

Examining Beninese Pre-Service Technical Teachers' Self-Reported Reasons for Using SMS

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Abstract

Original Research Article

The rise of communication technologies has led to a deep modification in several areas of human life. Languages are no exceptions. Since language teachers are first trained and then put in charge of guiding learners towards the mastery of languages for communication, it is important to investigate their views about such changes because they are first individual users who may be confronted with the advantages and drawbacks of these technologies in their professional practice. That is why the main purpose of this study, the second in a series, is to explore the perspectives of Beninese pre-service technical teachers on their reasons to use SMS. The results of this study shed further light on a previous study that indicated that none of these went without sending SMS on a day.

Keywords: Benin, pre-service technical teachers, SMS use, motives.

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PROBLEM AND PURPOSE

Cellphones are, these days, an essential tool for almost everybody. Their use is so well-established that one may ask if there can be a human being without a cellphone. In Benin, the use of cellulars has been noted for more than a decade [1].

And apart from making calls, one of the most prominent and most often used features of such phones is text messaging, commonly called SMS. In fact, Gnonlonfoun [1, 2], Gnonlonfoun and Sakpoliba [3] as well as Hindeme, Egounleti and Gnonlonfoun [4] have shown that the majority of Benin youth send SMS every day. They have indicated that SMS provides users with a convenient service which has taken the Internet revolution to the next level with (...) a unique writing style. An examination of literature available [5-12] confirms this point. Most cellphones are set up in such a way that the average length of an SMS is 160 characters. However, when writing on Internet fora, the features of common SMS speech are used. They help those engaged in the exchange to provide a somewhat literal representation of their speech and concerns through the use of a variety of features such as emoticons to convey emotions, punctuation and capitalization to emphasize words or phrases as well. In such conditions, the focus is put on relational interaction with the speech being extremely interactive, lively and natural [13-20]. And this form of

communication is now the most popular form of daily communication.

Therefore, because of the widespread and frequent use of text-messaging (or SMS), one could assume that people's written language may begin to show certain features that are used when writing SMS messages. Thus, their language does no longer conform to the formally approved standards of written language. Consequently, it is vital to explore the possible relations between the use of SMS speech and the way in which learners use language in their written work. This paper, the second in a series, investigates specifically the motives underlying the daily use of SMS by pre-service technical teachers who are supposed to teach in secondary schools nationwide upon completion of their studies.

METHOD

In this study, a descriptive methodology has been used as recommended by the literature in similar cases [21-23]. Data collection has been carried out by the means of a Likert-scale questionnaire which comprised only one question: the reasons why pre-service teachers use SMS frequently. The questionnaire was administered to 200 participants (100 from First Year and 100 from Third year). These participants were all selected among the 400 student-teachers registered at ENSET-Lokossa in 2017-2018 academic years [24].

They belonged to different fields of study including Agriculture, Mechanical Engineering, Home Economics, Economics, Accountancy, Mechanics and Secretary. They took an average of about five to ten minutes to answer. The study was conducted in the second half of October 2018.

FINDINGS

The results of the data collected are presented in table 1 below:

Table-1: Overall Reasons for Using SMS

N°	REASONS	PERCENTAGES OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS (N=200)
1	Talk to friends	80% (160)
2	Get information	60% (120)
3	Make arrangements	40% (80)
4	Boredom	15% (30)
5	Low cost	30% (60)
6	Keeping in touch with family and friends	38% (76)
7	Knowledge improvement	06% (12)
8	Ease of use	11% (22)
9	Quickness	06% (12)
10	Emergency	05% (10)
11	Competition	01% (02)

Table-2: Reasons for using SMS per group of pre-service teachers

N°	REASONS	PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS	
		FIRST YEAR TEACHERS (N=100)	THIRD YEAR TEACHERS (N=100)
1	Talk to friends	75 (75%)	60 (60%)
2	Get information	60 (60%)	45 (45%)
3	Make arrangements	45 (45%)	42 (42%)
4	Boredom	12 (12%)	11 (11%)
5	Low cost	25 (25%)	45 (45%)
6	Keeping in touch with family and friends	65 (65%)	45 (45%)
7	Knowledge improvement	00 (00%)	04 (04%)
8	Ease of use	12 (12%)	11 (11%)
9	Quickness	09 (09%)	00 (00%)
10	Emergency	14 (14%)	00 (00%)
11	Competition	00 (00%)	04 (04%)

DISCUSSIONS

The data in Table 1 above indicate participants' reasons for using SMS. Most of them (80%) indicated that talking to their friends was their major motivation for sending SMS. The need to obtain information (on school assignments) was the second most cited reason (60%), which, in most cases, involved obtaining information about homework requirements or group works. Other information that was sought included making arrangements, such as planning weekend activities, as well as keeping in contact with friends and family. These were frequently cited as reasons for using SMS. Furthermore, a significant number of participants (30%) reported that they send SMS because this messaging service is cost effective; cheaper than a phone call and often freely provided under certain conditions by network providers.

As stated above, the participants of this study indicated that talking to friends was their primary reason for using SMS. Adolescent and youth social behaviour is characterised by increasing interest in and involvement with peers [25, 26-28]. Therefore, friendships and friend groups are of utmost importance to these pre-service teachers. They want to be

connected to what is happening around them, they want to know where their friends are, what they are doing and they want to be involved in social events. SMSing helps fulfill this fundamental need for constant contact, because it is cost effective, easy to use and readily available across all age groups and language groups. These reasons can explain the frequency of SMS use amongst the participants of this study. The collected data also indicate that participants are highly motivated to use SMS on a regular basis. The data presented in Table 1 supports this hypothesis; as the reasons cited by participants for their frequent use of SMS are substantial and underpin necessary and daily utilization of SMS speech. This is a confirmation of the conclusions in Hindeme, Egounleti and Gnonlonfoun [4].

In Table 2, the two groups of pre-service teacher participants are compared in terms of their self-reported reasons for using SMS. As can be seen from this table, both groups were primarily concerned with using SMSes to talk to their friends (75% and 60%, respectively). Getting information and making arrangements were also rated highly amongst both groups (of the first year pre-service teachers group, 60% and 45%, respectively, cited these reasons, and

45% and 42% of the third year pre-service teachers group), and keeping in touch with family and friends proved to be a priority (for 65% of the first year pre-service teachers and 45% of the third year pre-service teachers). A considerable number of participants from first year and third year reported that they use SMS because it is cost effective, with more third year participants citing this as a reason (25% vs. 45%). This important differential gap in favour of third year participants could be that third year pre-service teachers are, at this level of their training, more concerned about the cost of SMSing because they carry greater financial responsibilities for payment of cellphone costs than the first year participants who might be more financially dependent on their parents and maybe receive a greater allocation. Therefore, even though table 1 showed that third year participants use SMS more than first year participants do, Table 2 shows that the two groups have very similar motivations for using SMS.

Very few participants stated that they use SMS for emergencies, to enter competitions, to improve their knowledge or because it was a quicker means of communicating. Those who mentioned these reasons were mostly first year participants.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the collected data shows that pre-service technical teachers use SMS to keep in touch with their friends, to get information and make diverse as well as to keep in touch with family and friends. However, more third year participants reported that they use SMS because it is cost effective. This is a good indication of their growing consciousness and sense of responsibility.

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