

# The Relationship between Internet Slang and English Language Learning

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## Abstract

English language is considered as one of the most widely used language and it plays a vital role in higher academic institutions globally. Besides, learning English as a second language is a common thing in Malaysia, and it is crucial at every stage of the educational process. The rapid growth of the Internet has also affected the development of the English language, which also gave birth to Internet slangs. However, Internet slangs profoundly affects the process of English language learning on higher academic institutions in Malaysia. As a result, Malaysian students faced problems in dealing with Internet slang and caused their English proficiency to drop significantly. Relevantly, previous studies have shown that students preferred using Internet slang in the academic environment, especially in the classroom. The issue might grow more prominent if the usage of Internet slangs is not being monitored and controlled. Therefore, this study is trying to identify the level of Internet slangs on English language learning and to investigate the relationship between those two variables. The researcher implemented a quantitative approach where a questionnaire has been designed and distributed toward the sample population. In this study, the sample population are university students that are majoring in Bachelor of Human Sciences in English language and literature. The collected data were later being processed and transformed into different information based on the hypothesis and objectives. Notably, the finding of this study had proven that there is no significant relationship between Internet slang and English language learning. Theoretical and practical implications were discussed in order to provide better understanding for future research in this area

**Key words:** Internet slangs, English language learning

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## Introduction

Years ago, language was considered as the medium and the tool for communication. The tools vary, for example, the usage of body languages and hand signs. People wanted to express themselves and communicate effortlessly and straightforwardly. Thus, it created the emergence of languages that purposely tries to transfer messages to others. Besides, English is also considered as one of the most widely used languages and plays a vital role in higher education institutions globally. Learning English as a second language is a common thing in Malaysia, and it is considered as an essential aspect at every stage of the educational process. As a Malaysian, learning the English language has been crucial as it has been assimilated into the learning system from all levels of education institutions. Generally, learning a different language was considered an advantage and opened up for more chances in future work or job. According to Azmi (2015), English language learning required multiple approaches and strategies as the process of each individual was different. Additionally, English is generally thought of as one of the basic elements that help learners to communicate better in English. Besides, English was considered as an important element in the educational institution where the focus was being shifted toward the formal context of the language and gave a proper insight to a correct English language (Lee & Heinz, 2016).

The main issue of this study is, the level of English proficiency in Malaysia had dropped significantly, and it was due to the English language learning in academic institutions. Low proficiency in English had caused many problems in English language learning among students in primary,

secondary and tertiary level. Some of them had difficulties in understanding the content itself and resulting to learn by just memorizing the language without knowing its usage and applicability. Research by Collins (2010) reported that students who had problems with English language learning became unassertive in the class and also stated that the instructor did not focus on their English proficiency level. Therefore, this study aims to identify the level of internet slang (homophones, onomatopoeic, emoticons, leetspeak, punctuation) and English language learning. This study would also investigate the relationship between internet slang (homophones, onomatopoeic, emoticons, leetspeak, punctuation) on English language learning.

## **Literature Review**

### **English language learning**

Khanekah (2017) defined English language learning as a process of learning a foreign language that came after basics mastery of their first language. The English language was considered as an effective medium in communication as it enlightened one vision on other languages and cultures (Moeller & Catalano, 2015). In the past, learning a foreign language involved traditional methods such as repetition and imitation. In English language learning, knowledge was gained by the learners in the process itself by experiencing and interacting with other individuals (Rao, 2018). The author added that active engagement in the learning process excels the traditional method of older education. English was acknowledged as an international language that can be used to connect with people from all over the world, for instance, travelling. Until now, people are still learning English for their future, such as getting jobs and to communicate to others. It has been supported by Collins (2010) stated that individual and professional perceived the English language as a vital component in their daily life. Besides, he expressed that people were sharing their ideas and thoughts with others, using English as their primary medium of communication.

### **Internet Slang**

Internet slang can be described as a variety of everyday languages that have been spoken or communicate by Internet communities. Moreover, it also can be defined as Internet short-hand, Cyber-slang, SMS speak, *netspeak* or *chat-speak*. When it comes to internet slang, it was a substantial element that has been in the web itself since it has emerged. People and users of online platform converge using internet slang in order to make their communication more accessible. In order for people to abide by the character limits on some platform, the internet slang has been created unconsciously. Nonetheless, it takes time for other people to read and understand the meaning behind the internet language itself. Besides, without people realized, they have been communicating in a different way than their usual daily communication. The richness and the infinite number of information on the Internet have given birth to a new language which was the internet slang (Barseghyan, 2013). Internet slang could also be known as *chat-speak*, *netspeak* or cyberslang. It was a product from a communicative language where it has been developed rapidly and normalized as a global language today. Moreover, student's usage of internet slang was affected by the context of the message and the message objectives. In a formal context, the students stated that they unintentionally used Internet slang and the usage was only in a minimum way. In this study, the researcher also found that rules and regulations were fundamental in the usage of Internet slang or the results would be a significant increase in the usage of Internet slang.

## **Research Methodology**

This study used correlation type of research analysing the relationship between independent variables and dependent variable namely Internet Slang and English language learning. The population of this study was International Islamic University students who are taking Bachelor Degree in Human Sciences (English Language and Literature).

## Results of the Study

**Table 1:** Demographic profile of the respondents

Variable	Descriptive	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	33	36.7
	Female	57	63.3
Age	18 > 20 years old	20	22.2
	20 > 22 years old	19	21.1
	22 > 24 years old	46	51.1
	24 years old and above	5	5.6
Year of Study	Year 1	18	20.0
	Year 2	6	6.7
	Year 3	19	21.1
	Year 4	47	52.2

Table 1 indicates the demographic background of respondents. Based on the findings above, 57 respondents (63.3%) are female and the remaining 33 (36.7%) are male. The total number of surveys answered by female is higher than male based on the percentage given. From the result, 20 respondents (22.2%) aged ranging from 18-20 years old, 19 of them (21.1%) were between 20-22 years old, 46 of the respondents (51.1%) aged between 22-24 years old and lastly 5 of them (5.6%) were above 24 years old. Finally, a total of 47 respondents (52.2%) were in their final year of study followed by 19 of the respondents (21.1%) who were in their third year of study, 6 of the respondents (6.7%) were second year students and lastly 18 (20.0%) of the respondents were in their first year of study.

**Table 2:** Correlation between Internet Slang and English language learning

No	Variables	SD	Mean	1	2	3	4	5
1	Homophones	.56186	3.6933					
2	Onomatopoeic	.54270	4.0204	.225				
3	Emoticons	.59578	4.0514	.092	.078			
4	Leespeak	.77061	3.6178	.433	.219	.149		
5	Punctuation	.69124	4.1722	.180	.288	.379	.340	
6	English language learning	.38106	4.3769	.223	.247	.162	.118	.252

Table 2 presents the result from the relationship between Internet slangs and English language learning. From the finding, all of the independent variables have weak degree of correlation starting from homophones that scored ( $r=.223$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), onomatopoeic ( $r=.247$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), emoticons ( $r=.162$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), leetspeak ( $r=.118$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and lastly punctuation ( $r=.252$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). The findings showed that the degree of influence from Internet slangs toward English language learning was very weak. In addition, the result also depicted that most of the respondents were aware of the usage of Internet slangs in an academic environment where it does not affect their English language learning session. Thurairaj, Hoon, Roy, and Fong, (2015) mentioned that students were consciously avoiding using Internet slangs in a formal context or precisely in the academic context.

**Table 3:** Regression Analysis

Model	Standardized Coefficient Beta
Homophones	.175
Onomatopoeic	.168
Emoticons	.081
Leetspeak	-.062
Punctuation	.162
R	.357
R <sup>2</sup>	.127
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.075
F Change	2.447
Significant F Change	.040
Durbin Watson	2.240

Table 3 shows the findings of multiple regressions between Internet slangs and English language learning. As illustrated in the table, the F value was 2.447 and this indicated significance ( $P < 0.05$ ). The F value helps to show the details of the relationship between the regression and the residuals. The R<sup>2</sup> of 12.7% was the variance in English language learning, which could be predicted from the Internet slangs elements. Based on the findings, all variables of Internet slangs are not significant in affecting English language learning. Therefore, all of the hypotheses above are not supported. In homophones, it is proven above that it does not have significant influence with English language learning. Hidayati (2018) mentioned that homophones were affecting students' vocabularies. The author explained that most of the students have difficulties in interpreting English meaning due to their limited vocabularies. Further, she emphasized that homophones word led to confusion in reading English text. Safataj and Amiryousefi (2016) agreed that homophones are directly involved in affecting learner's lexical development where it obstructs their recollection of memory regarding vocabularies. As for onomatopoeic, the variable is also proven to be insignificant in the relationship with English language learning. Besides that, onomatopoeic were prominent in early language development because it was easy to learn and easy to produce. When it comes to language development, young learners are exposed to onomatopoeic words and sounds where most of them were their basic communication skills. It was explained by Asmaa (2017) that onomatopoeic sounds and words are a part of children speech. In her research, she founded that the relationship between onomatopoeic words and language development was vital where they improve children language skills. Lastly, punctuation is also not significant in the relationship between English language learning. Often, punctuation which includes capitalization may be related to its users trying to express their emotions by using these variables. Nonetheless, Ruan (2012) mentioned that the semantic value of this variable was also crucial as the capitalized words represented something that the user expressed for other people to understand. From this statement, indicate that punctuation, including capitalization, have influenced the semantic value of the language.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

There are six variables altogether under Internet slangs in this study which started from homophones. In order to produce a significant relationship between homophones and English language learning, it must first be introduced at an early academic level. Since homophones are about basic vocabularies and words pronunciation, young learners gain advantage by learning before moving forward to higher academic level. Emoticons have been used further back in the past year where it grew and changed into something new today which is also known as emoji. People are using emoticons in order to facilitate their communication over the Internet and social media. Yet, it does not show a significant influence toward English language learning because of its informalities. Nonetheless, Doiron (2018) argued that emoticons have become part of student daily communication and suggested a creation in special emoticons for higher education purposes. The author explained further that language

educators need to include studies of emoticons in the syllabus and provide real life examples of communication functions or usages. Furthermore, institution educators must start to acknowledge that emoticons have become a new form of language and it was vital in English language learning and teaching. The usage of punctuation and capitalization are becoming a standard norm in today online communication. Nevertheless, in this study it is proved to be insignificant toward English language learning. In online communication, people are avoiding using language in a standard way where they have been taught in traditional methods that there are certain rules that must be followed. The standard rules in using punctuation and capitalization have been altered where the non-standard form of language is the proof of people's creativity. Perhaps, therefore most prescriptivism scholars think that the informal form of punctuation and capitalization can actually destroy English language.

It is highly recommended that further studies to be carried out on different universities and department of studies in order to see whether there is any similarity in the findings. This is because there are different courses of study which also learn English language and utilize internet slang in their daily communications. Moreover, different populations might show different results due to their level of internet slang usage and understanding. Future researchers also can utilize a different methodology in data collection as this research depends solely on its questionnaire as a research instrument. It is recommended for them to use qualitative methodology where they can opt for interview sessions and observations as their data collection instruments. Besides, this method may help in producing more significant results that can be discussed in future studies. Future studies also may consider other factors of Internet slangs that could influence English language learning for example, the usage of memes. This is because people tend to only use memes in their online communication today. Future researchers need to identify whether this factor may also contribute to influencing the English language learning.

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