Arab World English Journal
INTERNATIONAL PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL ISSN: 2229-9327

Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on CALL Volume 17. Number 12. July 2026 Pp.40 -58
DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/call12.3

Digital Language Awareness and AAVE-Related Expressions in Higher Education in Kosovo

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Received:03/25/2026 Accepted:06/03/2026 Published:07/15/2026

Abstract
The rapid expansion of digital communication platforms has transformed patterns of language exposure and language learning worldwide. Social media environments increasingly expose users to contemporary linguistic expressions associated with African American Vernacular English and other forms of digital communication. This study aimed to examine familiarity with expressions associated with African American Vernacular English and digital language practices among students and professors in higher education in Kosovo. The significance of the study lies in addressing the limited research on digital language practices and sociolinguistic awareness in English as a Foreign Language contexts within Balkan higher education settings. A quantitative survey design was employed involving 42 participants from the University for Business and Technology in Kosovo. The study examined patterns of social media exposure, familiarity with selected linguistic expressions, awareness of their origins, and attitudes toward their use in academic environments. Findings indicated that students demonstrated greater familiarity with such expressions than professors, suggesting generational differences in digital language exposure. Results also showed that social media platforms, particularly TikTok, function as important environments for informal language exposure and vocabulary development. However, participants demonstrated limited awareness regarding the sociocultural origins of many expressions. The findings suggest the importance of developing sociolinguistic and digital language awareness in educational contexts to support informed language use.
Keywords: African American Vernacular English, digital communication, digital culture, digital language awareness, higher education, social media

Cite as: Sefiu, R & Thaqi-Jashari, L (2026). Digital Language Awareness and AAVE-Related Expressions in Higher Education in Kosovo. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on CALL 17.* (12) 40-58. https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/call12.3

1.Introduction

Language is a dynamic system that continuously evolves in response to social, cultural, and technological developments. In the contemporary digital era, linguistic change has accelerated due to the widespread use of online communication platforms**.** Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) create global communication environments where linguistic expressions can spread rapidly across geographical and cultural boundaries. As a result, new words, phrases, and informal linguistic expressions increasingly emerge and circulate through digital media before entering everyday communication.

One notable feature of this digital linguistic landscape is the increasing visibility of linguistic expressions associated with African American Vernacular English (AAVE). AAVE is a systematic and rule-governed variety of English with distinctive grammatical, phonological, and lexical characteristics (Green, 2002). Through music, film, popular culture, and digital media, many expressions associated with AAVE increasingly circulate beyond their original communities and become visible to global audiences.

Expressions such as *slay*, *period*, *it's giving*, and *bet* frequently appear in online conversations, memes, and viral content. Younger users, particularly those active on social media, often adopt these expressions as part of everyday communication. Consequently, contemporary digital language practices increasingly become part of the linguistic repertoire of English language learners worldwide.

This increasing exposure raises important questions regarding language awareness and language learning. Learners encounter English not only through formal educational environments but also through social media platforms that expose them to informal language practices and evolving communication trends. Such exposure creates a context in which learners navigate between informal digital discourse and more formal academic language expectations.

Digital language awareness refers to the ability to recognize, interpret, and critically understand language practices emerging within digital environments. It includes awareness of language variation, sociocultural meanings, register appropriateness, and the contexts in which language is used online. Digital language awareness is closely connected to digital literacy because both involve critical engagement with digital environments; however, digital language awareness specifically focuses on language use and communication practices in online spaces.

The rationale for this study stems from the increasing role of digital media in shaping language exposure and the limited research examining how learners and educators perceive expressions associated with African American Vernacular English in English as a Foreign Language contexts. This issue becomes particularly important in higher education settings where students and professors may differ considerably in digital media engagement and exposure to contemporary language practices.

The main aim of this study is to investigate the influence of digital media exposure on familiarity with expressions associated with African American Vernacular English and contemporary digital language practices among students and professors in higher education in Kosovo.

The significance of the study lies in contributing to discussions on sociolinguistic awareness, digital literacy, and contemporary language learning practices in Balkan educational contexts.

Specifically, this study aims to:

• examine participants' familiarity with expressions associated with African American Vernacular English and digital language practices;
• compare students and professors regarding familiarity with digital language practices;
• identify primary sources of digital language exposure;
• investigate attitudes toward informal language practices in academic contexts.

Based on these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent does exposure to digital communication environments influence familiarity with expressions associated with African American Vernacular English?
RQ2: Are there significant differences between students and professors regarding familiarity with and attitudes toward expressions associated with African American Vernacular English?
RQ3: How do social media environments contribute to digital language awareness among English language learners?
RQ4: How do participants perceive the role of internet-mediated language practices in academic communication?

These research questions aim to provide insights into generational differences in digital language exposure and attitudes toward informal language practices in academic environments.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Language Variation and Digital Language Practices

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is one of the most extensively studied varieties of English in sociolinguistics. Linguistic research has consistently demonstrated that AAVE is a systematic and rule-governed linguistic variety with its own grammatical structures, phonological features, and lexical patterns (Green, 2002). Rather than representing a form of "incorrect" English, AAVE functions as a legitimate variety of English with consistent linguistic rules shared among speakers within the speech community.

The present study is informed by variationist sociolinguistic theory, which views language variation as a socially meaningful feature of communication rather than linguistic deficiency. Labov (1972) demonstrated that language varieties such as AAVE follow systematic patterns, while Eckert (2000) emphasized that linguistic variation is closely connected to identity, social meaning, and group membership. This theoretical perspective is relevant to the present study because younger users often encounter and adopt emerging linguistic expressions through digital environments where identity and participation are central to communication.

The study also draws on perspectives related to digital language practices and platformed communication. Digital environments are not neutral spaces where language is simply transmitted; rather, they shape how linguistic expressions become visible, repeated, and socially meaningful. Social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and X influence language circulation through algorithmic visibility, user participation, and repeated exposure. Therefore, digital language practices must be understood not only as informal communication but also as socially situated language use shaped by platforms, communities, and cultural meanings.

Digital ethnography perspectives further suggest that online environments should be understood as embedded social spaces where language practices, identities, and participation develop through everyday interactions (Hine, 2015). Rather than viewing digital communication as purely technological, digital ethnography emphasizes how users construct meanings and linguistic practices within online communities.

Similarly, social media platforms shape communication through algorithmic structures and patterns of participation. Van Dijck (2013) argues that platforms influence visibility and user interaction, thereby shaping how linguistic practices circulate and become socially normalized.

2.2 AAVE and Popular Culture

Historically, AAVE developed through complex historical and sociocultural processes involving contact between English dialects and African linguistic systems during slavery in the United States (Rickford, 1999). Over time, this linguistic variety developed distinctive grammatical and phonological features and became closely connected to African American identity, cultural expression, and community practices.

Despite its linguistic legitimacy, AAVE has often been stigmatized in educational and institutional contexts. Baugh (2015) argues that negative attitudes toward AAVE reflect broader social and racial inequalities rather than objective linguistic evaluation. Similarly, Baker-Bell (2020) emphasizes that language education must recognize the cultural and historical significance of Black language practices while also addressing linguistic discrimination.

Earlier studies primarily emphasized popular culture as a major channel through which expressions associated with AAVE entered wider public awareness. Alim and Smitherman (2012), for example, show how African American linguistic practices gained broader visibility through hip-hop, media, and public culture.

However, recent scholarship suggests that digital platforms do more than spread these expressions; they also reshape and recontextualize them. This distinction is important because the global circulation of expressions associated with AAVE can involve linguistic appropriation, racialized language use, and commodification. Recent scholarship suggests that expressions associated with African American Vernacular English may increasingly function as marketable digital content, where linguistic practices become socially popular and commercially visible while their cultural origins receive limited recognition.

In online environments, linguistic expressions associated with African American communities may become popular, humorous, or commercially valuable while their cultural origins remain unrecognized. Ilbury and Walcott (2026) argue that some AAVE features are increasingly reframed as "TikTok language" or "Gen Z language," which may detach these expressions from their original cultural and racial contexts. This process of decontextualization is central to the present study because participants may recognize or use expressions without understanding their sociocultural origins.

2.3 Internet Discourse, Black Twitter, and TikTok Language Practices

Internet slang refers to informal linguistic expressions that emerge and circulate primarily through digital communication environments. Research in computer-mediated communication has consistently shown that online environments play an important role in shaping contemporary language practices. Androutsopoulos (2016) argues that networked communication environments facilitate multilingual interaction and linguistic experimentation by enabling users to participate in diverse communicative communities.

Whereas earlier studies emphasized technological communication environments, more recent scholarship has shifted attention toward digital communities, identity construction, and platform-specific language practices. Earlier studies largely emphasized online interaction as a space for communication and experimentation, whereas contemporary research increasingly

focuses on how language practices are shaped by participation, visibility, and social engagement within specific digital platforms.

Androutsopoulos (2015) further suggests that networked multilingualism and social media environments transform language practices by creating opportunities for linguistic experimentation and digital interaction. These perspectives indicate that online communication environments function not only as channels of communication but also as spaces where language practices continuously evolve.

Black Twitter scholarship is particularly relevant because it demonstrates how African American users have shaped digital discourse through humor, cultural commentary, linguistic creativity, and community-based interaction. Florini (2014) argues that Black Twitter functions as a space of cultural performance and collective expression. Unlike general studies of internet slang, this scholarship emphasizes that online language practices are not culturally neutral but are closely connected to identity, community participation, and racialized experiences.

TikTok discourse introduces another important dimension to this discussion. Unlike earlier digital spaces where users actively searched for communities, TikTok relies heavily on algorithmic recommendation systems that repeatedly expose users to specific expressions, sounds, trends, and communicative styles. As a result, linguistic expressions can spread rapidly across cultural and national boundaries.

Recent scholarship suggests that platformed communication practices increasingly influence which linguistic expressions become visible and widely adopted. While earlier perspectives emphasized localized speech communities or popular culture, TikTok discourse studies highlight the role of algorithms in accelerating language diffusion and reshaping digital language awareness. However, this rapid circulation may also contribute to decontextualization, particularly when expressions associated with African American Vernacular English become reframed as generalized internet language detached from their original sociocultural contexts.

2.4 Social Media and Language Learning

The increasing role of digital media has transformed language learning environments. Traditional language education has often relied on textbooks and classroom instruction; however, contemporary learners increasingly encounter English through online communication environments and digital media platforms. Researchers argue that social media platforms provide opportunities for authentic language exposure and interaction. Canagarajah (2013) suggests that digital communication environments facilitate translingual practices and allow learners to engage with language beyond conventional classroom settings. Similarly, Thorne (2010) argues that online communication environments can function as informal language-learning spaces where learners interact with authentic linguistic practices in meaningful contexts.

More recent studies increasingly support the educational value of social media environments while emphasizing different aspects of language learning. Alsaied (2017), in a study published in the *Arab World English Journal*, found that learners generally perceived social media positively because it contributed to vocabulary development, interaction, and authentic language exposure. Similarly, Singer (2024) argued that social media platforms extend English language learning beyond traditional classroom environments by increasing learner engagement and providing authentic linguistic input.

However, differences emerge across these studies regarding the nature of the benefits associated with digital environments. Earlier research primarily emphasized vocabulary

development and communication opportunities, whereas more recent scholarship increasingly focuses on broader issues related to language awareness, participation, and digital communication practices. Seargeant and Tagg (2014) further suggest that social media environments create new forms of communication where language practices increasingly reflect online participation and identity construction.

These differences are important because exposure to language through digital environments may increase familiarity with linguistic expressions without necessarily developing critical understanding regarding language variation and sociocultural meanings. Therefore, while social media environments may support language learning and engagement, they may not automatically contribute to sociolinguistic or digital language awareness.

2.5 Digital Language Awareness and Sociolinguistic Awareness

Digital language awareness refers to the ability to recognize, interpret, and critically evaluate language practices that emerge within digital environments. It includes awareness of language variation, register, context, cultural meaning, and language appropriateness.

In English as a Foreign Language contexts, digital language awareness is increasingly important because learners often encounter informal expressions online before they encounter them in formal educational materials. Without guidance, learners may recognize or use such expressions without understanding their cultural meanings or appropriate contexts. Therefore, digital language awareness may help learners distinguish between informal online communication and academic language use. Gee (2015) similarly argues that literacy practices increasingly extend beyond traditional reading and writing skills and involve participation in socially situated forms of communication and meaning-making. This perspective supports the view that digital language awareness requires learners not only to recognize linguistic expressions but also to understand their social and cultural meanings.

2.6 Research Gap

Although previous studies have examined African American Vernacular English, social media discourse, and language learning separately, relatively limited research has investigated how expressions associated with African American Vernacular English are interpreted within English as a Foreign Language contexts.

Furthermore, while studies such as Alsaied (2017) and Singer (2024) support the role of social media in language learning, they do not specifically examine how learners interpret the sociocultural origins of digitally circulated expressions. Similarly, studies on digital discourse address appropriation and decontextualization but rarely examine these issues in Balkan educational contexts.

This creates a gap in understanding how students and professors in higher education perceive expressions associated with African American Vernacular English and contemporary digital language practices. Therefore, the present study addresses an underexplored area by examining familiarity with such expressions and digital language practices among students and professors in Kosovo.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine patterns of familiarity, exposure, and attitudes toward expressions associated with African American Vernacular English and digital language practices among participants in higher education. Quantitative survey methods are widely used in sociolinguistic and educational research because they allow researchers to identify patterns across groups and examine differences among participants**.**

The study focused on comparing two main participant groups: undergraduate students and university professors. This comparison allowed the researchers to investigate potential generational differences in familiarity with digital language practices and expressions circulating through social media platforms.

By examining participants' exposure to social media, familiarity with linguistic expressions, awareness of their origins, and attitudes toward their use in academic environments, the study aimed to explore patterns of familiarity and self-reported perceptions of digital language practices rather than directly measuring digital language awareness in an English as a Foreign Language context.

3.2 Participants

The study involved 42 participants from the University for Business and Technology (UBT) in Kosovo. The sample consisted of 23 undergraduate students, 17 professors, and two additional university staff members.

Students represented the largest proportion of the sample and were primarily enrolled in undergraduate programs where English was taught as a subject or used as a medium of instruction. Professors represented faculty members teaching courses at the university level. Their inclusion allowed for a comparison between younger and older generations in terms of exposure to digital language practices and familiarity with expressions associated with African American Vernacular English**.**

Participants represented different educational roles and age groups within the university environment, allowing the study to examine potential variation in familiarity and exposure across academic communities. Demographic variables collected for the study included age group, educational role, social media use (particularly TikTok use), and frequency of exposure to expressions encountered on social media platforms.

Participants were selected using non-probability convenience sampling, as the study targeted individuals who were accessible within the university environment during the data collection period. This sampling strategy was considered appropriate for an exploratory study designed to investigate preliminary patterns of familiarity, exposure, and perceptions related to digital language practices.

Participation was voluntary, and respondents completed the questionnaire anonymously.Although this sampling approach enabled efficient participant recruitment, the sample size remained relatively small and unevenly distributed across participant groups. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted cautiously and viewed as exploratory rather than representative of broader higher education populations

3.3 Research Instruments

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed to measure participants' exposure to social media platforms, familiarity with selected slang expressions, awareness of their linguistic origins, and attitudes toward the use of internet slang in academic contexts.

The instrument consisted of five sections: demographic information, social media usage, familiarity with selected slang expressions, awareness of the origins of expressions associated with African American Vernacular English, and attitudes toward the use of slang in classroom communication.

Participants evaluated their familiarity with selected slang expressions using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from *not familiar* to *very familiar*. This scale allowed the researchers to calculate mean familiarity scores and compare responses between participant groups.

To ensure the clarity and relevance of the questionnaire items, the instrument was reviewed by two specialists in English language teaching and sociolinguistics prior to data collection. The questionnaire was also piloted with a small group of students to identify potential ambiguities and improve question wording.

The internal consistency of the questionnaire items was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which indicated acceptable reliability for the scale measuring familiarity with slang expressions.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaire was distributed electronically through the Google Forms platform to participants at the University for Business and Technology. Participants were invited to complete the survey voluntarily during the data collection period.

Before responding to the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. The online format allowed participants to complete the questionnaire at their convenience while automatically recording responses in a database for statistical analysis.

The survey remained open for approximately two weeks, after which all responses were compiled and prepared for analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were applied to examine patterns in the data.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participant demographics, social media usage patterns, awareness of Origins of expressions associated with African American Vernacular English, and perceptions regarding the influence of social media on English vocabulary. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated to provide an overview of the data.

To examine differences between students and professors, an independent-samples t-test was conducted. This statistical test is commonly used to determine whether there are significant differences between the means of two independent groups.

In this study, the t-test was used to compare the mean familiarity scores with Expressions associated with African American Vernacular English between students and professors. The level

of statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. In addition, Cohen's d was calculated to determine the effect size and evaluate the magnitude of the difference between the two groups.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were informed that their answers would remain anonymous and used exclusively for research purposes.

No personal identifying information was collected from participants. All responses were stored securely and analyzed only for academic research purposes.

4 Results and Analysis

This section presents the statistical findings of the study. Descriptive statistics were first used to examine participant demographics, social media exposure, and awareness of expressions associated with African American Vernacular English. Inferential statistical analysis was then conducted to compare responses between students and professors. An independent-samples t-test was performed to determine whether statistically significant differences exist between the two groups in their familiarity with expressions associated with African American Vernacular English.

4.1 Participant demographics

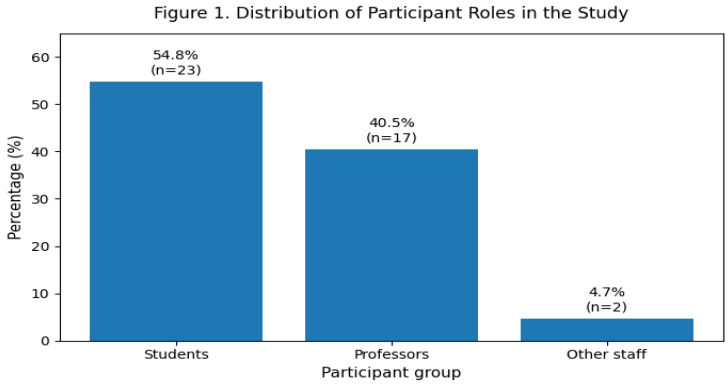
A total of 42 participants took part in the study. The majority of respondents were undergraduate students, followed by professors and a small number of additional staff members.

Table 1. *Participant demographics*

Participant group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Students	23	54.8
Professors	17	40.5
Other staff	2	4.7

As shown in Table 1, students represent the largest proportion of the sample (54.8%), followed by professors (40.5%). Only a small number of participants belonged to other staff categories.

Figure 1. Distribution of participant roles in the study.



Social media exposure

Participants were asked whether they use TikTok, which is widely recognized as one of the most influential platforms for the spread of internet slang.

Table 2. *TikTok Usage Among Participants*

TikTok usage	Frequency
Yes, regularly	25
Occasionally	9
No, but familiar with it	5
No, and not interested	3

The results indicate that the majority of participants reported regular TikTok usage (n = 25), while smaller groups reported occasional usage or familiarity with the platform without active engagement.

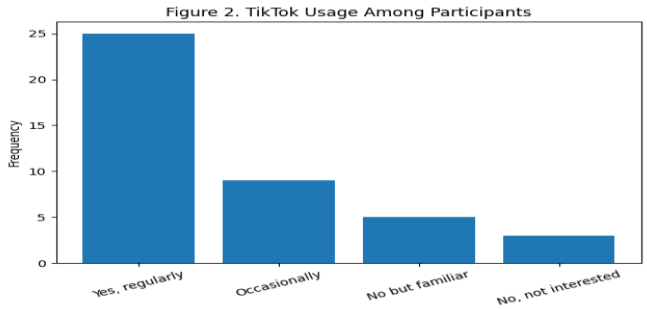


Figure 2. TikTok usage among participants

Awareness of Origins of expressions associated with African American Vernacular English
Participants were asked whether they were aware that many internet slang expressions originate from African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

Table 3. *Awareness of AAVE-Related Expression Origins*

Response	Frequency
Not aware	17
Somewhat aware	15
Aware	10

The results suggest that awareness of the linguistic origins of internet slang remains relatively limited. The largest group of respondents reported that they were not aware of the Origins of expressions associated with African American Vernacular English of many slang expressions.

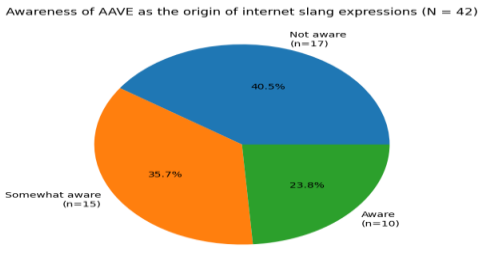


Figure 3. Awareness of AAVE as the origin of internet slang expressions.

4.2 Influence of social media on English vocabulary

Participants were also asked whether social media influences their English vocabulary.

Table 4. *Influence of social media on English vocabulary*

Response	Frequency
Yes	28
Somewhat	7
No	7

The majority of respondents indicated that social media influences their English vocabulary (n = 28), while a smaller proportion reported limited or no influence.

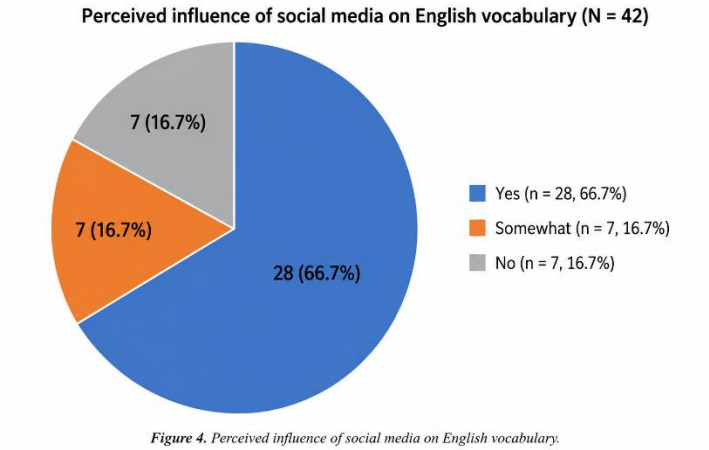


Figure 4. Perceived influence of social media on English vocabulary.

Familiarity with Expressions associated with African American Vernacular English

Descriptive statistics were calculated to compare familiarity with Expressions associated with African American Vernacular English between students and professors.

Table 5. Familiarity with AAVE-Related Expressions by Group

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Students	23	2.05	0.61	0.13
Professors	17	1.34	0.58	0.14

The results indicate that students reported higher familiarity with Expressions associated with African American Vernacular English (M = 2.05, SD = 0.61) compared to professors (M = 1.34, SD = 0.58).

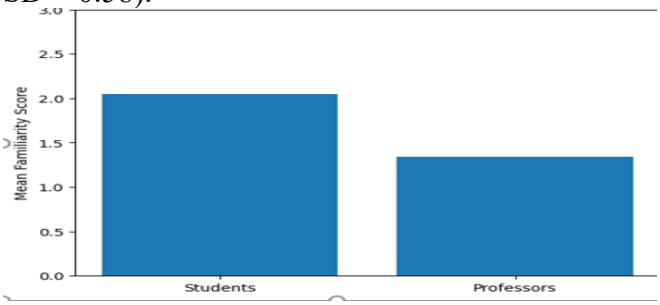


Figure 5. Mean familiarity with Expressions associated with African American Vernacular English

Independent-samples t-test

To examine whether the difference between students and professors was statistically significant, an independent-samples t-test was conducted.

Table 6. *Independent Samples Test for Familiarity with AAVE-Related Expressions*

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	0.12	.73	3.83	38	< .001	0.71	0.18
Equal variances not assumed			3.80	36.9	< .001	0.71	0.19

Levene's test indicated that the assumption of equal variances was met ($p = .73$). The independent-samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(38) = 3.83$, $p < .001$. Students demonstrated significantly higher familiarity with Expressions associated with African American Vernacular English than professors.

Effect size

To evaluate the magnitude of the difference between the two groups, Cohen's d was calculated. The effect size was d = 1.18, which represents a large effect according to conventional benchmarks. This finding indicates that the difference in familiarity with internet slang between students and professors is substantial rather than minimal.

4.3 Summary of findings

Overall, the statistical results indicate several important patterns:

• Students demonstrate significantly higher familiarity with Expressions associated with African American Vernacular English than professors.

• Social media platforms, particularly TikTok, serve as major sources of exposure to internet slang.
• Many participants are not fully aware of the linguistic and cultural origins of these expressions.
• Most respondents believe that social media influences their English vocabulary development.

These findings highlight the growing influence of digital culture on language exposure and communication practices in higher education.

5 Discussion

5.1 Overview

The present study addressed four research questions related to familiarity with expressions associated with African American Vernacular English, digital language exposure, and perceptions of internet-mediated language practices among students and professors in higher education. Findings indicate that digital communication environments increasingly influence language exposure and familiarity with contemporary linguistic expressions.

The results demonstrate that students exhibit significantly higher familiarity with expressions associated with African American Vernacular English compared to professors.

Regarding the first research question, findings suggest that exposure to digital communication environments appears closely associated with familiarity with expressions associated with African American Vernacular English and contemporary digital language practices. Students demonstrated greater familiarity than professors, indicating that participation in digital environments may influence exposure to emerging linguistic expressions. This finding

suggests that language familiarity increasingly develops through engagement with digital communication practices rather than exclusively through formal educational environments.

This generational difference is likely related to differences in social media usage patterns, particularly among younger users who frequently engage with digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and other social networking sites.

These findings support previous sociolinguistic research suggesting that younger speakers often play a central role in linguistic innovation and language change (Eckert, 2000). Young people are more likely to adopt new expressions and linguistic forms as part of their identity construction and participation in digital culture.

The findings also align with studies discussed in the literature review suggesting that digital environments function as spaces where linguistic practices spread rapidly through participation and repeated exposure. Earlier studies emphasized popular culture as a mechanism of language diffusion (Alim & Smitherman, 2012), whereas more recent perspectives highlight the role of platformed communication practices. Therefore, the present findings suggest that language exposure increasingly occurs through digitally mediated environments.

The results also demonstrate that social media plays a significant role in shaping vocabulary exposure. The majority of respondents reported that social media influences their English vocabulary.

Regarding the second and third research questions, findings indicate that social media environments contribute to language exposure and vocabulary familiarity; however, exposure alone does not necessarily result in deeper language awareness. Participants demonstrated familiarity with expressions but more limited awareness regarding their origins and sociocultural meanings. This finding suggests that repeated exposure may support recognition of expressions without necessarily encouraging critical awareness of language variation and context.

This finding supports previous studies suggesting that digital environments function as informal language learning spaces where learners encounter authentic language use (Canagarajah, 2013). Through online interactions, memes, videos, and comments, learners are exposed to a wide range of contemporary linguistic expressions.

This interpretation supports studies discussed in the literature review suggesting that digital environments increasingly function as informal language-learning spaces (Canagarajah, 2013; Thorne, 2010; Singer, 2024). However, while previous studies primarily emphasized positive effects related to exposure and engagement, the present findings suggest that familiarity with language forms should not automatically be interpreted as sociolinguistic understanding.

However, the results also reveal relatively limited awareness of the linguistic origins of many slang expressions. A considerable number of participants reported that they were not aware that many internet slang expressions originate from African American Vernacular English.

This finding highlights an important issue related to linguistic awareness and cultural context.

Scholars have emphasized that the widespread use of expressions associated with African American Vernacular English without awareness of their cultural origins may contribute to linguistic appropriation and misrepresentation of marginalized linguistic communities (Baker-Bell, 2020).

Regarding the fourth research question, findings indicate that participants differed in how they perceived internet-mediated language practices in academic environments. These findings suggest that digital communication practices increasingly influence language use while

simultaneously creating tensions between informal communication and academic language expectations.

Another important finding relates to differences in attitudes toward slang in academic contexts. While students often view internet slang as a creative and engaging form of communication, professors may perceive it as informal language that is not appropriate in academic settings.

This finding is particularly relevant in relation to previous discussions presented in the literature review regarding linguistic decontextualization and digital language practices. Expressions associated with African American Vernacular English increasingly circulate through digital environments detached from their original social contexts. Therefore, language diffusion within digital environments may involve broader questions related to sociolinguistic awareness, representation, and language use**.** These results suggest that educators may need to address the increasing presence of digital language practices in language education.

Rather than ignoring or discouraging students' exposure to internet slang, educators may consider using it as an opportunity to develop sociolinguistic awareness and critical language understanding.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for English language education, particularly in higher education contexts where students are exposed to multiple forms of language use.

First, the results highlight the importance of teaching register awareness. Students who are frequently exposed to informal digital language must develop the ability to distinguish between different language registers. Understanding when informal language is appropriate and when formal academic language is required is a key component of communicative competence.

Second, educators may benefit from integrating discussions of digital language practices into English language instruction. Internet slang and online linguistic trends can serve as valuable teaching tools for exploring language variation, sociolinguistics, and cultural context. By examining the origins and meanings of slang expressions, students can develop a deeper understanding of how language reflects social and cultural identities.

Third, incorporating discussions of digital communication into the classroom may increase student engagement. Many students encounter English primarily through online media rather than traditional textbooks. Connecting classroom instruction with students' digital language experiences may therefore make language learning more relevant and meaningful.

Finally, raising awareness of the cultural origins of linguistic expressions can help students develop a more critical understanding of language use. Recognizing the historical and cultural contexts associated with different varieties of English encourages respect for linguistic diversity.

5*.3 Limitations of the Study*

Although this study provides valuable insights into perceptions of internet slang in higher education, several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the sample size of the study was relatively small. The research involved only 42 participants from a single university. While the results provide useful preliminary insights, larger studies involving multiple institutions would provide more generalizable findings.

Second, the study relied on self-reported data collected through questionnaires. Participants' responses may reflect their perceptions rather than their actual language usage patterns.

Third, the research focused primarily on familiarity with slang expressions rather than examining how participants actually use these expressions in communication. Future studies could include discourse analysis or observational methods to investigate how internet slang appears in real communication contexts.

5.4 Future Research

Future research could expand this study in several ways.

First, researchers could conduct larger cross-institutional studies involving multiple universities across different regions or countries. This would allow researchers to examine whether similar patterns exist in other educational contexts.

Second, future studies could investigate the impact of internet slang on academic writing and formal communication skills. Understanding whether exposure to informal digital language influences students' writing practices would provide valuable insights for educators.

Third, researchers could examine how students themselves perceive the boundaries between informal and formal language. Investigating students' awareness of language registers could help educators design more effective language instruction strategies.

Finally, qualitative research methods such as interviews or focus groups could provide deeper insights into participants' attitudes toward internet slang and digital communication practices.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the influence of digital media exposure on familiarity with expressions associated with African American Vernacular English and contemporary digital language practices among students and professors in higher education in Kosovo.

The results indicate that students demonstrate significantly higher familiarity with expressions associated with African American Vernacular English and digital language practices compared to professors. This difference reflects generational patterns of digital media engagement and highlights the role of social media as an informal language environment.

The findings also show that social media influences English vocabulary exposure for many learners. However, awareness of the linguistic and cultural origins of many **expressions** remains relatively limited.

Overall, the findings suggest that digital communication environments increasingly influence language exposure and familiarity with contemporary linguistic practices among English language learners. The study highlights the importance of developing sociolinguistic and digital language awareness in educational contexts.

Funding: This research is not funded.
Acknowledgments: Not applicable.
Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that they have no known competing financial or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.
Authenticity and Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools: This manuscript is an original work and has not been published or submitted elsewhere. During the preparation of this manuscript, the

authors used Grammarly for language editing and proofreading purposes only. The authors reviewed and edited all content and take full responsibility for the final version of the manuscript.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Questionnaire

Slang Across Generations – AAVE and Beyond

Introduction

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is widely recognized as a major source of contemporary internet slang, particularly on social media platforms such as TikTok. This questionnaire aims to explore how different generations recognize, use, and perceive slang expressions, including those derived from AAVE. The data collected will contribute to understanding how digital culture influences language use across age groups. Participation in this study is voluntary and anonymous.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. What is your age group?
   ☐ Under 20
   ☐ 20–24
   ☐ 25–30
   ☐ 31–40
   ☐ 41+
2. What is your role at UBT?
   ☐ Student
   ☐ Professor
   ☐ Other

Section 2: Social Media Use

3. Do you use TikTok?
   ☐ Yes, regularly
   ☐ Occasionally
   ☐ No, but I am familiar with it
   ☐ No, and I am not interested

4. How often do you encounter slang on TikTok or other social media platforms?
   ☐ All the time
   ☐ Often
   ☐ Sometimes
   ☐ Rarely
   ☐ Never

Section 3: Familiarity with Slang Expressions

5. Please indicate your familiarity with the following slang expressions by selecting one option for each.

Slang Expression	**I know this word**	**I use this word**	**I have never heard this word**
Slay	☐	☐	☐
Period	☐	☐	☐
It's giving	☐	☐	☐
Bet	☐	☐	☐
Lowkey	☐	☐	☐
Sus	☐	☐	☐
GOAT	☐	☐	☐
(It) Slaps	☐	☐	☐
Gassed	☐	☐	☐
Woke	☐	☐	☐
Chopped	☐	☐	☐
Cooked	␣	☐	☐
Aura	☐	☐	☐
Unc	☐	☐	☐

Section 4: Perceptions of Slang

6. Which generation do you think uses slang most actively today?
   ☐ Gen Z (15–25)
   ☐ Millennials (26–40)
   ☐ Gen X (41–60)
   ☐ Not sure
   ☐ Other
7. Why do people (you or others) use slang expressions?
   ☐ To sound trendy
   ☐ To connect with a certain group or identity
   ☐ It is part of everyday language

ISSN: 2229-9327

☐ For humor or entertainment
☐ Other: _____

Section 5: Awareness of AAVE

8. Were you aware that much of today's social media slang derives from AAVE?
   ☐ Yes, I was aware
   ☐ Somewhat aware
   ☐ No, I was not aware
9. Do you think it is important to know the cultural or social origins of the slang you use?
   ☐ Yes, very important
   ☐ Somewhat important
   ☐ Not important
   ☐ I have never thought about it
10. In your opinion, using AAVE slang without understanding its background is:
    ☐ Disrespectful
    ☐ Acceptable if it is trendy
    ☐ A form of cultural appropriation
    ☐ Depends on the situation
    ☐ I do not know what AAVE is
    ☐ Other: _____

Section 6: Language and Academic Use

11. Do you think slang affects how well people speak or write in academic or professional settings?
    ☐ Yes, negatively
    ☐ Yes, positively
    ☐ No
12. Has social media influenced your English vocabulary?
    ☐ Yes
    ☐ Somewhat
    ☐ No