

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>

**THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEMPORARY SLANG ON THE
ACADEMIC WRITING PRACTICES OF GRADUATE-LEVEL ESL
LEARNERS.**



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Abstract

This research aimed to determine the influence of contemporary slang on the academic writings of ESL learners at graduate level. Due to the rapid spread of internet speak, students' formal writings are observed to have a lot of features of informal English. Students are particularly interested in having slang adopted into the formal papers and into the English language as a whole. Based on the principles of Prensky's (2001) Digital Natives Theory, the study followed a quantitative design where closed-ended questionnaire was the instrument of data collection. The tool consisted of 15 items and the data was gathered from a sample 50 students of English Linguistics' Department, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur. Data was collected under the supervision of researchers where they introduced the participants about the objectives of the study and ensured them confidentiality. Data was analysed statistically through SPSS software. Results of the study showed that slang language is becoming common among youth where they are prone to use them in their academic papers. Even if they do not use informal features of English language in formal write ups, they get confused and fail to differentiate between formal and informal English.

Keywords: Academic Writing, Contemporary Slang, Digital Natives, Internet Speak

Introduction

An important part of NLP is opinion analysis, usually known as opinion mining. That concentrates on understanding, analyzing human sentiments, opinions, attitudes expressed in text. With the growing dominance of online platforms and social networking sites, in recent times, sentiment analysis has emerged as an increasingly current field of study. The use of sentiment analysis has increased significant value in several areas, such as social-media monitoring, customer response analysis, and advertising.

1.1 Background

Pakistan is a multilingual country where more than 60 local languages are in use in addition to Urdu, the country's official language. As the official language of government, law, science, and technology in Pakistan, English has a high status. In the areas of government regulation, judiciary, army, higher education, economics, and the media, English is spoken and utilized by a relatively little but incredibly dominant sector of the country's population (Gardner, 2009). According to Javed et al. (2021), English in Pakistan serves as a doorway to success, to further education and to highly prestigious jobs. It is the language of educational institutions and of higher education and not the mother tongue of population except in the elite class of society where it is spoken as a status badge. The purpose of this survey-based study is to examine how slang is now used and how it affects the educational system with a focus on academic writing practices.

Slang refers to informal vocabulary and expressions commonly used within specific social groups to establish identity, express familiarity, and strengthen group cohesion. Slang includes vocabulary used in a colloquial register that is popular in oral conversation but is not appropriate for academic writing. It can also refer to language that is generally exclusive to members of specific groups in an effort to forge a sense of group identity or to exclude outsiders. The term itself first appeared in the 18th century and has since been used to describe a variety of things. The term "slang" first appeared in print in 1756 and was used to describe slang used by people of low status. By the early 19th century, meaning was broadened to

include informal expressions that fell outside the standards of formal and educated speech. If the slang will continue in English language, then it will eradicate the standard features of English language (Illonga, 2025). A lot of new slang terms have been emerged which people of specific age group might not know about. These words significantly hinder conversational flow. Slang usage can cause a linguistic obstacle between successive generations, especially when used improperly. This term “slang” is overly broad because it encompasses a wide range of dialects, hidden codes, and languages inside languages that are not actually considered slang. Slang is the language of the younger generation which older people can understand but do not use because it is regarded as vulgar, juvenile, and informal by people who feel themselves to be mature enough.

The present survey-based study aims to investigate the prevalence of slang among graduate students and examine its impact on their formal writing skills. Slang is employed to create or maintain social existence and group cohesion, particularly within a group. Basically, the goal of this study was to advance knowledge about the effects of slang on graduate students’ formal writing abilities. Slang makes it easier to converse with individuals in various locales. The findings of this study may contribute to a better understanding of students’ language practices and provide useful insights for educators regarding the role of slang in academic communication. Ultimately, the study may assist educational institutions in promoting appropriate language use while recognising the social and communicative functions of slang in contemporary society.

Literature Review

Language is a living social entity that is constantly evolving as a function of cultural, technological and social transformation. A key change that has become clear is the growth and use of slang. The emergence of digital communication and the growth of social media, instant messaging applications, and the like have made it all the more easy to create and spread slang expressions, especially among young people. Slang is important for social and communicative purposes in informal situations; however, its growing use in formal settings has been a concern about its impact on students’ formal language proficiency, particularly in their academic writing. The pervasive presence of slang might disrupt the practice of formal English conventions for students in an academic environment at the graduate level who are studying English as a Second Language (ESL). Thus, the connection between slang use and students’ writing in the academic context has been the subject of research

The term ‘slang’ is usually used to describe an informal vocabulary that is specific to certain social groups and is used chiefly in casual speech. Slang, in Eble’s (1996) terms, is the words and expressions that are invented and used by members of certain communities as a way of developing identity, solidarity and separation from outsiders. Likewise, Allan and Burridge (2006) define slang as an innovative and non-standard form of language that is creative, humorous and expressive of culture, but not suitable for formal and academic writing.

With the advent of digital communication, the production and propagation of slang has been changed (Javed et al., 2021). Social media like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and X (previously Twitter) introduce slang to the vocabulary of those who use them and this can quickly become commonplace. Crystal (2006) contends that the internet-mediated language communication has hastened the pace of language change by promoting the use of shortened forms, the creation of new linguistic forms and experimenting with vocabulary. Abbreviations, acronyms, clipping of words, phonetic spellings, emoji’s, and the mixing of words and emoji’s are widely accepted in online communication.

There are a number of types of slang based on its purpose and origin, including: there is also group-specific slang which is mostly used by specific groups of people, like university students, gamers and professionals. Technological or internet slang refers to the use of abbreviations and acronyms like “LOL,” “BRB,” or “OMG” that are frequently used in online interactions. Youth slang, however, is the language of the youth and is often subject to change

from generation to generation, reflecting current youth culture. These categories illustrate that slang is not just a bunch of random words used, but a linguistic phenomenon that is related to social identity, culture and communication.

There are a number of empirical studies that have looked at the educational implications of slang utilization. The purpose of slang is to serve a number of social functions, which Coleman (2012) states are to increase interpersonal relations and build group identity. But he also insists that successful language users need to be aware of the difference between informal and formal register. By failing to distinguish these registers, students may be tempted to bring informal expressions into their academic writing, thereby lowering the level of formality expected at the college or university. For ESL learners, this difference is significant because they need to learn to fluently communicate the intended message in English, as well as to be academically accurate in their use of English.

Studies on the relationship between informal digital language and students' writing have been growing in number. The researchers, Drouin and Davis (2009), examined how the use of text language affected students' literacy skills and concluded that students generally could identify informal and formal contexts, but that sometimes, when students used text language, they produced non-standard forms in academic writing. In a similar study, Aziz et al. (2013) conducted a study on how text messaging influences the writing of Pakistani university students and concluded that the use of abbreviations and informal sentences led to some errors in spelling and grammar and decreased awareness of formal conventions in writing. Their results indicate that the use of informal language may affect students' writing in English if there is no reinforcement of appropriate academic writing.

Recent studies also indicate that slang should not be considered a linguistic problem. In the Tanzania study of multilingual digital advertising, Ilonga (2025) found that translanguaging and creative slang can be considered as a strategy to increase creativity, cultural relevance, and audience engagement. The study was done for the purpose of advertising, not education, but it shows that slang has communicative value, when used in the right place and at the right time. However, a language that is appropriate for business or social situations may not be the language appropriate for classroom, where clarity, precision, and formal language are important.

Previous studies generally suggest that slang is a normal and dynamic part of language and serves salient social and cultural functions. Meanwhile, it has been noted in the literature that it has a negative impact on student's academic writing, especially among ESL learners who are often involved in digital communication. Studies on informal language use on the one hand and Pakistani Studies on the other have been conducted at the international level but there has been relatively little research on the impact of modern slang on the academic writing of ESL learners at the graduate level. This gap is the motivation for the present study, which aims to examine the impact of contemporary slang on the formal academic writing conventions that are expected from graduate students and to explore the implications for language use in higher education.

Research Methodology

The design of the study is quantitative. A closed-ended questionnaire was designed by the researcher. The Likert scale was used to build the questionnaire with 15 items (Likert scale: strongly agree, Agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree). The researchers created the closed-ended questionnaire by keeping the purpose of study in mind and had it validated by subject experts. The purpose of the survey was to gauge how the ESL students of BS English Linguistics, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, responded to the items of questionnaire and learn how they felt about the impact of slangs on ESL learner's formal writings at graduate level. Simple random sampling strategy was used in the study where 50 participants of BS English Linguistics, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur were randomly selected. The sample consisted of 20 male and 30 female ESL learners. The researcher considered the

following ethics during the process of data collection:

- Ensured confidentiality and anonymity to participants
- Introduced the participants to the objectives of the study
- The researchers considered their consent
- Researchers made sure that the participation in the study is completely involuntary
- Researchers gave the participants liberty to quit from the study any time

Theoretical Framework

The study is based upon Prensky's (2001) *Digital Natives Theory* where he stated that the people who were born into the digital age have different ways of communication and language. Digital natives often interact with social networking websites, text messaging, and other forms of online communication, using modern language, acronyms and non-standard vocabulary. They develop a language habit of using informal language in their everyday life due to the impact of these digital environments. This intensive exposure to the digital media can impact the distinction between informal and formal registers, especially in academic writing, for graduate-level learners of ESL. Based on this theory the present study investigates whether the over use of contemporary slang in digital communication can affect the academic writing techniques of ESL graduate students' and their respect for the conventions of formal written English.

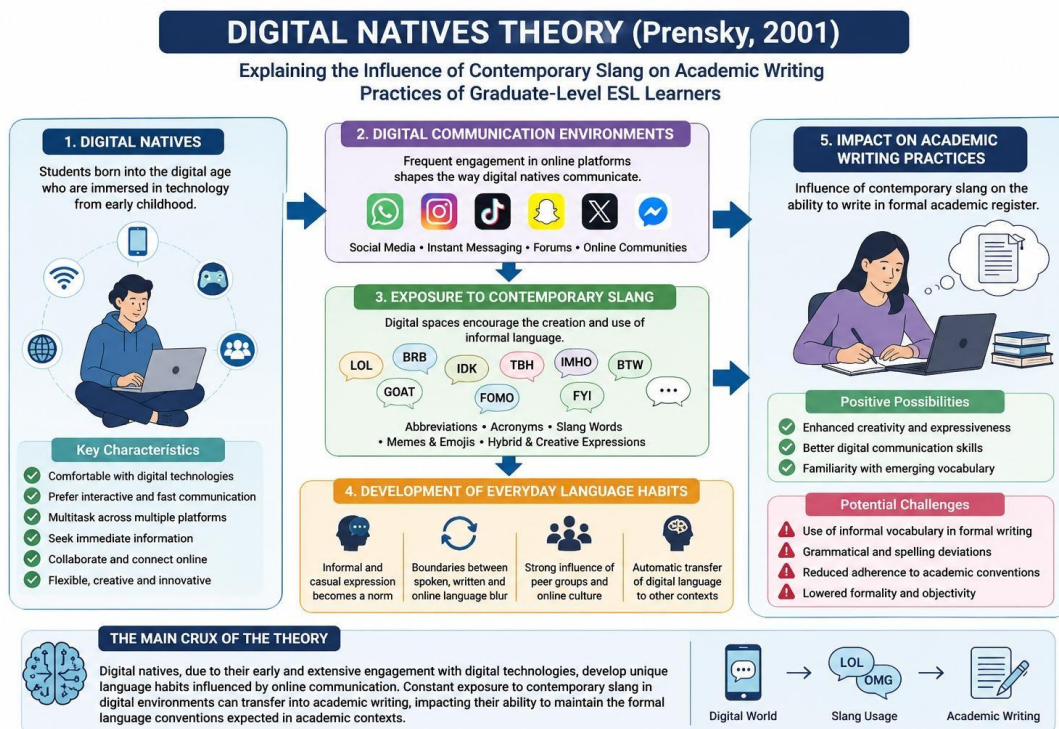


Figure 1. Digital Natives Theory, Adapted from Prensky (2001)

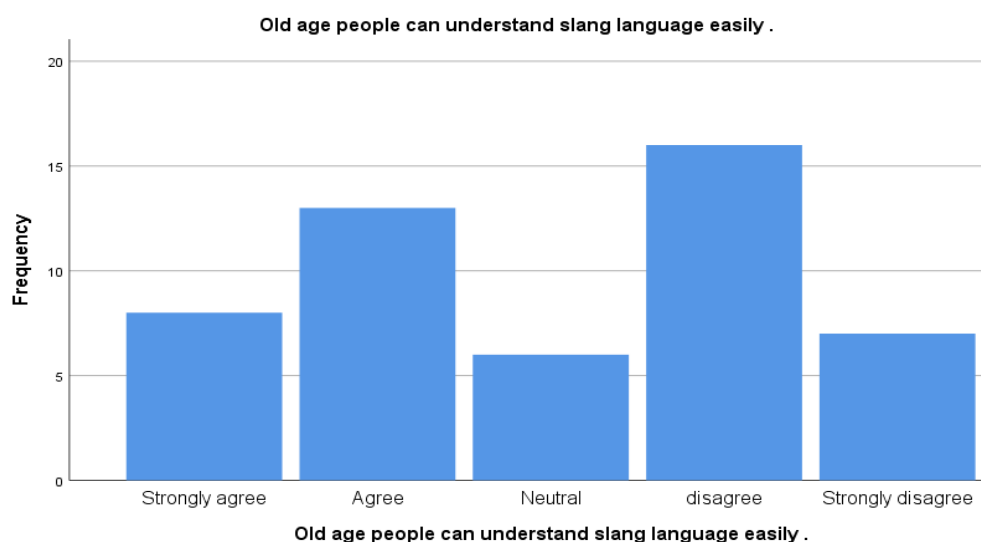
Data Analysis

This section of the study is concerned with data analysis. The researchers administered questionnaire and asked the respondents to fill the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions, designed on Likert scale and then the questionnaire was analysed on a software known as SPSS. The researcher has analysed the data statistically. The tables and bar graphs are drawn to illustrate the responses. It was done to pinpoint this specific area for figuring out how slang language affects the formal writings of ESL learners. The purpose of this section is to describe and present the results of various research techniques. The results

demonstrated that slang language has a different impact on students' writing, reading, and speaking abilities in different proportions.

Table 1: Old Age People Can Understand Slang Language Easily

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	8	16.0	16.0	16.0
	Agree	13	26.0	26.0	42.0
	Neutral	6	12.0	12.0	54.0
	disagree	16	32.0	32.0	86.0
	Strongly disagree	7	14.0	14.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	



When respondents were asked that old age people can understand slang language easily then 16% strongly agreed, 26% agreed, 12% remained neutral, 32% disagreed and 14% strongly disagreed.

Table 2: Usage of Slang Words Affect the Spelling of English language

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	23	46.0	46.0	46.0
	Agree	20	40.0	40.0	86.0
	Neutral	1	2.0	2.0	88.0
	Disagree	4	8.0	8.0	96.0
	Strongly disagree	2	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

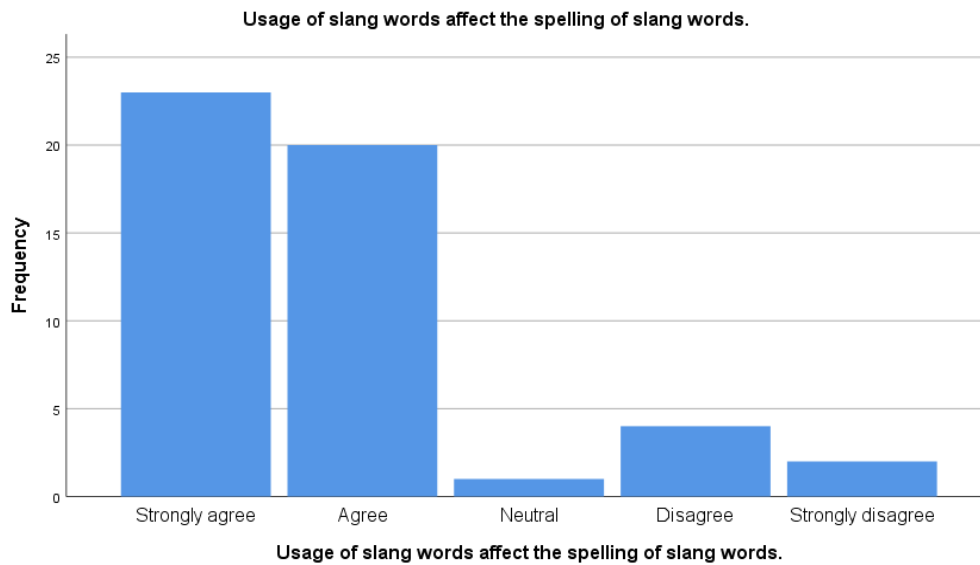


Table 2 represents that usage of slang words affect the spellings of English language. 46% strongly agreed, 40% agreed, 2% remained neutral, 8% disagreed and 4% Strongly disagreed.

Table 3: Slang Language Represents the Playful Nature of Language

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	8	16.0	16.0	16.0
	Agree	28	56.0	56.0	72.0
	Neutral	7	14.0	14.0	86.0
	Disagree	7	14.0	14.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

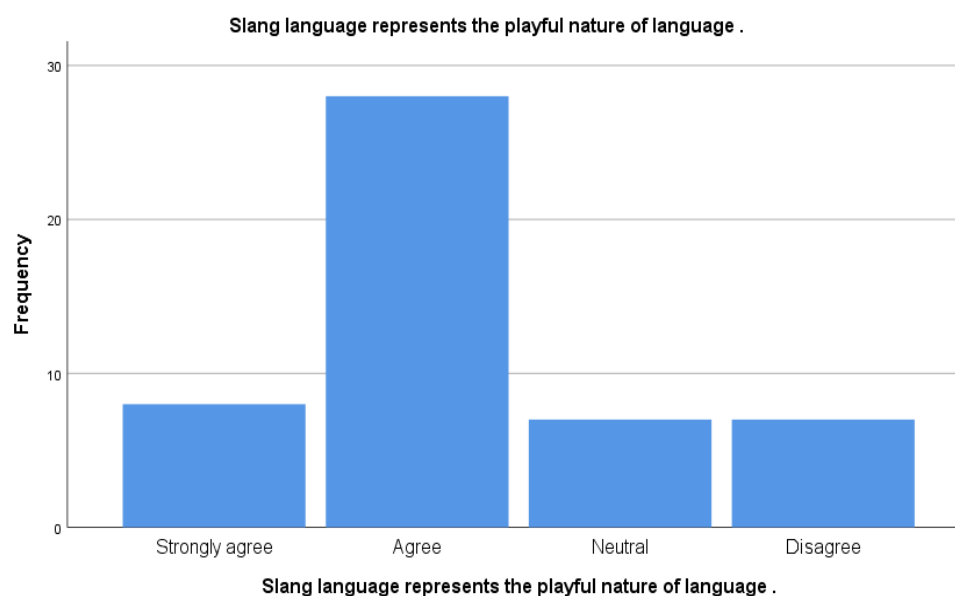


Table 3 represents that slang language represents the playful nature of language. 16% strongly

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

agreed, 56% agreed,14% remained neutral and 14% disagreed.

Table 4: Slang Language Shows Good Literacy Skills

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	9	18.0	18.0	18.0
	Agree	15	30.0	30.0	48.0
	Neutral	11	22.0	22.0	70.0
	Disagree	14	28.0	28.0	98.0
	Strongly disagree	1	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

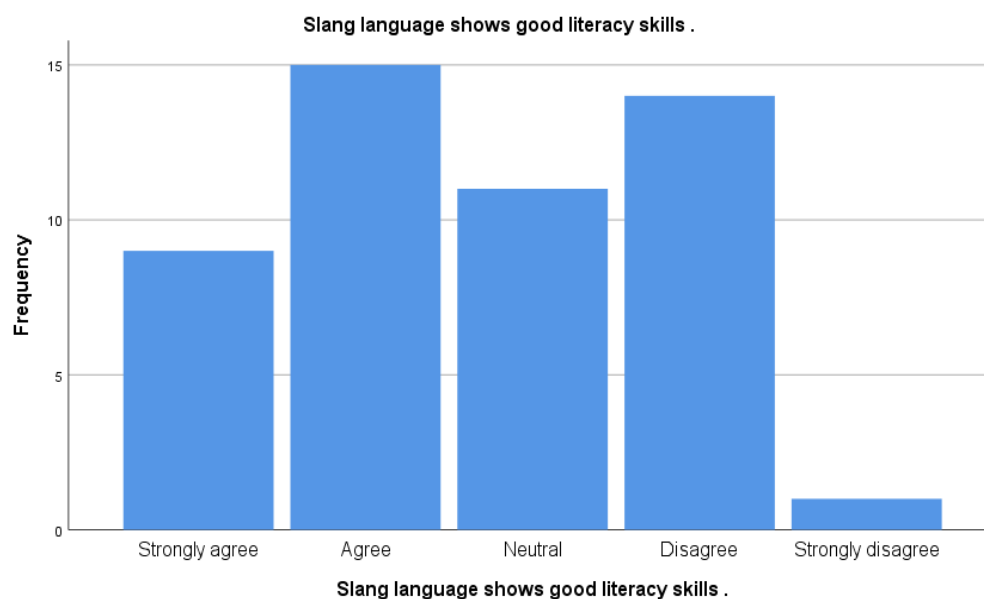


Table 4 represents that slang language shows good literacy skills. 18% strongly agreed, 30% agreed, 22% remained neutral,28% disagreed while 2% strongly disagreed.

Table 5: Using Slang has become a Matter of Good Social Status

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	13	26.0	26.0	26.0
	Agree	22	44.0	44.0	70.0
	Neutral	7	14.0	14.0	84.0
	Disagree	5	10.0	10.0	94.0
	Strongly disagree	3	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

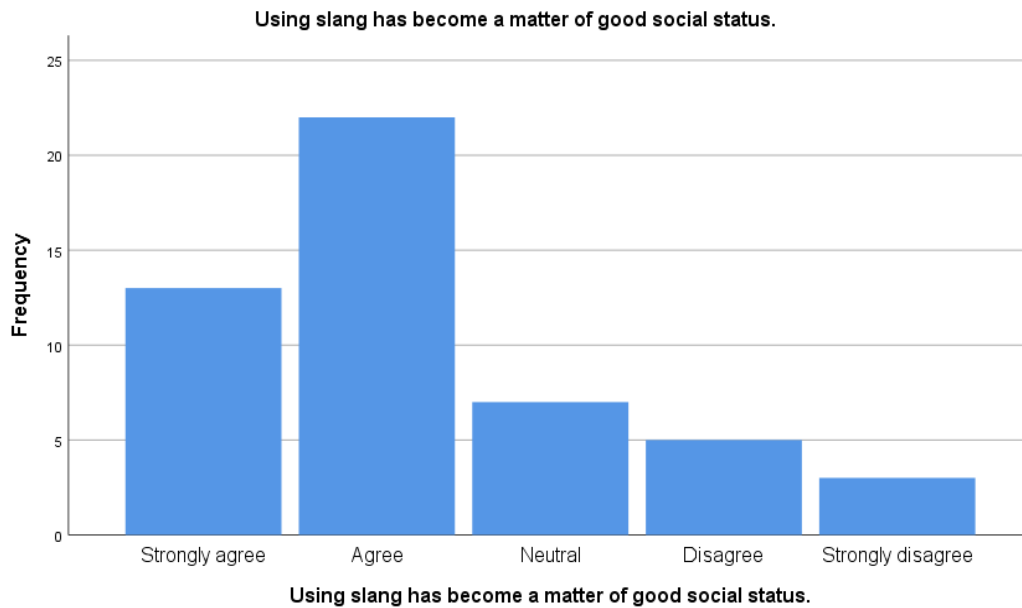


Table 5 represents that using slang language has become a matter of good social status. 26% strongly agreed, 44% agreed, 14% remained neutral, 10% disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed.

Table 5: Popularization of Slang is affecting the Norms of Standard English

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	11	22.0	22.0	22.0
	Agree	21	42.0	42.0	64.0
	Neutral	9	18.0	18.0	82.0
	Disagree	8	16.0	16.0	98.0
	Strongly disagree	1	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

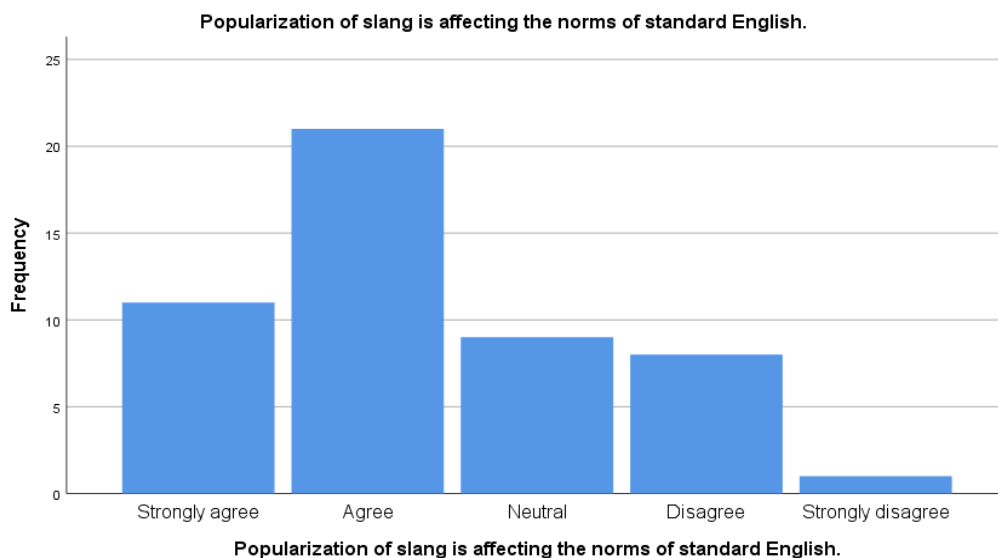


Table 6 represents that popularization of slang is affecting the norms of standard English. 22% strongly agreed, 42% agreed, 18% remained neutral, 16% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed.

Table 7: Slangs are Spreading Because of social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	25	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Agree	17	34.0	34.0	84.0
	Neutral	3	6.0	6.0	90.0
	Disagree	4	8.0	8.0	98.0
	Strongly disagree	1	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

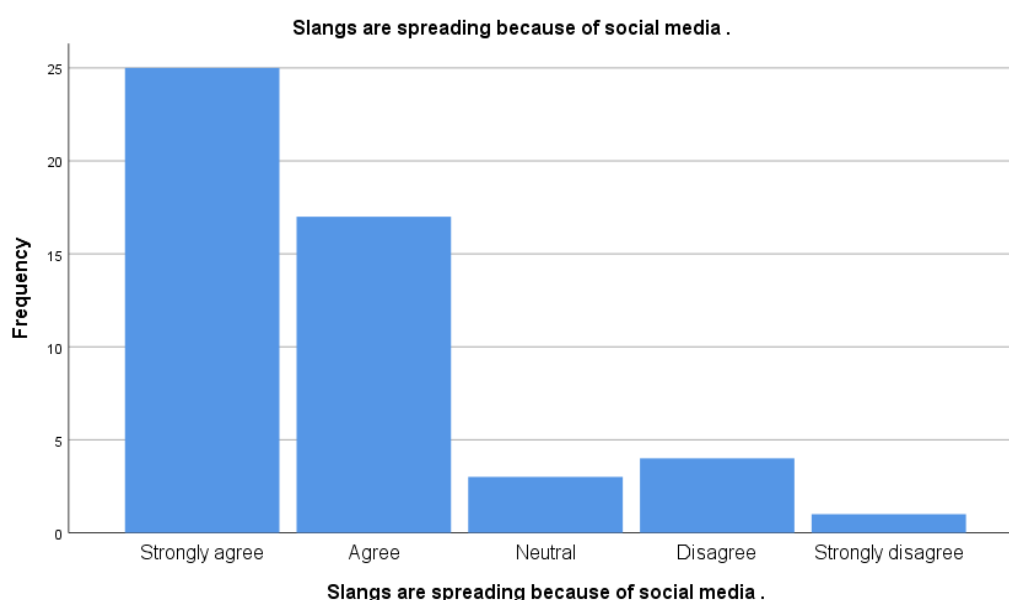


Table 7 represents that slangs are spreading because of social media. 50% strongly agreed, 34% agreed, 6% remained neutral, 8% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed.

Table 6: Continuous Usage of Slang Language Confuses the Students while Writing Formal Papers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	21	42.0	42.0	42.0
	Agree	15	30.0	30.0	72.0
	Neutral	7	14.0	14.0	86.0
	Disagree	5	10.0	10.0	96.0
	Strongly disagree	2	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

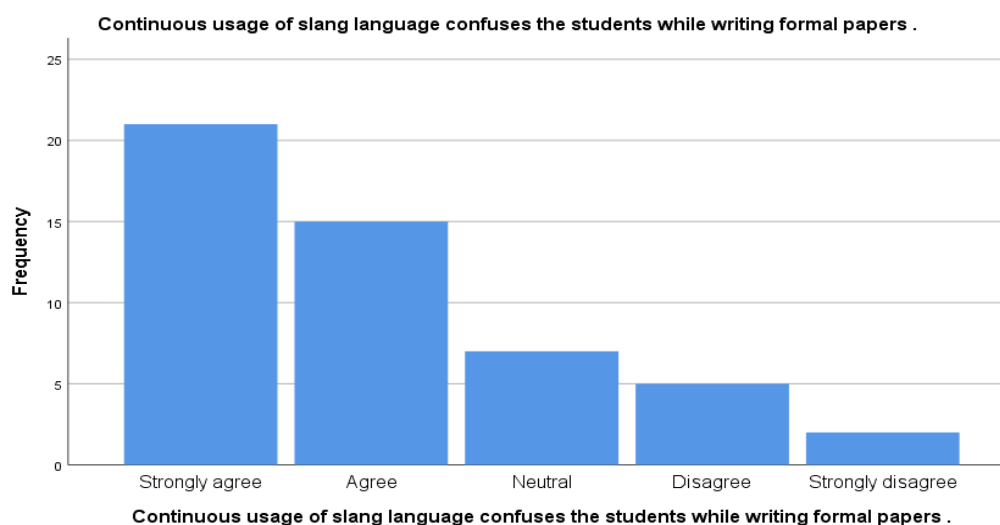


Table 8 represents that continuous usage of *slang* language confuses the students while writing formal papers. 42% strongly agreed, 30% agreed, 14% remained neutral, 10% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed.

Table 7: Continuous Usage of Slang Language Causes Students to Misspell the Words

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	21	42.0	42.0	42.0
	Agree	13	26.0	26.0	68.0
	Neutral	9	18.0	18.0	86.0
	Disagree	6	12.0	12.0	98.0
	Strongly disagree	1	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total		50	100.0	100.0	

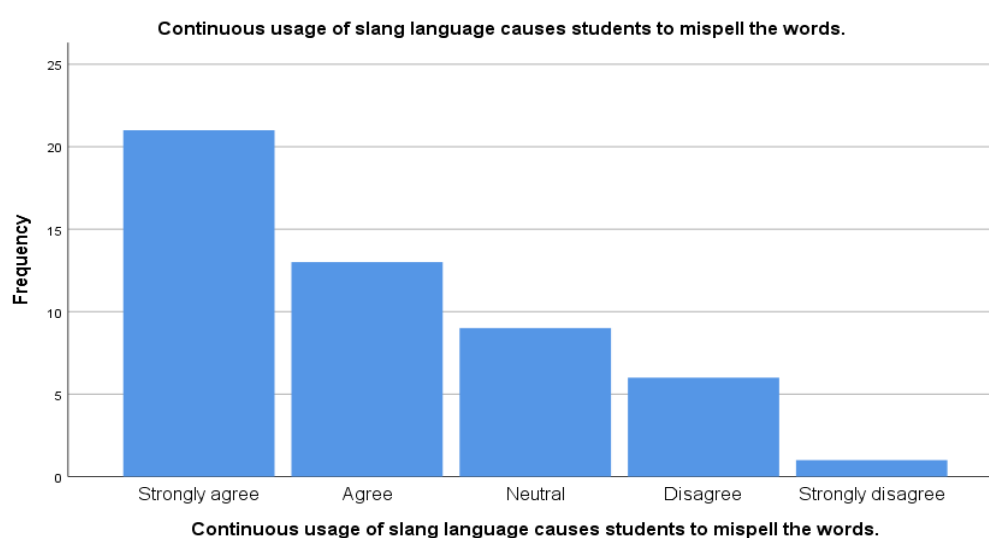
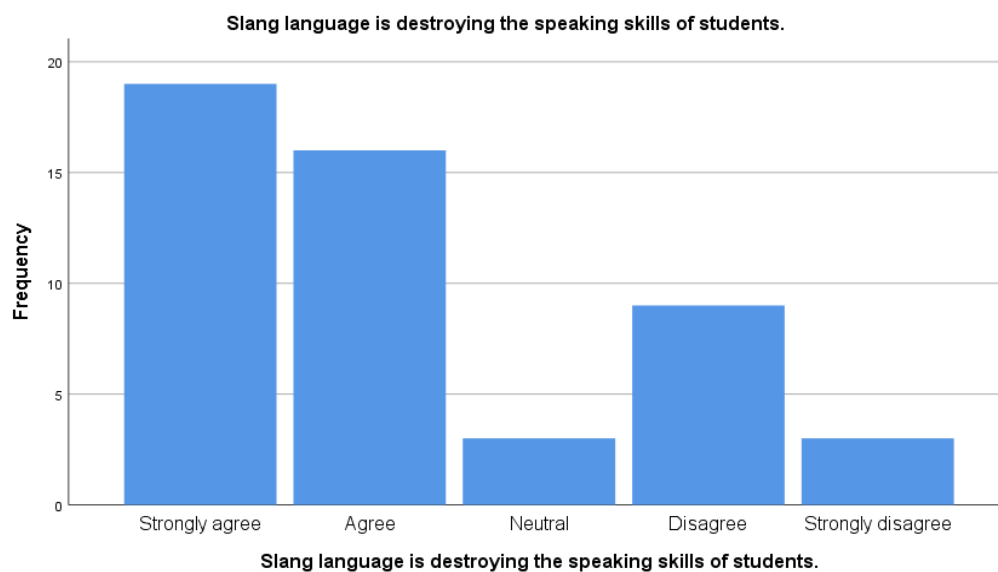


Table 9 represents that continuous usage of slang language causes students to misspell the words. 42% strongly agreed, 26% agreed, 18% remained neutral, 12% disagreed and 2%

strongly disagreed.

Table 8: Slang Language is destroying the Speaking Skills of Students

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	19	38.0	38.0	38.0
	Agree	16	32.0	32.0	70.0
	Neutral	3	6.0	6.0	76.0
	Disagree	9	18.0	18.0	94.0
	Strongly disagree	3	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	



Slang language is destroying the speaking skills of students.

Table 10 represents that 38% strongly agreed, 32% agreed, 6% remained neutral, 18% disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed.

Table 9: Slang Language is destroying the Writing Skills of Students

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	15	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Agree	19	38.0	38.0	68.0
	Neutral	4	8.0	8.0	76.0
	Disagree	9	18.0	18.0	94.0
	Strongly disagree	3	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

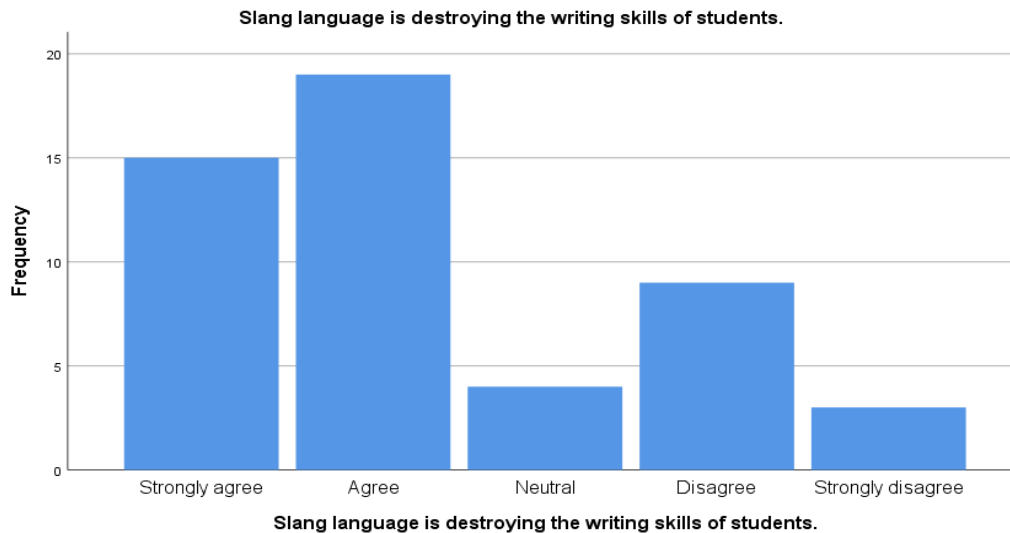


Table 11 represents that slang language is destroying the writing skills of students. 30% strongly agreed, 38% agreed, 8% remained neutral, 18 disagreed while 6% strongly disagreed.

Table 12: Use of Slang Language Should be Encouraged in Academics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	7	14.0	14.0	14.0
	Agree	13	26.0	26.0	40.0
	Neutral	4	8.0	8.0	48.0
	Disagree	11	22.0	22.0	70.0
	Strongly disagree	15	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

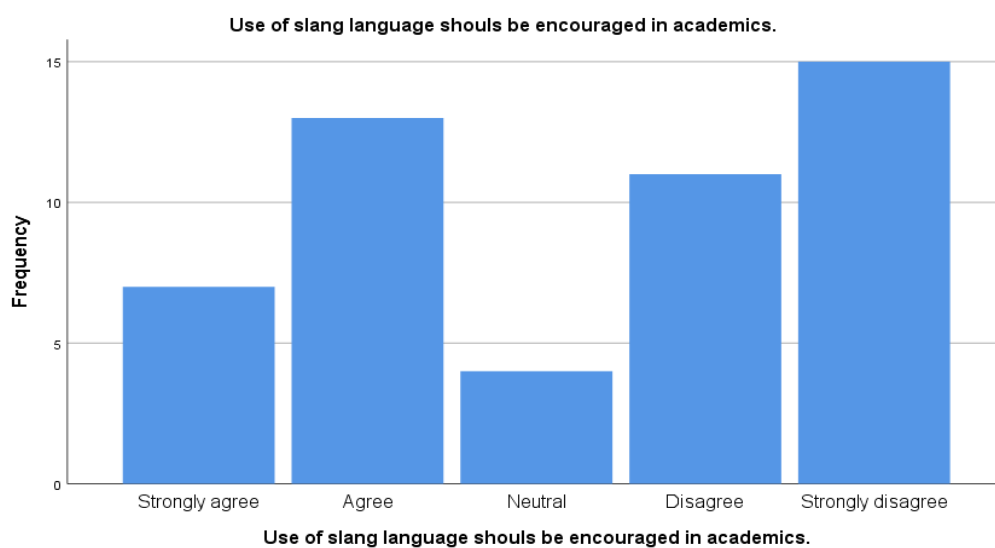


Table 12 represents that use of slang language should be encouraged in academics. 14% strongly agreed, 26% agreed, 8% remained neutral, 22% disagreed while 30% strongly disagreed.

Table 10: Slang Language is Just a Variety of English Language

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	9	18.0	18.0	18.0
	Agree	12	24.0	24.0	42.0
	Neutral	17	34.0	34.0	76.0
	Disagree	6	12.0	12.0	88.0
	Strongly disagree	6	12.0	12.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

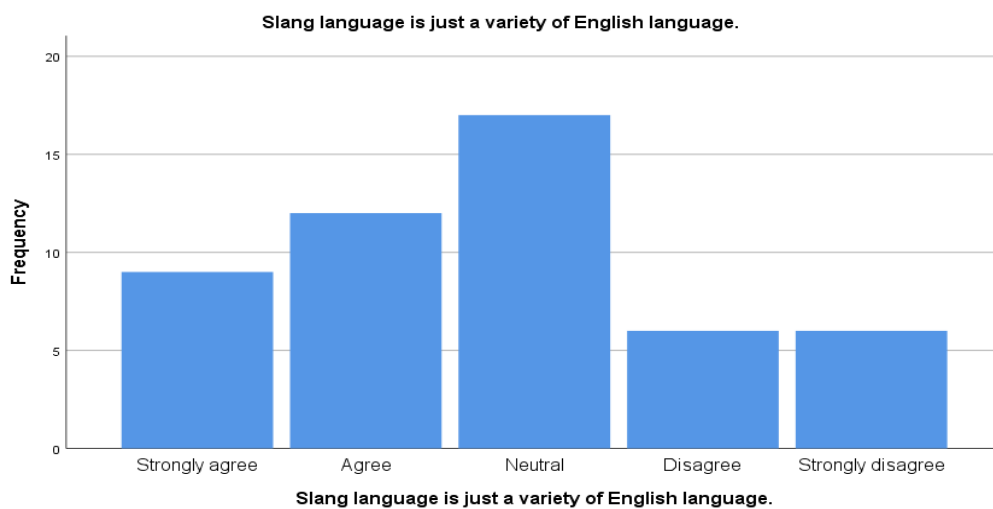


Table 13 represents that slang language is just a variety of English language. 18% strongly agreed, 24% agreed, 34% remained neutral, 12% disagreed and 12% strongly disagreed.

Table 14: Slang Language Shows Smartness, Confidence and Creativity of Students

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	14	28.0	28.0	28.0
	Agree	11	22.0	22.0	50.0
	Neutral	8	16.0	16.0	66.0
	Disagree	9	18.0	18.0	84.0
	Strongly disagree	8	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

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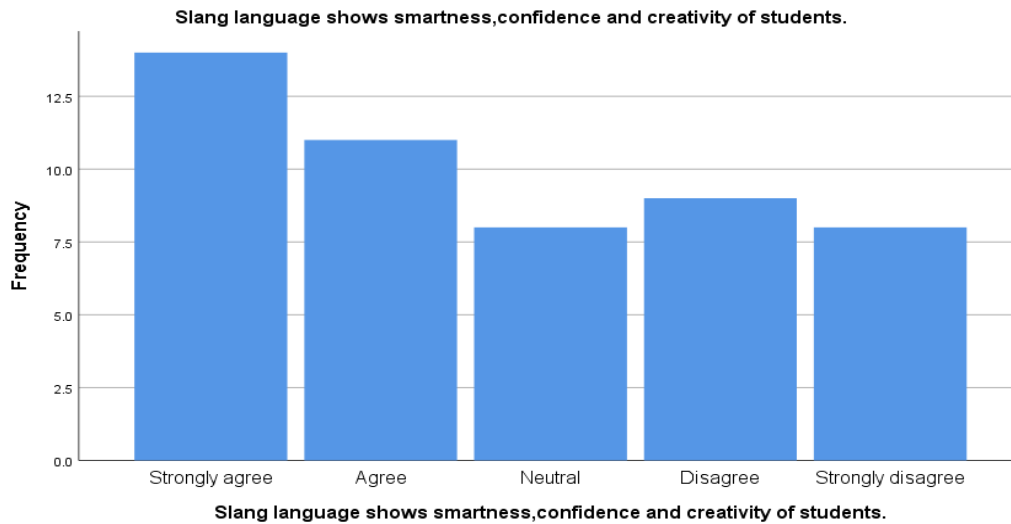
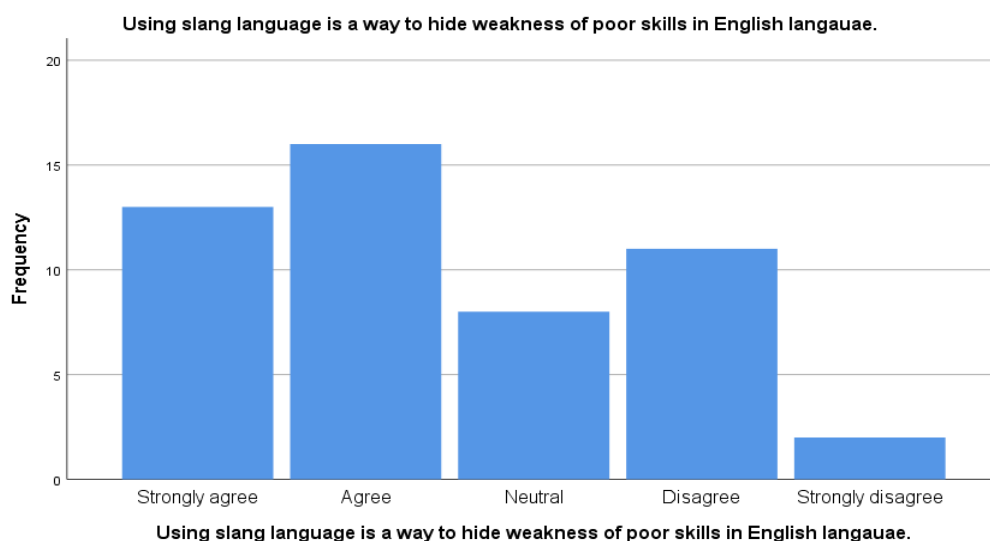


Table 14 represents that slang language shows smartness, confidence and creativity of students. 28% strongly agreed, 22% agreed, 16% remained neutral, 18% disagreed and 16% strongly disagreed.

Table 11: Using Slang Language is a Way to Hide Weakness of Poor Skills in English Language

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	13	26.0	26.0	26.0
	Agree	16	32.0	32.0	58.0
	Neutral	8	16.0	16.0	74.0
	Disagree	11	22.0	22.0	96.0
	Strongly disagree	2	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	



Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

Table 15 represents that using slang language is a way to hide weakness of poor skills in English language. 26% strongly agreed, 32% agreed, 16% remained neutral, 22% disagreed while 4% strongly disagreed.

Findings

With the advent of social media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other internet forums, usage of slang language and incorporation of informal features in English language is becoming common nowadays. Youth predominantly uses slang language while old age people tend to avoid the usage of slangs. Language is not static but it is fluid, so it keeps on changing and the usage of slangs represent the fluid and playful nature of language. Continuous usage of slang language by ESL learners confuse them and make them enter a state of double mindedness where they get puzzled about which features to use while writing standard papers. Slang language is affecting the writing skills of students. They tend to use more informal features in their formal papers and academics. ESL learners tend to use slangs in order to raise their social status because it is considered as a means of showing modernity in pop culture.

Proliferation of slang language is considered as a matter of good social status. Slang language is also a variety of English language and sometimes it represents the creativity of people that how artfully they invent new features of language to satisfy their conversational needs. Since slangs are disseminating because of social media, so in order to converse on social media, youth use informal spellings, abbreviations and slangs to communicate with each other. But this is an informal category of language that should not be used in academics. Despite of its creative and playful nature, slang language does not represent good literacy skills.

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