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Texting and Chatting Styles and Students' English Spelling Proficiency: A Correlational Study

Judemil S. Comprado
Visayas State University Villaba
Corresponding Author: Judemil S. Comprado compradojudemil@gmail.com

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A B S T R A C T

Digital communication fosters informal texting styles that, while convenient, may affect formal spelling proficiency. This study investigated the correlation between texting and chatting styles and spelling proficiency among first-year college students at Visayas State University Villaba. A total of 92 students participated in the study. A survey questionnaire measured the students' texting and chatting habits, and the Test of Written Spelling Fourth Edition (TWS-4) assessed spelling proficiency. Results revealed that the students' level of texting/chatting usage showed a mean of 3.04, interpreted as Oftentimes. Meanwhile, their spelling proficiency showed a mean of 2.28, interpreted as Moderately Low. Pearson's correlation test revealed a negative moderate correlation (-0.5194), indicating that students who frequently engaged in informal texting/chatting styles tended to score lower on the spelling test. These findings suggest that while texting and chatting styles are common among youth in digital communication, they may negatively affect spelling proficiency. This can help educators understand how informal digital communication relates to language learning, though further research is needed to confirm causality.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning appropriate spelling is a fundamental aspect of language acquisition and is crucial for effective communication and literacy development (Graham & Santangelo, 2000). However, the rise of informal communication styles—particularly texting shortcuts, abbreviations, code-switching, and chatting language—raises concerns for educators. These styles often involve deliberate misspellings, unconventional abbreviations, and shortcuts (Crystal, 2011), which thrive in online and mobile platforms. While some view these styles as a creative expression of identity and convenience, their potential impact on formal spelling proficiency remains a topic of debate.

English spelling has long been described as a daunting task, especially for learners whose first language is not English. Shekha AlBereiki et al. (2016) identified the complexity of English spelling rules and letter combinations as major causes of misspellings. Spelling is regarded as one of the essential abilities in written communication and an important component of literacy. According to Warda (2005), poor spelling negatively affects pupils' written performance and confidence. This concern is echoed by Graham and Hebert (2010), who emphasized that weak spelling skills often hinder students' overall academic achievement, since written accuracy is closely tied to comprehension, assessment outcomes, and credibility in academic work.

The rise of informal texting and chatting styles introduces new spelling habits among students. Some adopt abbreviations to save time and space (e.g., "u" for "you," "brb" for "be right back"), while others use creative spellings for fun and social identity. Language plays a key role in the creation and maintenance of adolescent peer groups (Eckert, 2003). Informal registers often become a marker of group belonging, but these practices may carry over into formal academic writing, creating tensions between peer identity and scholastic expectations. Recent studies (Plester, Wood, & Joshi, 2009; Kemp & Bushnell, 2011) suggest mixed findings: while texting can promote phonological awareness and creativity, excessive reliance on nonstandard spelling may impair the acquisition of conventional orthography, particularly among students still developing foundational literacy skills.

Existing studies on the influence of digital communication on spelling often focus on general trends (Crystal, 2011), but there remains a need to explore how informal styles specifically impact students' academic performance in particular contexts. In the Philippine setting, where English is a second language and is central to higher education, the implications are even more critical. Research has shown that second-language learners often rely on phonetic strategies in spelling (Cook, 1997), making them more vulnerable to the influence of texting norms. Hence, understanding how texting and chatting styles shape spelling proficiency is not only relevant for linguistic research but also for improving language instruction in schools.

While prior studies have examined general trends in texting and language use (Crystal, 2011; Plester, Wood, & Joshi, 2009), limited attention has been given to second-language contexts such as the Philippines, where learners must navigate both local languages and English as a medium of instruction. By

investigating the correlation between texting and chatting styles and spelling proficiency among first-year college students, this study addresses a critical gap in understanding how informal digital language habits influence formal academic performance. The findings provide empirical evidence that can enrich linguistic theories on orthographic development, second-language acquisition, and code-switching. Furthermore, by situating the study within the local context of Visayas State University Villaba, it offers context-specific insights that can inform both regional and global discussions on literacy in the digital age.

As observed among the first-year students in VSU Villaba, many struggled with correct spelling in formal essays and academic writing. These difficulties suggest a possible link between frequent use of texting and chatting styles and lower spelling proficiency. Thus, this study is significant as it investigates whether the increasing prevalence of informal digital communication correlates with spelling challenges among learners, offering insights that can inform curriculum development, teacher intervention strategies, and literacy enhancement programs.

Objectives of the Study

This study sought to determine the relationship between the students' Jejemon Texting usage and their English Spelling Proficiency level. Through that, the researcher developed guidelines on how the students can improve their spelling proficiency while acknowledging the playful nature of Jejemon texting.

Specifically, this sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of the students' texting and chatting styles?
2. What is the level of the students' spelling proficiency?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the levels of the students' texting and chatting styles and spelling proficiency?

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)

Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (1973) states that individuals adjust their language to align with their communicative partners. In texting and chatting, students often converge to digital norms by using abbreviations (e.g., "u" for "you"), phonetic spellings (e.g., "luv" for "love"), or emojis. Such adjustments can normalize nonstandard spellings that may spill over into formal academic writing.

H1: Students who frequently use accommodative texting styles (abbreviations, phonetic spellings, and emojis) are more likely to demonstrate lower English spelling proficiency.

Orthographic Depth Hypothesis (ODH)

Katz and Frost (1992) argue that languages with deep orthographies, such as English, pose greater challenges in spelling because of irregular grapheme–phoneme relationships. Texting shortcuts (e.g., "nite" for "night") simplify these complexities, which may reduce reinforcement of correct orthographic patterns.

H2: The more students rely on simplified spellings in texting, the weaker their mastery of English orthography will be.

Literacy Development Theory (Orthographic Mapping)

Ehri (2000) proposes that readers build spelling proficiency through orthographic mapping, where repeated exposure to correct spellings allows words to be stored in long-term memory. Exposure to distorted or nonstandard spellings in texting may interfere with this mapping process.

H3: Students exposed to frequent nonstandard spellings in digital communication will have lower orthographic mapping accuracy, resulting in poorer spelling performance.

Social Constructivism

Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that learning is socially constructed through interactions with peers and cultural tools. Texting and chatting create a peer-influenced linguistic environment where spelling shortcuts are socially accepted and reinforced. Without proper scaffolding, students may transfer these digital habits into formal writing.

H4: Students whose peer groups heavily engage in nonstandard texting practices will show reduced English spelling proficiency compared to those in groups that use more standard forms.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the correlational research design since the researcher only investigated the relationships between variables without controlling or manipulating any of them. This research was conducted at Visayas State University Villaba in Brgy. Cagnocot, Villaba, Leyte. Using the stratified sampling technique, a total of 92 freshmen students were selected as respondents to ensure fair representation of the population. The participants were convened at the university's student center to administer the instruments in a uniform and controlled setting, minimizing distractions and ensuring consistency in test administration.

Two sets of instruments were used to gather the data. The first instrument was a structured questionnaire adapted from Ignacio and De Jesus (2011), which measured students' chatting and texting styles. It consisted of 20 items on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Always." This tool was validated by experts in language and communication to ensure reliability and appropriateness for the target respondents. The second instrument measured the students' English spelling proficiency through the Test of Written Spelling, Fourth Edition (TWS-4), a norm-referenced assessment administered in a dictated word format. Each word was read aloud, used in a sentence, and then repeated, requiring respondents to write the correct spelling. This format provided an objective measure of spelling ability.

The data collection process followed several procedures to safeguard validity, reliability, and ethical standards. Initially, the researcher sought formal permission from the university administration and secured informed consent from the student participants, assuring them of their voluntary participation.

After approval, the researcher scheduled the administration of the instruments. During data collection, the first set of questionnaires measuring texting and chatting styles was distributed and completed within a 30-minute time frame under the researcher's supervision. Immediately afterward, the spelling test was administered in two rounds: the first as a practice round to familiarize students with the process, and the second as the actual test to ensure fairness and reduce anxiety.

All responses were collected, organized, and encoded for statistical analysis. The gathered data were then processed using appropriate statistical tools: Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation to describe the students' texting and chatting styles, and Pearson-r correlation to examine the relationship between texting/chatting styles and spelling proficiency. To ensure confidentiality, respondent codes were used instead of names, and all data were stored securely in password-protected files. Only the researcher had access to the raw responses, and findings were reported in aggregate form to protect individual identities.

Through this systematic data-gathering process, the study ensured accuracy, ethical compliance, and reliability in exploring the correlation between texting/chatting styles and English spelling proficiency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of Students' Texting and Chatting Styles

The purpose of the first research question was to determine the level of the students' texting and chatting styles.

Table 1. Level of Texting and Chatting Styles

	Mean	**SD**	**Interpretation**
Texting and Chatting Styles	3.04	0.50	Often

Based on the results, the level of texting and chatting styles among students had a mean of 3.04, which indicates that most students engage in such practices often. The standard deviation (SD) of 0.50 further shows that responses were closely clustered around the mean, reinforcing the interpretation of frequent usage.

This finding is consistent with Penman's (2011) study, which reported that informal texting and chatting styles are common among young Filipinos who are active social media users. It suggests that the sample of students in this study reflects the same demographic, where the use of informal digital language occurs regularly.

Similarly, Ello (2014) highlighted that these texting and chatting practices can function as a form of self-expression and creativity for young people. This

supports the idea that students may deliberately use such styles not only for convenience but also as a way of emphasizing meaning or adding stylistic flair to their messages.

Overall, the results imply that texting and chatting styles remain prevalent among Filipino students and are used for various reasons ranging from efficiency to personal expression. These insights may prove useful for educators, researchers, and communication practitioners who seek to understand the dynamics of digital language use among today's youth.

Level of Students' Spelling Proficiency

The purpose of the second research question was to determine the level of the students' spelling proficiency.

Table 2. Level of Spelling Proficiency

	Mean	**SD**	**Interpretation**
Spelling Proficiency	2.28	0.75	Moderately Low

Based on the results, the level of spelling proficiency of the students had a mean of 2.28, which is interpreted as Moderately Low. The standard deviation (SD) of 0.75 indicates some variation in spelling ability within the sample, with scores leaning toward the lower end. This finding supports the study of McBride-Chang (2010), which found that texting and social media use can have both positive and negative impacts on spelling, depending on the context. Informal communication often prioritizes speed and convenience over accuracy, potentially explaining the moderately low spelling scores in this study.

Similar results were reported by Drouin (2011), who examined text messaging habits and academic performance among college students. The study found that frequent use of textisms—nonstandard spellings such as "u" for you—was associated with lower spelling accuracy in formal writing. Likewise, Plester and Wood (2009) observed that while texting can enhance phonological awareness, excessive exposure to nonconventional spellings may weaken adherence to standard orthography. Kemp and Bushnell (2011) further highlighted that although some students can distinguish between formal and informal registers, weaker spellers are more prone to transferring texting habits into academic work.

The findings of the present study underscore the importance of strengthening spelling instruction. The moderately low scores suggest that educators may need to adopt targeted strategies to address spelling weaknesses and to help students maintain a clear boundary between informal digital writing and formal academic tasks.

Nonetheless, as some scholars argue (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008), spelling in online contexts does not always reflect spelling ability in formal settings, since individuals may deliberately adopt textisms as part of digital identity rather than due to lack of knowledge. This indicates that while texting and chatting styles

may influence spelling proficiency, the relationship is complex and shaped by multiple linguistic and social factors.

Pearson Correlation Results Between Texting and Chatting Styles and Spelling Proficiency

The purpose of the third question was to determine the significant relationship between students' texting and chatting styles and spelling proficiency.

Table 3. Significant Relationship Between Texting and Chatting Styles and Spelling Proficiency

	Mean	SD	r-value	p-value	ŷ	Interpretation
Texting and Chatting Styles	3.04	0.50	-0.52	.00001	-0.77465X + 4.66879	Significant
Spelling Proficiency	2.28	0.75				

**Significant at 0.05*

As shown in Table 3, the correlation coefficient calculated using Pearson's r correlation is -0.52 which indicates that there is a negative moderate correlation between Texting and Chatting Styles and Spelling Proficiency. This means that as the Texting and Chatting Styles scores increase, the Spelling Proficiency scores tend to decrease, but the strength of this relationship is moderate.

Moreover, the result also showed a 0.00001 p-value which indicates that the correlation is significant since the significant level is at 0.05. Additionally, the linear regression equation, $\hat{y} = -0.77465X + 4.66879$, suggests a negative linear relationship between Texting and Chatting Styles (X) and English Spelling Proficiency (Y). For every unit increase in X, there's a predicted decrease of -0.77465 in Y, on average. The y-intercept, 4.66879, indicates that when X is zero, the predicted value of Y is 4.66879.

This coincides with the study of Lupton (2013) which explored the impact of texting on language development. The study suggests that informal communication styles like texting can lead to practices that differ from formal writing, potentially affecting spelling proficiency in some contexts.

This highlights the importance of promoting a balanced approach to communication, where young people understand the difference between formal and informal language and can adapt their communication style accordingly. Educators can integrate activities that solidify standard spelling while acknowledging the value of clear communication in digital contexts.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that students frequently used texting and chatting styles and had moderately low spelling proficiency. A negative moderate correlation was observed, indicating that students who relied more on informal digital

language tended to score lower on spelling assessments. This may be because regular use of non-standard spellings reduces attention to conventional orthography. While texting and chatting are common among Filipino students, correlation does not imply causation, and other factors such as reading habits or prior language exposure may also play a role.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that teachers emphasize register awareness to help students distinguish between informal and formal writing. Technology can be used to reinforce correct spelling through apps and online tools. Students should balance casual digital communication with practice in standard spelling, and schools and parents can support literacy through reading and writing activities. Future research should examine how texting and chatting habits interact with other factors to better understand their impact on spelling development.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Although previous studies have examined the link between texting and chatting styles and spelling proficiency, most relied on cross-sectional designs and focused on younger students, limiting their ability to establish causation or generalize findings to college populations. Many also measured texting frequency without analyzing the types of digital language used or how students switch between informal and formal registers. Future research could use longitudinal or experimental designs, explore the impact of specific texting features on spelling and literacy, and consider mediating factors such as reading habits, metalinguistic awareness, and bilingualism. Studies in diverse educational and cultural contexts, particularly among Filipino college students, would help provide a clearer understanding of how informal digital communication influences spelling skills.

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