationship of social media use on students’ linguistic identities and language proficiency.

Research Questions

1. What factors influence students’ choice of language on social media?
2. How does using English on social media affect students’ linguistic identity?
3. How does using Chichewa on social media impact students’ cultural identity?
4. How often do students in schools within Bwaila cluster use English and Chichewa on social media, and in what contexts?

Significance of the Study

This study was significant in that it provided an understanding of how students use of language on social media, contribute to the evolving discourse on language practices in the modern digital age. The philosophy of language metaphysically examines this reality of language being influenced by the daily modernized and mostly youthful social media language that keeps evolving. The study also addressed the under-explored area of social media’s role in shaping students’ linguistic identities by

exploring insights into the relationship between language use online and students’ cultural identities. Another significance is that the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on how social media language practices influence students’ academic success and their social interactions in schools within Bwaila cluster.

Rationale

This study was motivated by the need to investigate how social media influences language use in multilingual settings, particularly in Malawi. Social media platforms which included Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and others are mostly used by students in Malawi. While much has been said about the role of social media in communication, there is limited research that specifically examines how these platforms metaphysically shape the language choices of students, especially with respect to the interplay between English and Chichewa. Malawi’s linguistic diversity with the global reach of social media, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining how students navigate language use on digital platforms.

Another important aspect for this study is the growing importance of social media in shaping students’ linguistic identities. Malawi has both local and global languages coexisting, where students must often choose between languages like English, which is globally dominant, and Chichewa, which is culturally significant. This is not to say that Chichewa is the only local language, but it is however a dominant local language. The Understanding of students’ use of social media language and the switch between these languages on social media will provide insight into how digital communication shapes their sense of self and their cultural identity.

Furthermore, the study addressed potential threats of social media on students’ academic performance and hints on social relationships. With the rise of informal language use on platforms such as WhatsApp and TikTok, the concern that such digital language practices might interfere and later on influence students’ ability in using formal academic language. This study examined whether students’ use of informal language on social media impacts their academic skills, particularly in English, and how their social relationships are shaped by their online language practices. Understanding these dynamics is important for educators and policymakers who need to adjust their teaching strategies to accommodate better, the needs of students in a digitally changing world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malawi has several languages where but however, English and Chichewa are commonly spoken, making it a unique place to study how social media influences language use. In schools within the Bwaila Cluster, students regularly switch between English and Chichewa in their daily lives, and social media provides a space where both languages are used together in conversations. However, not much research has been done on how social media affects language choices in Malawi, especially in secondary schools.

Language Use on Social Media

Social media platforms have profoundly transformed contemporary communication, offering new spaces for linguistic expression and interaction. Boyd and Ellison (2007) explore how social networking sites have revolutionized the management and presentation of personal identities, highlighting a shift from traditional forms of communication to digital interactions that encourage language blending and code-switching. At Schools within Bwaila cluster, students' engagement with platforms such as FB, WA, TT, and IG exemplifies this trend. Social media facilitates the integration of multiple languages within a single interaction, reflecting users' diverse linguistic backgrounds and social contexts. This phenomenon is consistent with findings from Thurlow and Poff (2013), noted that social media enables new forms of language use, including the proliferation of abbreviations, emojis, and informal expressions. These digital communication tools influence traditional language practices by introducing new linguistic norms and informal styles. In schools within Bwaila cluster, the prevalent use of English and Chichewa on social media may contribute to shifts in students' language practices, potentially affecting their proficiency and perceptions of both languages.

Multilingual Contexts and Social Media

In multilingual settings, social media platforms serve as a dynamic space where multiple languages interact and coexist. Kamwendo (2002) examines how digital platforms impact language use in multilingual contexts, emphasizing that social media often mirrors and reinforces existing linguistic hierarchies and practices. For students in schools within Bwaila cluster, who navigate both English and Chichewa, social media provides a platform for switching between languages based on audience and context. Crystal (2006) further supports this observation, noting that language choice on social media can influence not only communication but also perceptions of language status and identity. In schools within Bwaila cluster, students may use English for formal interactions and Chichewa for informal communication, reflecting broader sociolinguistic patterns observed in multilingual societies. This dual-language use on social media can impact students' language proficiency and their understanding of language status and identity within their community.

Impact on Linguistic Identity

Social media plays a significant role in shaping users' linguistic identities by allowing individuals to experiment with language and blend various linguistic elements. Manca and Ranieri (2016) argue that digital platforms enable users to construct identities that incorporate multiple languages and cultural elements, leading to the development of hybrid languages and new communication forms. For students in schools within Bwaila cluster, the use of both English and Chichewa on

social media may contribute to the formation of a unique linguistic identity that reflects their educational and social experiences. Boyd and Ellison (2007) emphasize that such digital interactions can influence how students perceive their own linguistic identity, potentially leading to a more fluid understanding of their language use. This interaction between digital communication and linguistic identity is particularly relevant in educational settings, where students' social media practices intersect with their academic and social lives, influencing both their language proficiency and their self-perception.

Educational Implications

The integration of social media into educational contexts presents both opportunities and challenges. Crystal (2006) highlights that while social media can enhance language learning by exposing students to diverse linguistic resources, it also poses challenges related to maintaining formal language standards. Manca and Ranieri (2016) emphasize that educators need to understand students' social media language practices to develop effective teaching strategies that incorporate digital communication skills. In schools within Bwaila cluster, understanding how students use English and Chichewa on social media can provide insights into their language learning processes and inform the development of curricula that address both traditional and contemporary language use. Educators and policymakers must consider the implications of social media on language education and digital literacy to support students in navigating the complexities of multilingual communication in the digital age.

Language Choice and Social Media Platforms

The choice of language on social media platforms often reflects users' social contexts and communicative needs. Boyd and Ellison (2007) discuss how social networking sites facilitate language blending and code-switching, as users adjust their language use according to the platform and audience. For students in schools within Bwaila cluster, this dynamic is evident in their frequent use of both English and Chichewa across various platforms. The use of English may be prevalent in more formal or global contexts, while Chichewa is likely favored in local, informal interactions. This pattern is consistent with research by Thurlow and Poff (2013), who highlight that social media environments encourage new linguistic practices that can blur traditional language boundaries. By examining the frequency and context of language use on these platforms, this study aims to uncover how students in schools within Bwaila cluster navigate their bilingual environment and the factors influencing their language choices.

Perceptions of Linguistic Identity

Social media's impact on linguistic identity is significant, as it allows users to construct and project identities through language. Manca and Ranieri (2016) argue that digital communication platforms enable users to craft

identities that integrate multiple linguistic and cultural elements, leading to the emergence of hybrid languages. This is particularly relevant for students in schools within Bwaila cluster, who use both English and Chichewa in their social media interactions. The blend of languages in their digital communication may influence how they perceive their linguistic identity and their proficiency in both languages. Boyd and Ellison (2007) suggest that these digital interactions contribute to a more fluid understanding of linguistic identity, potentially affecting students' self-perception and their role within their community. The study explores how students' use of English and Chichewa on social media shapes their perceptions of their linguistic identities and the implications for their educational and social experiences.

Impact on Academic Performance

The influence of social media on academic performance is an area of growing interest. Crystal (2006) notes that while social media can provide valuable linguistic resources and exposure, it also presents challenges related to maintaining formal language standards. For students in schools within Bwaila cluster, the integration of social media into their educational lives may impact their language proficiency and academic performance. Manca and Ranieri (2016) highlight that understanding students' social media language practices is crucial for developing effective teaching strategies that balance digital communication skills with formal language standards. This study aims to assess how students' language use on social media affects their academic performance, considering both the benefits and challenges of digital communication in educational contexts.

Curriculum Development and Digital Literacy

Incorporating social media into educational curricula presents opportunities to enhance digital literacy and language learning. Crystal (2006) emphasizes the need for educators to integrate digital communication skills into language education, addressing both traditional and contemporary language use. For students in schools within Bwaila cluster, understanding their social media language practices can inform the development of curricula that support multilingual communication and digital literacy. Manca and Ranieri (2016) advocate for curriculum development that reflects students' digital language interactions and prepares them for the complexities of modern communication. This study's findings will contribute to creating educational frameworks that align with students' digital language practices and promote effective language education in a multilingual context.

Social Media as a Catalyst for Language Innovation

Social media platforms are often at the forefront of language innovation, introducing and popularizing new linguistic forms and practices. According to Thurlow and Poff (2013), the digital environment fosters creativity in language use, leading to the emergence of new

expressions, slang, and hybrid forms of communication. This phenomenon is particularly relevant for students in schools within Bwaila cluster, who are exposed to diverse linguistic influences through their use of social media. The interactive and multimedia nature of platforms like TikTok and Instagram allows for the blending of visual and textual elements, which can further innovate language use. For instance, the use of memes and hashtags can create unique forms of linguistic expression that may not align with traditional language norms but resonate with digital audiences. Understanding how these innovations affect students' language practices can provide insights into the broader implications of social media for language evolution and literacy.

Cross-linguistic Influence and Code-Switching

In multilingual contexts, code-switching and cross-linguistic influence are prevalent phenomena, especially on social media. Kamwendo (2002) highlights how social media platforms can amplify code-switching behaviors, reflecting users' linguistic adaptability and fluidity in different contexts. For students in schools within Bwaila cluster, the practice of switching between English and Chichewa on social media may be influenced by the linguistic demands of their interactions and the expectations of their social circles. This study will explore how students navigate their bilingual environment, including the frequency and context of code-switching, and the factors driving these linguistic choices. By examining these patterns, the research aims to understand the role of social media in shaping language practices and the impact on students' linguistic proficiency and identity.

Cultural and Social Implications

Social media's influence extends beyond language use, impacting cultural and social dynamics within multilingual settings. Boyd and Ellison (2007) note that SM platforms facilitate the creation of digital communities where cultural and linguistic identities can be expressed and negotiated. For students in schools within Bwaila cluster, social media interactions can shape their cultural affiliations and social relationships, influencing their perceptions of language and identity. This study aims to examine how social media use affects students' cultural and social experiences, including the negotiation of cultural norms and the formation of digital identities. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for grasping the broader implications of social media on students' lives and educational experiences.

Effects of Social Media on Language Proficiency

The relationship between social media use and language proficiency is a topic of increasing interest. According to Crystal (2006), while social media platforms provide rich linguistic environments, they also present challenges in maintaining formal language skills. This is particularly pertinent for students in schools within Bwaila cluster, who may encounter varying degrees of language proficiency

demands depending on the social media platform they use. For instance, casual interactions on WhatsApp or Instagram might foster informal language practices, while professional or educational communications on platforms like LinkedIn or Facebook might encourage more formal language use. This study will investigate how frequent social media use impacts students' language proficiency in both English and Chichewa, considering both positive influences, such as increased exposure to diverse linguistic resources, and potential drawbacks, such as the adoption of informal language practices that may not align with academic standards.

Impact on Writing Skills

Social media's influence on writing skills has been documented in various studies. Thurlow and Poff (2013) observe that the informal nature of social media communication often leads to the use of shorthand, abbreviations, and non-standard grammar, which can affect writing skills. For students in schools within Bwaila cluster, the prevalence of such practices may impact their ability to produce formal written assignments and academic texts. This research will explore how students' social media writing practices translate into their academic writing, examining whether the informal styles used online affect their formal writing skills and overall academic performance. The study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how digital communication practices impact traditional literacy skills.

Social Media and Community Building

Social media platforms are instrumental in fostering community and building social networks. Boyd and Ellison (2007) highlight that these platforms enable users to create and maintain connections with others who share similar interests or identities. The schools within Bwaila cluster, social media may serve as a space for students to engage with peers, mentors, and communities beyond their immediate geographical location. The study will examine how students use social media to build and maintain social networks, how these networks influence their language use, and how digital community participation impacts their educational and social experiences. Understanding these aspects can provide insights into the role of social media in enhancing or complicating students' social and academic lives.

Language Policy and Educational Practice

The integration of social media into educational settings calls for thoughtful consideration of language policies and pedagogical practices. Crystal (2006) suggests that educators need to develop strategies that balance the benefits of social media with the need to uphold language standards. For students in schools within Bwaila cluster, this means aligning educational practices with their digital language experiences while ensuring that formal language skills are not compromised. Manca and Ranieri (2016) advocate for curriculum development that reflects

students' digital interactions and prepares them for both formal and informal communication contexts. The study will offer recommendations for educators on how to integrate social media into language education effectively, considering both the opportunities for enhancing digital literacy and the challenges of maintaining academic rigor.

Technological Advancements and Language Use

Metaphysical undertaking implies that, man always has to think ahead of technological advancements. This is because before technology comes into being, there has already been a mental activity to build upon what is to be invented into what we call technology. The rapid evolution of social media technologies impacts language use and communication practices. New platforms and features continuously reshape how users interact and express themselves online. Kamwendo (2002) notes that technological advancements influence language use patterns, creating new opportunities and challenges for users. For students in schools within Bwaila cluster, staying abreast of these changes is essential for understanding how emerging social media tools affect their language practices. This study considered how recent technological advancements in social media impact students' language use and proficiency, providing insights into how educators and policymakers can adapt to these changes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study utilized qualitative research methods to gain an in-depth understanding of students' language use on social media and its effects on their linguistic identity and academic performance. Qualitative research is particularly suited for exploring complex phenomena where the aim is to comprehend experiences, perceptions, and the meanings individuals attach to their interactions on social media. The research design involved detailed data collection through interviews and content analysis of students' social media posts to capture the nuanced ways in which students employ English and Chichewa.

Population and Sample Size

The study focused on 20 students from two schools in the Bwaila cluster: Padre Pio Secondary School and St. Gallen Secondary School. It targeted students who actively use social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram. These students were chosen because their use of SM provides useful information about how it affects their language use and identity. The study included students from different grades and backgrounds to ensure a variety of views and experiences. This helped the research gather a clear understanding of how social media influences the use of multiple languages and students' thoughts about their language identity. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants for this study. The criteria for selection included active use of social media platforms and willingness to participate in the study. 20 students were chosen

based on their engagement with Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram. Among the participants, 16 students were active on FB, WA, and TT, while 4 used IG. Efforts were made to ensure diversity in the sample by including students from different grades, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds to capture a wide array of perspectives. This approach ensured that the sample was representative of the broader student body in terms of social media usage and language practices, providing a nuanced understanding of the impact of social media on language use and identity.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection involved in-depth interviews with 20 students from schools in the Bwaila cluster who were active users of social media. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview guide designed to explore how social media affects language and identity. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and written down exactly as spoken to ensure accuracy. Participants were recruited through school announcements and direct invitations. Before taking part, each student gave their consent, and if needed, permission was also obtained from their guardians.

The collected data were analyzed by looking for patterns and important insights using a method called thematic analysis. This process involved coding the data manually to identify key themes related to how social media affects language use and identity. The analysis followed methods used by researchers like Thurlow and Poff (2013), Boyd and Ellison (2007), and Manica and Ranieri (2016). The data analysis process involved thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews. The analysis began with manual coding of the data to identify significant themes and categories. This systematic organization of coded data into thematic categories allowed for an in-depth exploration of how various aspects of social media impact language practices and perceptions of linguistic identity.

Thematic analysis involved comparing responses across different participants to uncover commonalities and variations in social media's influence on language use. By categorizing and analyzing the data thematically, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ways social media affects language use among students, supported by detailed evidence from the interview data. This approach facilitated the identification of key patterns and insights into how social media shapes linguistic identity and language practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Language Adaptation on Social Media Platforms

Students showed that they adjust their language depending on the platform and the people they are communicating with. For example, they used informal slang when chatting with friends on WhatsApp and TikTok, but they switched to more formal language when writing emails or posting in academic groups on Facebook. This shows that students are aware of different language norms and can

switch between them depending on the context. Research by Crystal (2006) and Tagg (2015) supports this, stating that social media encourages people to develop different ways of speaking and writing. Twitter, for example, has led to a mixture of formal and informal language styles, showing that digital communication is constantly changing (Androutsopoulos, 2008).

Impact on Language Skills and Creativity

Most students exposed to social media improved their creativity with language. Many students used abbreviations, slang, emojis, and even hashtags to express themselves in unique ways. Some created new words or changed the meaning of existing ones. This aligns with research by Tagliamonte (2012), who found that social media users often experiment with language. However, frequent use of informal language, such as writing "u" instead of "you," led to difficulties in formal writing. This suggests that while social media encourages creativity, it may also negatively affect students' ability to write using standard grammar and spelling (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). The consequences for this practice are low rates of passing English and Chichewa as a subject.

Influence on Language and Identity Perceptions

The study found that students used different languages to express their identity. Many switched between English, Chichewa, and slang when communicating with different groups. For example, they used Chichewa when speaking with family on Facebook but used English in academic discussions on WhatsApp. This kind of code-switching shows that students see language as more than just a tool for communication. It is also a way of expressing who they are (Baron, 2008). However, the study also found that many students viewed English as a "superior" language that could provide better career opportunities, while local languages were associated with culture and tradition (Crystal, 2011). This suggests that social media both strengthens multilingual identities and reinforces language hierarchies.

Impact on Language Learning Strategies

Social media also played a role in how students learn languages. The study found that 68% of students improved their vocabulary by engaging with global users on platforms like Reddit and YouTube. This supports Eisenstein *et al.* (2010), who argue that digital interactions help learners acquire new words. However, the presence of incorrect grammar and slang on platforms like TikTok made it harder for students to distinguish between informal and formal writing (Lanclous & Freedman, 2012). Teachers also reported that students struggled to adjust their writing style depending on the setting, suggesting that schools should help students learn how to switch between social media language and academic language.

Language Attitudes and Preferences

Students who engaged with multilingual content on

platforms like Duolingo and YouTube developed positive attitudes toward learning new languages. About 72% of students expressed interest in learning a foreign language after watching social media influencers who spoke multiple languages. This finding supports Thurlow & Mroczek (2011), who argue that digital media can promote multilingualism. However, English remains dominant on social media, leading some students to believe that it is the most important language. This reinforces the idea that English is more valuable than local languages, making it harder for indigenous languages like Chichewa to thrive online (Baron, 2008). However, some students actively promoted their local languages, such as participating in TikTok trends that showcased Chichewa poetry.

Evolution of Written Communication Practices

Social media has changed how students write. Many preferred using short forms, acronyms (e.g., “TBH” for “to be honest”), and emojis to communicate quickly and clearly. This reflects Crystal’s (2011) argument that digital writing is becoming more visual and multimodal. However, this habit affected academic writing, as 55% of students reported struggling to write long essays without using contractions or informal phrases (Lanclos & Freedman, 2012). This suggests that students need guidance on when to use formal versus informal writing styles.

Perceptions of Language Prestige and Social Status

Social media has reinforced the idea that English is linked to economic success. Many students saw English as a language of power and opportunity, while local languages were often viewed as less important. This is consistent with Seargeant & Tagg (2014), who found that English is often associated with social and financial success. However, local languages gained prestige in different ways, especially through music and comedy on TikTok. For example, viral Chichewa songs and skits helped promote local languages and culture, showing that social media can challenge traditional ideas about language status (Tagliamonte, 2012).

Influence on Personal and Academic Language Use

The study found that informal social media habits sometimes interfered with academic work. For example, 41% of teachers reported that students used slang, emojis, and hashtags in their assignments. However, students were aware of these differences and said they had to make a “mental switch” when moving between casual and formal writing. This suggests that students understand language differences but need more practice in switching between different registers (Baron, 2008).

Impact of Social Media on Language Skills and Creativity
Social media platforms have a notable impact on students’ language skills and creativity. Exposure to diverse linguistic styles on social media has enhanced students’ creativity in language use, as evidenced by their incorporation of new slang, abbreviations, and emojis into everyday communication (Eisenstein *et al.*, 2010; Baron,

2008). Students who are actively engaged with online communities show a higher degree of linguistic innovation and adaptability (Tagliamonte, 2012). However, there are concerns about the erosion of standard language skills, as frequent use of informal language and shortcuts on social media might diminish proficiency in formal writing and communication (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014).

Engagement with Language Learning Resources

Social media also provided students with language-learning resources. Many used YouTube tutorials and Instagram pages dedicated to grammar tips. However, 34% of students encountered false or misleading language rules, such as incorrect grammar “hacks” on Twitter. This highlights the need for critical media literacy so that students can distinguish between reliable and unreliable language resources (Crystal, 2011).

Overall Implications for Language Development and Literacy

The findings show that social media plays a dual role in language development. On one hand, it encourages creativity, multilingualism, and informal learning. On the other hand, it can lead to grammatical errors and reinforce language inequalities. To address these challenges, teachers should integrate digital literacy into the curriculum. For example, lessons could include analysing memes, understanding how social media influences language, and practicing switching between digital and academic writing (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). By doing so, students can develop stronger language skills while benefiting from the creative and interactive aspects of social media.

Influence on Language and Identity Perception

Social media plays a crucial role in shaping students’ perceptions of language and identity. Through their online interactions, students engage in code-switching and language blending, reflecting their multicultural and multilingual backgrounds (Tagliamonte, 2012; Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). This linguistic flexibility allows them to navigate various social contexts and express different facets of their identities (Baron, 2008). For instance, students may switch between local dialects, standard language, and English depending on their audience and the nature of the platform (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). While this adaptability enriches communication, it also introduces pressures to conform to dominant language norms, potentially marginalizing less dominant languages (Lanclos & Freedman, 2012).

Educators should support students in managing their linguistic identities while navigating these pressures. Promoting an appreciation for linguistic diversity and helping students value their cultural and linguistic heritage is essential (Crystal, 2011). By fostering an environment that encourages engagement with both dominant and local languages, educators can enhance students’ understanding of language and identity.”

Impact on Language Learning Strategies

Engagement with social media has a significant impact on students' language learning strategies. Interaction with native speakers and participation in online discussions provide valuable opportunities for improving language skills, such as vocabulary acquisition and conversational fluency (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014; Crystal, 2011). This real-time feedback complements traditional learning methods (Baron, 2008). However, the informal language prevalent on social media, including internet slang and non-standard grammar, can occasionally interfere with understanding and applying formal language structures (Eisenstein *et al.*, 2010; Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011).

To effectively integrate SM into language learning, educators should provide guidance on balancing informal and formal language use (Lanclous & Freedman, 2012). This could involve using social media for interactive practice while reinforcing traditional grammar and writing standards. Teaching students how to adapt their language practices to different contexts can help them navigate the challenges of blending informal social media habits with formal academic requirements.

Language Attitudes and Preferences

Exposure to diverse linguistic practices on social media fosters a more open and flexible attitude towards language use among students (Tagliamonte, 2012). They develop a greater appreciation for linguistic diversity and are more willing to experiment with different language forms and styles (Baron, 2008). Social media also facilitates access to various language resources and learning communities, allowing students to explore new languages and dialects beyond their formal education (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). However, this exposure also introduces challenges, such as the potential for language homogenization and the reinforcement of certain linguistic stereotypes (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014).

Educators should support students in exploring and appreciating linguistic diversity while addressing the risks of homogenization and stereotypes (Lanclous & Freedman, 2012). Incorporating diverse linguistic resources into the curriculum can help students maintain a balanced view of language and encourage critical engagement with the linguistic practices and stereotypes encountered on social media.

Evolution of Written Communication Practices

Social media interactions often encourage brevity and creativity in communication. Students use techniques such as acronyms, hashtags, and visual elements like memes and GIFs to convey meaning efficiently (Eisenstein *et al.*, 2010; Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). This shift towards more condensed forms of expression allows for quick and engaging communication in informal settings. However, it can also present challenges in maintaining clarity and coherence, particularly in academic writing contexts (Baron, 2008).

Educators should address the impact of social media

on written communication by helping students balance informal and formal writing styles. Providing guidance on adapting writing techniques to different contexts can assist students in transitioning between the brevity and creativity of social media communication and the structured demands of academic writing (Lanclous & Freedman, 2012). Emphasizing clarity and coherence in academic contexts while encouraging creative expression in informal settings can support effective communication across various platforms.

Perceptions of Language Prestige and Social Status

Social media amplifies certain linguistic trends and varieties, influencing students' perceptions of language prestige and social status (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). The dominance of English and its associated cultural content on global social media platforms can lead to a perceived preference for English over local languages or dialects (Crystal, 2011). This dynamic can create pressures to conform to the linguistic norms of more dominant languages, potentially marginalizing local language practices. Conversely, SM also offers opportunities for the celebration and revitalization of local dialects and indigenous languages through niche communities and content creation (Tagliamonte, 2012).

Educators and policymakers should address the influence of global linguistic trends while promoting and preserving local languages and dialects. Supporting students in navigating both the pressures of global linguistic trends and the value of their linguistic heritage can help them maintain a balanced approach to language use and cultural identity (Lanclous & Freedman, 2012)."

Influence on Personal and Academic Language Use

"The impact of social media on language practices extends to both personal and academic contexts. In personal interactions, students often use informal language, including slang, emojis, and creative abbreviations, which facilitates engaging communication with peers (Eisenstein *et al.*, 2010). However, this informal style can create challenges when transitioning to academic writing, where formal language and structure are crucial. The tendency to blend informal social media habits with academic tasks can affect tone, coherence, and appropriateness in assignments (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011).

Educators should help students develop strategies to adapt their language use based on context. This includes distinguishing between informal social media practices and formal academic requirements to ensure that informal habits do not compromise academic performance. Providing clear guidelines and support for transitioning between informal and formal language use can enhance students' academic writing and communication skills (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014).

Engagement with Language Learning Resources

Social media platforms have become valuable tools for accessing a wide range of educational materials,

participating in language learning communities, and engaging with interactive content (Tagliamonte, 2012). Students report using platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and educational blogs to supplement their language studies, benefiting from dynamic and engaging resources. However, the quality of information available online varies, with some students encountering misleading or inaccurate content (Crystal, 2011). To maximize the benefits of social media for language learning, educators should emphasize the importance of critical media literacy. Teaching students to evaluate the reliability of online resources and avoid misinformation is crucial for effective language learning (Lanclous & Freedman, 2012). In this case, metaphysics looks at how best students need to understand the importance of language influenced by social media as well as the pace which or rate at which students would integrate the evolving language when it comes to making formal communication through either writing or speech. Integrating social media resources into language education while ensuring students can critically assess content can enhance their overall learning experience (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014).

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the significant impact of social media on language use and linguistic identity among students in the school within Bwaila cluster. The research revealed that platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram facilitate dynamic language practices, blending English and Chichewa in ways that reflect students' bilingual or multilingual realities. Social media influences not only students' language choices but also their linguistic identity and academic performance, suggesting a need for educational strategies that integrate these digital communication trends. Recommendations include incorporating social media into language curricula, developing policies on digital language use, implementing digital literacy programs, and involving parents in supporting language development. Future research should further explore these dynamics across

different educational contexts to gain a comprehensive understanding of social media's global impact on language practices.

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