

ABSTRACT

There seems to be no end to the debate on whether textese positively or negatively affect written English language learners. Some previous studies indicate that textese positively influence written English while other studies found negative influence. The contradictory opinion about textese and its influence on written English language may have resulted from the data collection method and sample size used in the studies. Although textese mainly written in English, it has very distinctive linguistics features. Therefore it is important to identify the textese features that affect the writing skills of the students and how these features influence writing of Standard English. This study investigated further on this contested association between textese and written English among high school learners in Kisii town using these objectives: to identify the textual characteristics of text messages written by the high school students in formal writing; evaluate how gender determine the use of textese among the high school students; assess relationship between textese and literacy among high school students. The study was guided by New Literacy Studies theory which offers a more panoramic view of literacy than the traditional perspective which frames literacy in psychological, cognitive and school based learning terms. NLS theory further acknowledges and investigates the new practices and forms of literacy that are borne out of rising technology. The study used mixed method design which allowed the researcher to understand the meaning and ideas as expressed in the written work of the students. Data for the study were sampled using purposive sampling. They comprised of 49 notes and essays written by students in class during lessons in subjects taught in English as well as English compositions. The compiled materials were examined for features of textese and its influence acquisition of writing skills of the sampled students. There was 448 instances of textese use was found from purposively sampled 49 pages of photocopies of the compiled materials through content analysis. For data discussion and analysis, the study utilized descriptive statistics. The study found out that textese negatively influence learners' spelling, capitalization and use of punctuation marks. It was also discovered that learners are aware of the features of textese which is why they use textese with a lot of ease and consistency. This very fact demonstrates the possibility that learners' view textese as literacy event to be made use of in new domains where rapid writing and efficiency in communication is valued. In addition, the study found that learners omit the subject of a sentence as it is done for the second person (you). Further, the study found out that students used self-representation of their own creation; new textese features. Since there is little awareness of benefits derivable from language technology, the findings of the study will enlighten educators understanding of textese language and broaden the perspective of what literacy entails. It will also guide the curriculum developers on whether to incorporate textese into school syllabus.