



## EFFECTS OF TEXT MESSAGING ON THE ACADEMIC WRITING OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS OF A GHANAIAN COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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### Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of text messaging on the academic writing of first-year pre-service teachers of Offinso College of Education. Empirical studies on the use of text messages in specific cultures were reviewed in order to demonstrate how the present study is both similar to and different from previous research. Descriptive survey research design was employed by the researchers to conduct this study. The student population for the study was 350. Quota sampling and simple random sampling techniques aided the researchers to select 50 pre-service teachers for the study. The instruments used were questionnaires, interviews and essay-type tests. The study revealed that the vocabulary items students used in their SMS texting contained numbers, reduction, clipping and shortening, and that the use of these vocabulary items had a negative effect because these items found their way into the academic writing of students. The researchers recommend that college tutors should sensitize the pre-service teachers on the need to avoid SMS language in their academic writings to help them overcome the menace. To curtail everything, they should text using Standard English to avoid being addicted to texting language.

**Keywords:** text message, effects, academic writings, pre-service teachers, Ghanaian

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## 1. Introduction

Advances in science have led to the introduction of new technologies into all human activities. Our mode of interaction is constantly changing with the emergence of new communication media which are social in nature and which have brought a tremendous impact on social interaction all over the world. This ever-extending array of communication tools such as telephone, text messaging, e-mail, instant messaging and other online social media have broadened our interaction horizons significantly. With the ever-increasing use of text messaging among students, especially teenagers, there has been a growing concern among educators, parents, researchers and the general public that this practice is damaging the use of the English language in speaking and writing and will affect the standard forms in the long run (Dansie, 2011).

Although abbreviations have been used since 1987, with the introduction of email interfaces, nowadays, the diminutive, the brief and the simple are exceedingly valued in communication, especially by the youth who are between 18 and 24 years old (Dansie, 2011). The youth have been called the generation being defined by their digital connectivity: they socialize and share experiences through different devices such as smartphones, digital players and computers more than any other age group. They have replaced books and face-to-face communication with texting, social networks, messenger or chat. Cell-phone texting has become the “preferred channel of basic communication” and it is now commonplace for children at younger and older ages to communicate with their friends via text messaging as opposed to phone conversations or even face-to-face. Unfortunately, by using this short message service (SMS) which is an ungrammatical form of communication so frequently, they have introduced it (the features of SMS) in their “normal language”. Therefore, the ubiquity of this new way of communication, undeniably both funny and practical, makes us wonder whether its effects are positive or detrimental to the young generation’s verbal language use and academic writing.

Again, this phenomenon, ‘SMS’ language has brought in its wake three main schools of thought. While some educators like Tomaszewski (2011), Odey et al. (2014) and some students think that text messaging is one of the banes of mobile telephony because of its possible negative impact on the writing skills of students, others contend that it rather enhances their written communication skills, and therefore is a blessing. A third group thinks that the argument is neither here nor there – text messaging has neither a positive nor negative impact on student writing.

The first school of thought bases its argument on the fact that for the sake of brevity, conciseness, and economy, the short message service (SMS) of text messaging throws the essential mechanics of writing such as grammar, syntax, punctuation and capitalization to the wind. The other school of thought, spearheaded by the renowned linguist, Crystal (2010) and Jansen (2010) think otherwise, that text messaging does not really pose a threat as many fear it can. The more students write the more they improve upon their writing skills. Therefore, its increased use rather enhances the literacy of users, especially the youth instead of harming it (Crystal, 2010). The debate is carried to another

level by the third group led by Russell, who doubts whether texting really has any effect (positive or negative) on English grammar at all (Russell, 2010). These views will be expanded on later under the literature review section. I would like to posit that text messaging in itself is not bad. It is its misuse, especially, the unbridled use of abbreviations and non-standard expressions and spellings and their possible negative impact on students' spelling, punctuation and grammatical expressions in general that has brought about the worry of many people.

Speakers of every language have a set of internalized rules for using that language and these rules constitute that language's grammar. Students in colleges of education in Ghana are supposed to write formal essays, exercises, and class assignments using the appropriate sentence pattern, good grammar and incorrect tenses. However, the experience this researcher has had in marking students' examination scripts as an examiner, and class exercises, essays and assignments as a tutor at the college of education, has revealed a decline in students' academic writing skills. Scripts of students are now filled with terms that were hitherto found only in SMS texts. With the escalating row and debate over the effect of the internet on language use, the present study investigates the effects of SMS text messaging in the academic writing of first-year students of Offinso College of Education.

### **1.1 Research questions**

**Q1:** How pervasive is the use of text messaging among pre-service teachers of Offinso College of Education?

**Q2:** What are the positive and negative effects of text messaging on the academic writings of the college students?

**Q3:** What are the vocabulary items pre-service teachers come across and employ as they use the SMS and how are they structured?

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Characteristics of text messaging**

While Standard English is identified primarily by proper vocabulary, grammar, and spelling, textese is most often identified as something different, something inferior (Johnson, 2012). Both Standard English and textese are dialects, or socially distinctive varieties of language, each characterized by a particular set of words and grammatical structures (Crystal, 2010). In contrast to 'standard' language, which is prestigious, correct, uniform, and follows the rules of grammar, SMS dialects generally lack prestige, are seen as incorrect, substandard, and fail to obey grammatical rules (Hock & Joseph, 2009). Lenhart (2012) explained that the dialect of text messaging is often seen as having a corrupting influence on the presumed 'standard' or formal written Standard English.

At the same time, texting has been considered a sign of creativity and proficiency by some researchers. Thurlow and Poff (2011), and Baron (2008) call young people's use of their mobile phones a 'novel, creative' way of improving close relationships and

existing social circles, they claim, “popular discourses about the linguistic uniqueness and incomprehensibility of this particular technologically mediated discourse appear greatly exaggerated” (p.12). Keeping to the sociolinguistic 'maxims' of (a) brevity and speed, (b) paralinguistic restitution and (c) phonological approximation, young people's messages are linguistically unremarkable and communicatively adept. According to research done by Nenagh Kemp of the University of Tasmania, the evolution of 'textese' is essentially associated with a strong grasp of grammar and phonetics (Kemp, 2010).

## 2.2 Vocabulary items employed in SMS language

The systematic constraint of the number of characters has given rise to linguistic creativity with the development by texters of a whole lot of imaginative and innovative techniques aimed at making the technology work best for them. Quan-Haase (2008) helpfully categorizes some of these linguistic trends into five types of abbreviations, including “homophonic spellings” (e.g. “u” for “you”), “truncated homophonic spellings” (e.g. “k” for “okay”), “borrowed shorthand” (e.g. “w” for “with”), reduced spellings needing a gloss” (e.g. “ft” for “faint”), and “simplified but recognizable spellings” (e.g. “nite” for “night”). She continues to outline some of these linguistic trends and observes that in informal SMS communication, forms of phonetic spelling, morphosyntactic contractions typical of informal spoken discourse, representations of nonstandard varieties, and the written representation of proximity-related forms like interjections can be found. Semi-phonetic spellings and eye dialect: enuf (‘enough’), nite (‘night’), u (‘you’), no (‘know’), l8r (‘later’). Morphosyntactic contractions represent spoken informal language: isn’t ‘is not’, cant ‘cannot’, gonna ‘going to’, wanna ‘want to’ and written representations of nonstandard forms. The way text messages exhibit oral elements is through their use of onomatopoeic words, like “haha,” “ugh,” “ahhh,” “hmmm,” “yay!” “zzzz,” etc. which are simply written versions of popular spoken terms. Text messaging involves the use of such forms as pictograms and logograms. The texter may employ shortened phrases through the use of symbols in order to represent the word. A text may equally consist of a series of alphanumeric blendings. Examples of such compositions include the following: “4 u” used for “for you”, “Luv u” used for “love you”, “b4” used for “before”, “love you with all my heart” used for “luwamh”, “to whom it may concern” in the place of “twimc”, “2d8” used for “to date” and “db8” used for “debate” (Odey et al., 2014; Crystal 2008, Dansieh, 2011). All these language techniques have caused the SMS language to be considered a kind of independently written register which does not necessarily depend on the conventions of the standard written language.

Abbreviations:

- LOL for “laughing out loud”;
- Spelling: coz for “because”;
- Numerals: 2 for “to”;
- Symbols: @ for “at”;
- Reductions: gonna for “going to”;
- Ungrammatical structures: ive for “I have”;

- Word-play: L8 for “late” Loss of punctuation marks:
- Dropping punctuation marks and capitals such as tom for “Tom”;
- Smileys/Emoticons.

It is noteworthy that some features of text messaging are used in the academic context due to the lack of social skills. Cell phones have been known to make their users antisocial. Nowadays, people rarely enjoy the company of family, friends or surroundings. They spend most of the time navigating the Internet and texting, which have become the preferred modes of communication (cf. McCoy, 2017).

### **2.3 Effects of texting on students’ academic writing**

The impact of SMS on language use has raised conflicting viewpoints. The first viewpoint says that SMS messaging has a positive impact on students’ writing. The second opposes this by saying that it has a negative impact on students’ writing while the third view says it has no impact, both positive and negative on students’ writing.

Ross of the American Federation of Teachers stated that text and instant messaging are negatively affecting students’ writing quality on a daily basis, as they bring their abbreviated language into the classroom. As a result of their electronic chatting, kids are making countless syntax, subject-verb agreement and spelling mistakes in writing assignments. Many teachers believed that students’ wide use of “textspeak” was a key factor in their students’ negative performance. Text speak is a problem. (Ross, 2007, p. 4) This assertion is supported by language purists (Tomaszewski, 2011; Odey et al., 2014) who have a more negative viewpoint. For them, this development in social media networks and the falsely acclaimed benefits constitute negative platforms that damage, harm and endanger language and linguistic heritage by reducing it to a deplorable state.

### **2.4 Studies reporting a positive correlation**

A staunch supporter of the positive effects of the Internet on language is the renowned British linguist David Crystal who argues that the impact of the world wide web on language remains minimal. He says we are not seeing an alternation, but additions to the language since the main effect of the Internet on language has been to increase the expressive richness of language with a new set of communicative dimensions that haven’t existed in the past. Crystal, 2008; Wood, et al. 2011; Bushnell, 2011; & Kemp, 2010) contend that texting is not harmful to students’ literacy; rather it enhances it. They again, refute the popular view that SMS language and its profuse use of abbreviations and slang can impact negatively students' language and literacy. Crystal and Wood et al., claim was based on six main points:

- 1) In a typical text message, less than 10% of the words are abbreviated
- 2) Abbreviating has been in use for decades and thus is not a new language
- 3) Children and adults alike use text language, the latter being more likely to do so
- 4) Students do not habitually use abbreviations in their homework and examinations
- 5) Before people can text, they must first know how to spell. Texting can therefore not be a cause of bad spelling

- 6) Since texting provides people with the opportunity of engaging with the language conducted a study to determine the nature and direction of any association between textism usage and literacy, they conclude that exposure to textisms positively affects young adults' language.

### **2.5 Studies reporting a negative correlation**

Whereas pundits of e-technology and cyberspace credit the Internet with the massive global communication highway leading to the dissemination of knowledge (Baron 2008), one school of thought argues that the service is a curse, because it impacts negatively on students' communication skills, particularly writing skills; language purists have a more negative viewpoint. For them, this development in social media networks and the falsely acclaimed benefits constitute negative platforms that damage, harm and endanger language and linguistic heritage by reducing it to a deplorable state (cf. Tomaszewski, 2011; Essoh et al., 2014).

Kate Ross of the American Federation of Teachers, Thurlow, Geertsema, Hyman and Deventer (2011), and De Jonge and Kemp (2012) conducted a study into the relationship between texting and literacy and stated that Text and instant messaging are negatively affecting students' writing quality on a daily basis, as they bring their abbreviated language into the classroom. Sutherland (2002) also reflected this concern when he ridiculed textese by presenting Hamlet's existential question in textese: "2B or (not) 2b = ?" He then summarized textese as "snot-talk," "unimaginative," "bleak, bald, sad shorthand," and "drab shrink talk" (p. 11). Sutherland concluded with his claim that textese, "*masks dyslexia, poor spelling and mental laziness*" (p. 11).

### **2.6 Studies reporting conflicting findings or no significant correlation**

The third school of thought led by Russell contends that textism has no effect on grammar. They argue that SMS texting should be considered as another language, and since learning a new language does not affect students' ability to use English grammar, it would be wrong to conclude that text messaging can affect their grammar. They point out that slang words have no effect on English grammar, and that even though each generation has its own jargon, English grammar has not been changed. All students need to do, they claim, is learn the basics in English class and they will be able to distinguish between "*slang, texting lingo and correct English*" (Russell, 2010).

Shaw, Carlson and Waxman (2007) Plester, Wood and Bell (2008), Drouin and Davis (2009), and Winzker, Southwood and Huddleston (2009) report on two studies investigating the relationship between texting and literacy. There were no significant differences between students who indicated that they did use textese and those who did not in their literacy scores or misspellings of words regularly abbreviated in textese. The group doubted whether texting really has any effects on English grammar at all.

### **3. Methodology**

Descriptive Survey Research Design was employed by the researchers to conduct this study. The main Instruments used for data collection were questionnaires and interviews.

#### **3.1 Population and sampling techniques**

The population for this study consisted of 350 first-year students and 5 English language tutors of Offinso College of Education in the Ashanti Region of Ghana with a sample size of 55. Thus, 50 pre-service teachers constituting 14.2% of the total first-year population and the 5 English tutors. The first-year pre-service teachers were grouped into five classes based on their areas of specializations. Ten students were randomly selected from each class to get a total of 50.

Each of the respondents was made to write an essay of not more than 300 words which enabled the researchers to assess their vocabulary usage and their sentence construction. This essay written by the fifty respondents for assessment purposes in a natural setting following the one-shot design was analyzed for incidences of SMS features. They were given sheets of paper and each of them was asked to write a friendly letter to his or her friend telling him or her about how he or she spent the Christmas holidays. Respondents were told that they should take the assignment as a normal letter they were writing to their friends and respond to it as if it were an examination item. They responded to the assessment item in the most natural and realistic way possible.

The respondents' write-ups were marked and the errors they made were noted and analyzed. In attempting to identify the errors attributed to the influence of texting, the researchers adopted the distinctive features of 'text speak graphology' formalized by Crystal (2008). These features include abbreviations, numerals, and symbols, together with misspellings, reductions or clippings, alphanumeric words or letter and number homophones, ungrammatical structures, loss of punctuation marks, etc. These features were found to be present in the responses to the essay item that was given to the respondents. Moreover, SMS text messages that students had written to their friends were analyzed.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

This section presents the analysis of data collected and findings made from the analysis of the data. The data collected consisted of field observations, tests results, responses to interview questions and questionnaires administered during the research process.

#### **4.1 Text messaging among respondents**

The interview and the questionnaire results revealed that all the respondents owned mobile phones which they used to send and receive text messages. They sent and received text messages, most of them several times a day, this being their preferred channel of basic communication with friends and family. Some of them sent and also

received SMS messages from their tutors. Those who were interviewed reported that they also received SMS messages in the form of prompts from banks, and advertisement notices from loans and savings companies and consumer credit companies.

#### 4.2 Occurrence and frequency of SMS text in students' essays

There is an ongoing discussion on whether or not SMS text messaging affects students' formal writing and hence their academic work. As part of the research tools for this study, the respondents were made to write an essay of three hundred words in length. The scripts were then analyzed to check for SMS features. The following table presents the data on the essays written by respondents.

**Table 1:** Occurrence and Frequency of SMS text in Students' Essays

Items	Features	No of students	Percentage (%)
1	Omission of articles subjects and prepositions	14	5.98
2	Omission and overuse of punctuations	27	11.5
3	Omission and overuse of capitals	33	14
4	Spelling errors	41	17.5
5	Clipping	14	5.98
6	Shortening	17	7.1
7	Tense errors	38	16
8	Use of letters	11	4.7
9	Numerals	6	2.6
10	Informal expressions	33	14

Table 1 above shows the aspects of writing that were affected by the text messaging syndrome. These included spelling (17.5%), clipping (5.98), punctuations (11.5%), shortening (7.1), tense errors (16%) omissions of articles and prepositions (5.98%), informal expressions (14%), and the use of letters and numerals (7.3%) respectively. This affirms the fact that text messaging has a major impact on students' performance and quality of work.

As is the case with textisms used in the data set, the morphological structures the textisms used in the participants' essays deviated from those applicable to formal English. Nonetheless, in this data set, the textisms with the highest occurrence frequency percentages were on spelling errors, tense errors, and capitalization.

#### 4.3 Vocabulary items students employ from SMS language in their write-ups SMS features found in students' essays

This section provides an analysis of essays written by students in order to find out the vocabulary items they come across and employ as they use the SMS resource. The features of SMS found in the students' essays included abbreviations, numerals and symbols, together with misspellings, reductions or clippings, alphanumeric words or letter and number homophones, ungrammatical structures, loss of punctuation marks, etc. These features were found to be present in the essay item written by the respondents.



Based on Crystal (2008), Table 4 details some of the characteristic features of text speak identified in the essays that the respondents wrote.

**Table 2: Pre-service teachers' use of SMS language in their essay writing**

SMS features	Examples
1. Clipping/ shortenings/ reductions	'comin' for coming; 'welcom' for welcome; 'gonna' for going to; 'welcom' for welcome; 'luv u' for love you; 'tho' for although or even though; 'e' for the; 'u' for you; 'ok' for alright; 'exwhere' for somewhere; 'Exmas' 'x'mas' for Christmas; 'Mum' for mother; 'Dad' for father; 'no' for know; 'wher' for where etc.
2. Dropping of capitals	'tuesday' for Tuesday; 'i' for I; 'december' for December; 'hanna' for Hannah
3. Loss of punctuation marks	'cant' for can't; 'wont' for won't; 'dont' for don't
4. Abbreviations	'Omg' for oh my God
5. Spelling	'coz' for because, 'More' for Mall
6. Ungrammatical Structures	'ive' for I have; 'hy nager' for hello boy
7. Non-conventional Spellings	'fone' for phone; 'rite' for right/write; 'notin' for nothing; 'no' for know
8. Letter and number homophones	'2moro' for tomorrow; 'b4' for before; 'L8' for late; 'gr8t' for great; '2' for to; '4' for for
9. Informal tone and registers	Informal addresses such as 'Hey'; hy instead of Dear and use of slang terms such as, hi gal, yeah, u paa dee, 4 days bi, hy nager, etc.

The morphological structures analyzed in the participants' essays in the data set were categorized into different textism features. It could be inferred from the students' write-ups that they did not really consider chatting or text messaging as "writing", but as an

easier and faster way to interact with peers and family. According to Essoh et al. (2014), Crystal (2008), Dansieh (2011) and BBC-Focus on Africa (2004) all these language techniques have caused the SMS language to be considered a kind of independently written register which does not necessarily depend on the conventions of the standard written language. In other words, SMS language or textese is a new kind of language with its own conventions and standards. Looking at the examples of the text messages that were sent by the students, it can be seen that almost all the words in the text are abbreviated so the researcher also refutes the popular views by Crytal (2008) that “SMS language and its profuse use of abbreviations and slang cannot impact negatively on students’ language and literacy and that, in a typical text message, less than 10% of the words are abbreviated.”

#### 4.4 Effects of SMS language on the academic writing of respondents

As part of the marks awarded for an essay, mechanical accuracy marks are awarded based on the writer’s use of tenses, spelling, punctuation and amalgamation (wrong separation and joining) of words. Owing to the use of SMS features by respondents in the essays it was expected that mechanical accuracy would be affected. Once mechanical accuracy is affected, then, there would be a corresponding effect on the total marks obtained.

**Table 3:** Mechanical accuracy results in essays of respondents

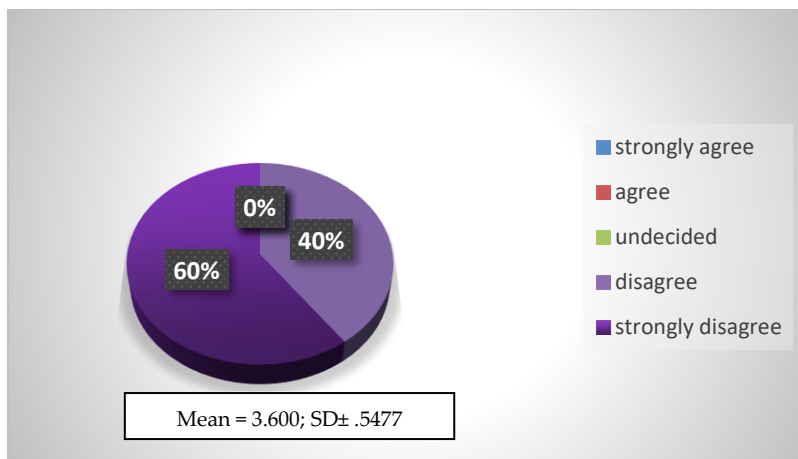
Marks	No of Students	Percentage (%)
0	30	60%
1	13	26%
2	5	10%
3	2	4%
4	0	0
5	0	0
Total	50	100

The problem of SMS features in students’ writing became pronounced when it permeated students’ academic activities with recordings of about 60% of students scoring 0 out of 5 marks given for mechanical accuracy of students’ essays, and 26% scoring 1 out of 5 marks, with 10% scoring 2 out of 5 marks and only 4% scoring 3 out of 5 marks. This shows clearly that texting is seriously affecting the academic writing of students.

The results showed that the majority of students’ encountered difficulties in writing English and often make spelling mistakes due to the SMS-using habit which is also directly proportional to the excessive use of the SMS (Odey et al, 2014). The results showed that many students used textisms language of their examinations. The features of SMS that were used in the examinations were spelling errors, lack of punctuation, over-punctuation, acronyms, the omission of function words, etc. The same features that were found in the text messages of the students were seen in their examination scripts.

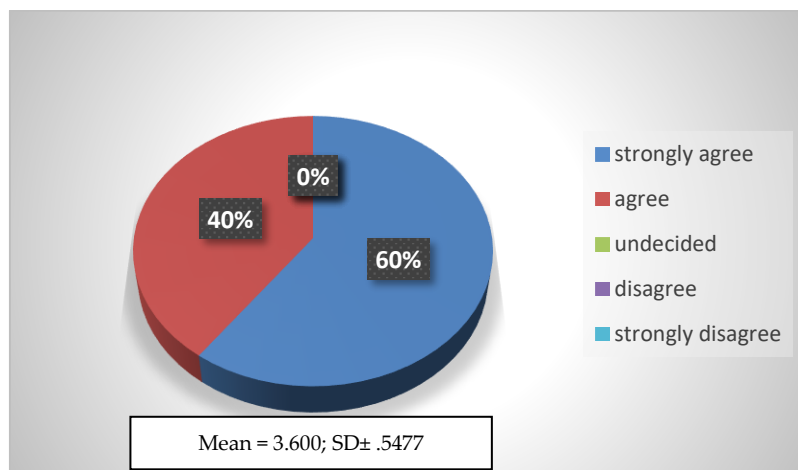
#### 4.4.1 Effects of SMS on students' academic work (tutors views)

Tutors' views on the effects of texting on the academic writing of first-year students of Offinso College of Education were elicited. Likert scale was used to take their views on the issue. Their responses were analyzed using SPSS and the results are presented through the following pie charts and bar graphs.



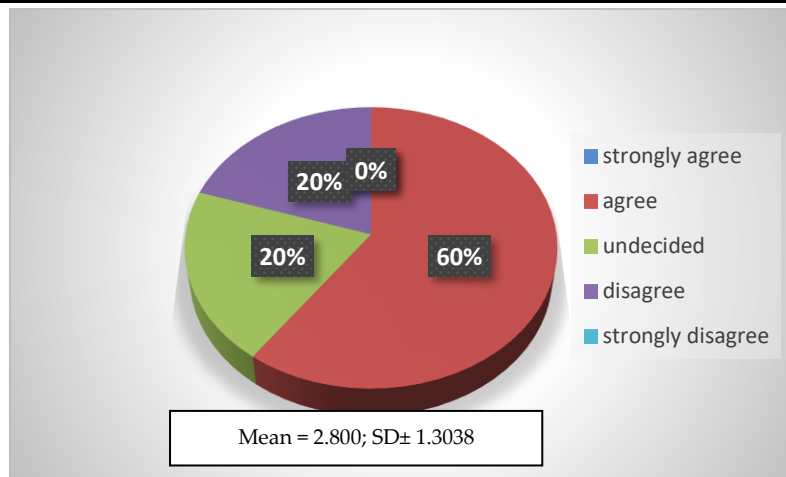
**Figure 1:** Texting and SMS do not pose a threat to students' academic writing

Figure 1 shows that all the tutors opposed the view that Texting and SMS do not pose a threat to students' academic writing. For instance, 40% of them disagreed and 60% strongly disagreed that SMS texting positively affects their students' writing.



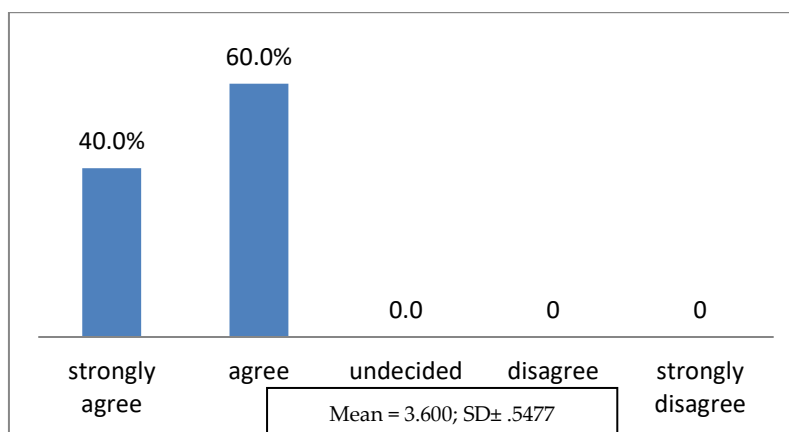
**Figure 2:** The language of text messaging does not always observe grammatical rules

According to the data in Figure 2 which states, 'My students do not recognize the difference between informal language use, where features of texting and SMS are allowed, and formal writing which should be purely academic', 60% agreed while 20% disagreed and 20% was undecided.



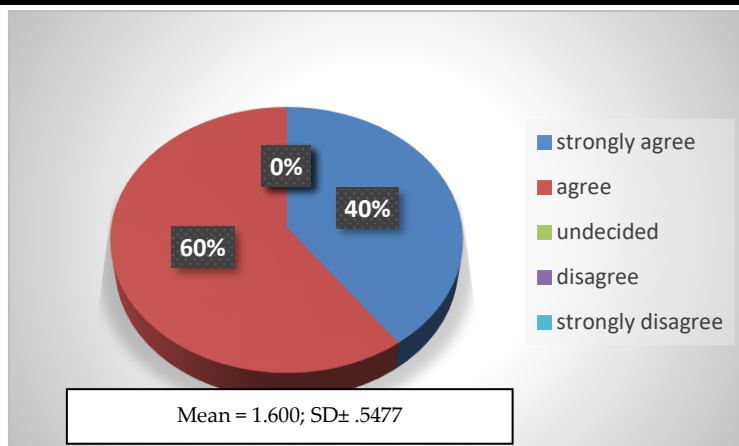
**Figure 3:** My students do not recognize the difference between informal language use, where features of texting and SMS are allowed, and formal writing which should be purely academic

According to Figure 3, 40% of respondents strongly agreed and 60% agreed to the assertion 'Uncommon abbreviations and contractions appear in my students' academic writing.'



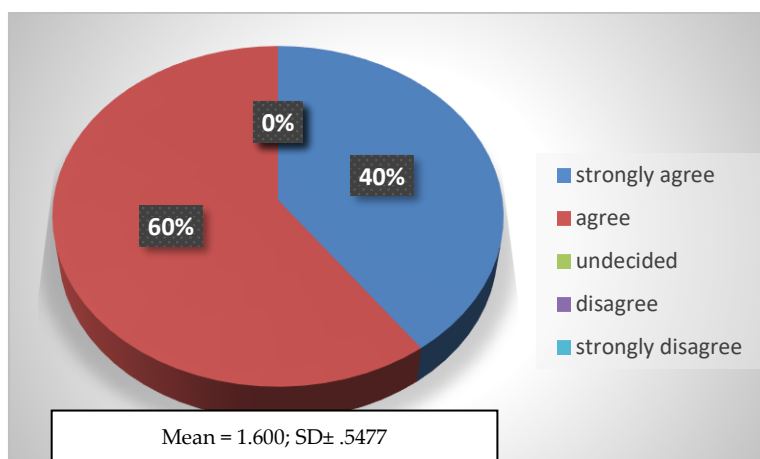
**Figure 4:** Uncommon abbreviations and contractions appear in my students' academic writing

All the tutors agreed that punctuations are seriously affected when it comes to student's use of SMS texting language as shown in Figure 4.



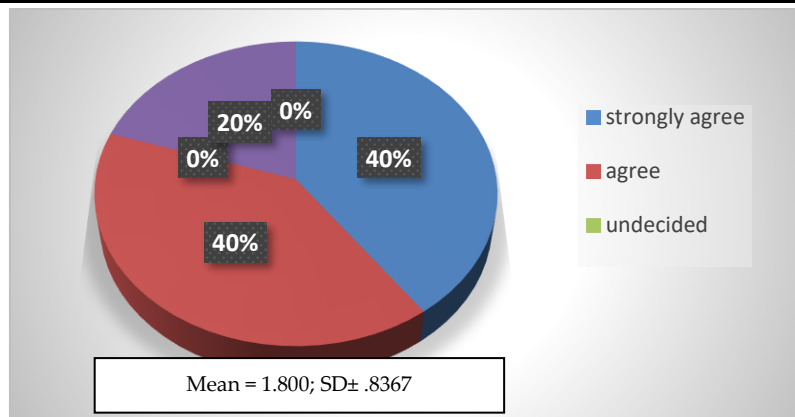
**Figure 5:** Text messaging affects negatively students' use of punctuation marks

Figure 5 presents respondents' answers to the statement that text messaging has negative effects on students' use of punctuation marks in their academic writing. All of them agreed that spelling is seriously affected when it comes to student's use of SMS texting language.



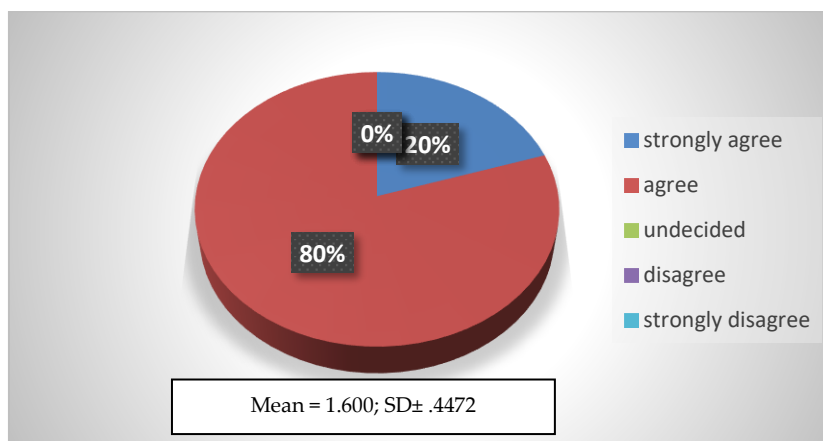
**Figure 6:** In my students' writing, spelling is the most affected aspect due to texting effects

Figure 6 shows that 80% of respondents agreed that texting and chatting will endanger the future of Standard English, while 20% disagreed.



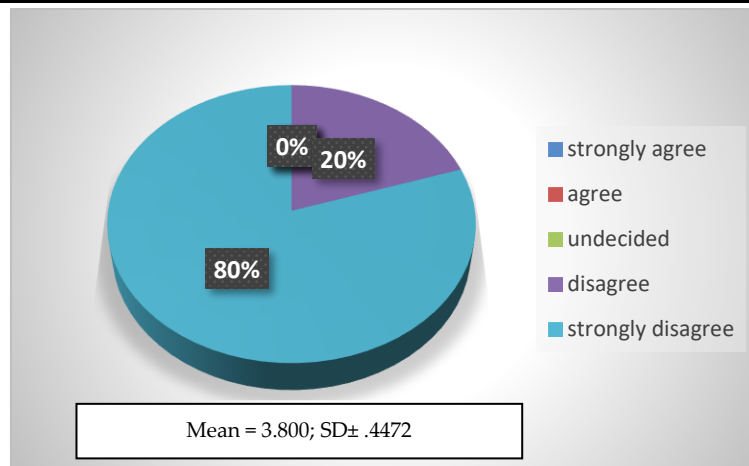
**Figure 7:** I believe that text messaging and chatting will endanger the future of standard English

Figure 7 shows respondents' answers to the statement 'I believe that text messaging and chatting will endanger the future of Standard English.' Four tutors representing 80% agreed that due to texting effects, a shallow style of writing is sometimes detected even in good students' essays whereas 20% disagreed.



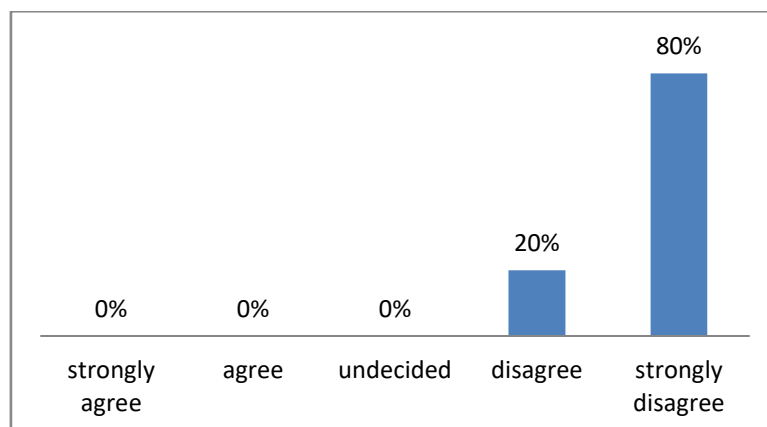
**Figure 8:** Due to texting effects, a shallow style of writing is sometimes detected even in good students' essays

Figure 8 represents respondents' reaction to the assertion, 'Errors in students' writing are attributable to a lack of knowledge and not necessarily to frequent texting.' It shows that all the respondents disagreed.



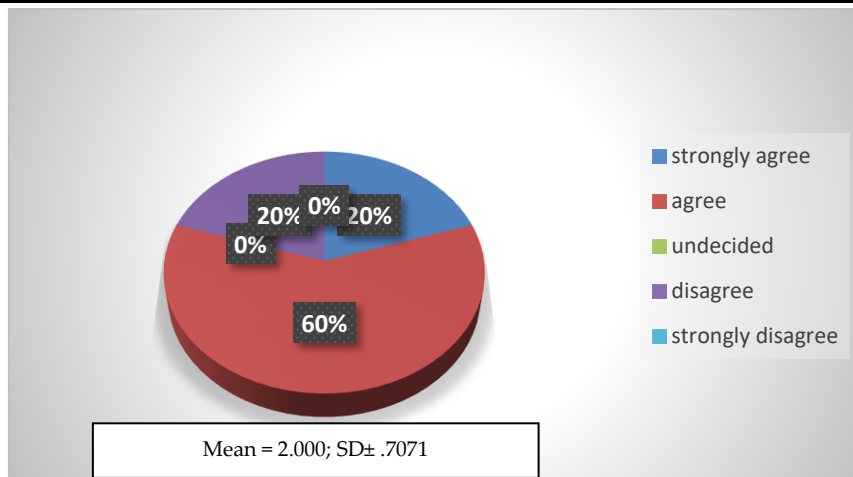
**Figure 9:** Errors in students' writing are attributed to a lack of knowledge and not necessarily to frequent texting

All the 5 tutors representing 100% disagreed that as a feature of e-technology, texting improves students' English in general and their writing in particular' respectively.



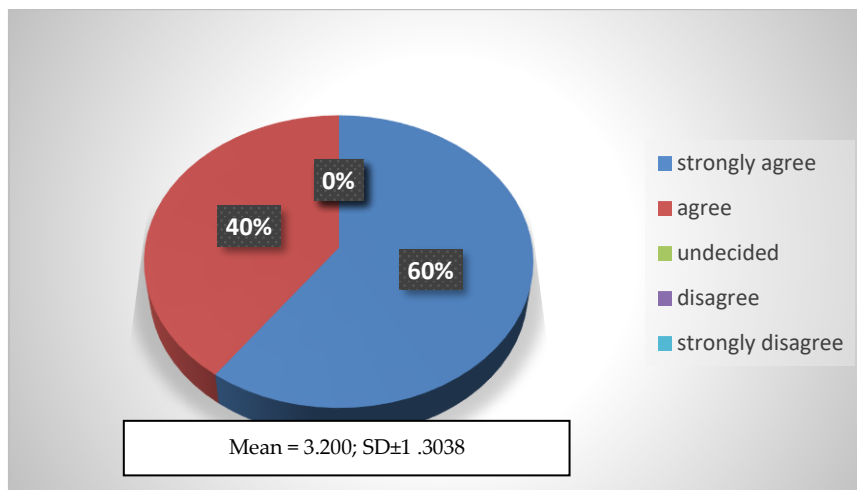
**Figure 10:** As a feature of e-technology, texting improves students' English in general and their writing in particular

The statement in Figure 11 posits, 'In my writing classes, features of texting appear in the essays of students who have a good command of the language.' The data shows that 80% of respondents agreed but 20% disagreed.



**Figure 11:** In my writing classes, features of texting appear in the essays of students who have a good command of the language

According to Figure 11, two tutors (40%) agreed while 40% of also disagreed with the view that using some aspects of texting such as abbreviations in formal writing can be tolerated.



**Figure 12:** The language of text messaging does not always observe grammatical rules

According to Figure 12, all respondents agreed to the statement 'The language of text messaging does not always observe grammatical rules.'

#### 4.4.2 Students' views on the effects of SMS language usage on their academic work

The researcher inquired from respondents whether they considered text messaging as writing. The responses they gave to the questions that were asked are given below.

To the question "Do you consider text messaging and chatting as writing?" All the respondents said that they did not really consider chatting or text messaging as "writing". For them, it was an easy, simple, and fastest way to interact with peers and family. It also saved time and reduced costs. They went on to say that they considered texting as creativity in writing, that is, it helped them to be creative.



**Table 10:** Students' views on effects, either positive or negative, on their academic work

Effect	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Negative	20	40
Positive	10	20
No effect	20	40
Total	50	100

Some of the respondents who sent and received text messages or instant messages were of the opinion that communicating electronically helped them to be more creative and improve upon their academic writing. About 20% of them did not consider that it has harmed their school writing, or that it has had a negative impact on their overall writing skills, and about 40%, admitted that they often used informal writing styles and ignored punctuations, correct spelling and capitalization and other formalities in their school assignments. They could attest to the fact that at times they unconsciously write these text languages in their school work and consider it to be the order of the day, with some even saying that they had become addicted to the text language because of continuous texting. Respondents enjoy non-school writing and, to a lesser extent, the writing they do for school, especially when they are assigned short writings, from a paragraph to one page. 40% say this communication has had no important impact, either positive or negative, on the quality of writing they do for school. They believe that developing good writing is important to their future success so they do not use them or they try to avoid the text language completely. Because they know that academic writings are official and they demand formal writing styles.

On the issue of the effect of SMS text messaging on students' coursework, 80% of the respondents acknowledged the fact that they had employed abbreviated forms in their academic writing. They said the areas most affected were especially in examinations, class exercises, writing of notes in class, etc. When respondents were asked whether their use of textese language in their academic writing was consciously done, 20 percent of them replied in the affirmative. They said that they resort to this when they are short of time. Eighty percent of the respondents said they were not conscious of their use of textese language. According to them, aspects of textese language slip in when they are writing. Whether the inclusion of textese language in their writing was done consciously or unconsciously the use of the phone for text messaging influenced the writing skills and ability of students. Yousaf and Ahmed (2013), "*the way people converse, as well people write, has been influenced by text messaging*" (p. 394). The implication here is that the more people become addicted to texting the worse their academic writing becomes.

#### 4.5 Strategies to mitigate SMS on writing

In view of the fact that SMS texting is adversely affecting students in their academic writing, the researcher asked the students and the tutors to suggest ways by which the

incidence of the appearance of SMS vocabulary items or textese could be reduced or eradicated.

#### 4.5.1 Students' views on mitigating the effects of SMS texting

The respondents were aware of the presence of SMS language in their academic writing and the negative effects this has on their academic performance. They, therefore, suggested ways through which this can be reduced or even eradicated. These are captured in Table 11.

**Table 11:** Students' views on mitigating the incidence of textese in their writing

No	Items	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Teachers should educate and sensitize us on the effects of SMS on our academic work	50	100
2	Self-consciousness of students	30	60
3	Write words in text messages in full	20	40
4	Parents and teachers should encourage us to stop SMS use	20	40
5	Feedback from tutors to alert us	40	80
6	We should reduce the use of SMS in our messages to prevent addiction	30	60
7	Use auto correct to check spelling in texting	20	40
8	It should be part of the instructions in exams	50	100
9	Ample time should be given in examination situation	40	80

When respondents were asked about what they think can be done to mitigate the problem of using SMS texting in their academic work, all fifty of them representing 100% responded that there should be education on the effects it has on their academic work. Thirty respondents representing 60% said they themselves should be self-conscious of what they write and know the purpose for which they write it. While twenty of them representing 40% said their parents and tutors should always encourage them to stop using SMS text language in their texting. Twenty respondents representing 40% said that their parents and tutors should discourage them from using the features in their academic work.

Moreover, about forty respondents representing 80% said tutors should send them feedback after marking their scripts so that they will always be on the alert. Also, thirty of them representing 60% said they should try to reduce the SMS text language in their texting to friends and relatives to the barest minimum in order not to become addicted to it. Again, twenty respondents said they should use the auto-correct on their phones to check spelling in order to write words in full in case they have problems with spelling. In addition, all of them suggested that it should be part of the instructions given in examination situations so that it will remind them.

Finally, forty of them suggested that ample time should be given in examination situations for them to be able to finish since students try to rush through when they realize there is limited time left.

#### 4.5.2 Tutors' views on mitigating the effects of SMS texting on students' academic writing

Tutors of the college were asked to give their views on how the incidence of SMS texting could be mitigated. Their responses are given below.

**Table 12:** Tutors' views on mitigating the problem of SMS text in students' academic work?

No.	Items	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
1	They should practice writing formal letters regularly	4	80
2	Exercises should be marked and feedback given on time	5	100
3	Create awareness on formal grammatical conventions and writing mechanics	4	80
4	Education on the effects of SMS texting on their academic work	5	100
5	Join students' platforms to see the particular SMS features used and find solutions to help them	3	60
6	If spelling, organize spelling 'B' and dictation in class	4	80
7	Teach grammar rules	3	60
8	Encourage them to write stories on their phones	2	40
9	Accept assignments and other classwork from their phones	2	40

When tutors were asked about what they think could be done to help mitigate the problem of SMS texting in students' academic work, four tutors (80%) out of the five suggested that they should be made to practice writing formal letters regularly. All the tutors representing 100% said tutors should try as much as possible to mark students' assignments, exercises and essays on time and provide feedback immediately for them to see and correct their mistakes. Also, four tutors representing 80% said awareness should be created on formal grammatical conventions and writing mechanics for students to know what goes into writing for formal or academic work and writing that is just casual or informal.

Again, all the tutors suggested that they should give the students education on the effects of SMS texting on their academic work. Moreover, three tutors representing 60% recommended that tutors should join students' platforms to see the particular SMS features used and find solutions to help them. This is because the features of SMS used by students differ from place to place so when tutors get to know the features that are used they then can think of strategies that can be used to help students overcome their challenges. If they find out that the spelling problem is the reason for students' use of the

features of textism spelling 'Bee' and dictation in class can be organized to help them to overcome the problem. Also, three tutors representing 60% said tutors should teach grammar rules effectively for students to know rules as well as dos and don'ts of the language so that they will be guided by those rules. Furthermore, two of the tutors said tutors should encourage students to write stories on their phones and forward them to tutors to check all their writing mechanics and correct them.

Finally, two tutors representing 40% said tutors should accept students' assignments and other class exercises from their phones in order to be able to encourage them to do the right things on their phones.

In order to avoid such inconveniences, the researcher in this study informed the students that their messages should be in correct English free of any abbreviations, shortenings, contractions, initials or any non-conventional spelling. The immediate feedback from the teacher will confirm the impression that text messages should be in formal English.

## 5. Findings

The study found out both positive and negative effects of SMS texting on the academic writing of the first-year students of Offinso College of Education. Positively, the study revealed that students used SMS texting to facilitate their discussions on their group assignments and project works. Notwithstanding these positive effects, the study found out that SMS texting had negative effects on students' academic writing. It impacted negatively on students' mechanical accuracy in examinations and class exercises in terms of punctuations, tenses, and expressions.

The study also revealed that some of the vocabulary items students employ as they use the SMS resources are numbers, reduction, clipping and shortening. For example, 'u' for you, 'e' for the, luv for love, 'goin' for going, 'bro' for brother, etc. Students used these as time-saving devices while communicating using text messages. Students resorted to these because the text limit is short and precise.

The findings of the study again show that technological advancement has contributed to the problem of non-usage of the standard language.

The study further revealed that the negative effects of text messaging on students' academic writing could be mitigated. In the first place, students should be educated on the effects it has on their academic work. Secondly, students should practice writing formal letters regularly, exercises should be marked and feedback given on time. Moreover, students should be able to differentiate between formal and informal writing and the demands of each of the two. Finally, awareness on formal grammatical conventions and writing mechanics should be created among students.

## 6. Conclusion

Text messaging has both positive and negative effects on students' spelling in formal writing. The basic purpose of text messages is to convey a long message in short text language that utilizes minimum characters of text because text content is limited to a minimum space of 160 characters in one text.

There is marked evidence in the findings of the present study that texting has had a negative effect on first-year students of Offinso College of Education. This has happened because students, more often than not, are not conscious of the context in which they are writing. As pointed out by Dansie (2011) and others, if this is not checked students are likely to get so used to it that they may no longer realize the need for Standard English constructions even in writings that are supposed to be formal.

Finally, it is evident that modern technological tools are redefining modern writing and writing skills. Students nowadays are "*changing the nature of the English language*" and relying on technology to "*fix*" all their writing errors (Bromley, 2010, p. 103). Moreover, the nature of text messages transferred to students writing created a sense of laziness in them. People who use SMS in texting benefit from predicting text options to save their time and energy. This function makes typing in SMS text messaging easier because the system predicts a word to be used after the beginning of the word has been typed. The danger in this process is that if one does not read over what has been typed carefully, the predicted word might not be the word that one had wanted to type.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the major findings of the study, the researchers suggest that students be more sensitized to the need to avoid SMS language informal contexts of communication such as examinations through special programmes conceived for such an objective. Such sensitization should not only be done in examination situations. Also, examining organizations should motivate the use of Standard English in examination situations by giving SMS slang-free essays extra marks. This would motivate candidates to strive to use the appropriate language in their academic writing.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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