



THE LANGUAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON ACADEMIC WRITING-TEACHER PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

The topic 'Language of social media and its impact on academic writing' has been a subject of much debate among teachers, researchers and educators. Academic writing requires focused instruction to enable students write academic reports, essays, written presentations, research papers and dissertations. Students increasingly engage in social media with profound ease and their writing too is impacted by these various sites. The scale at which social media is being used gives students access to information encapsulated from vast sources of information without them having to study the numerous materials. How has social media impacted academic writing is analysed in this paper. The analysis is made on the researcher's interaction with fellow teachers who teach English in colleges. Some teachers find this thought very disturbing as it distracts the learners from the rules of sentence patterns, grammar, punctuation, diction and specialised vocabulary, whereas, some believe that in this age of digital literacy, incorporating technology in the classroom, and allowing room for social media can be beneficial.

KEYWORDS : Academic writing, social media sites, digital literacy.

Introduction

Academic writing requires extensive practice. Academic writing can be divided into two types: student academic writing, which is used as a form of assessment at schools, colleges, as well as universities, and expert academic writing, which is writing that is intended for publication in academic journals or books. Academic writing is characterized by its formal tone, use of specific vocabulary, and adherence to academic conventions such as citation and referencing. It is used to convey complex ideas and arguments in a clear and concise manner, and is often subject to peer review and critique.

Academic writing is governed by strict stylistic and linguistic conventions. While it is true that social networking sites have been instrumental in the spread of information, the language used therein is rather informal as it attempts to connect with all kinds of people of different intelligences and language competencies. Although the academic social networks such as Research Gate, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook facilitate exchange of ideas, they also allow for fashionable abbreviations, slang and polarised words which impact the language of young learners who are led to think that this is the manner they can adopt when writing for academic purposes.

This paradigm shift in the way language is used can affect the quality and accuracy of academic writing. Some teachers find this shift disturbing as it distracts the learners from the rules of sentence patterns, grammar, punctuation, diction and specialised vocabulary, whereas, some believe that in this age of digital literacy, incorporating technology in the classroom, and allowing room for social media can be beneficial.

Therefore, the research questions that this paper seeks to answer is, "should the use of social media be encouraged in the classroom in the 21st century where technology is ubiquitous?"

And the second question is "what are the teachers' perspectives on the use and impact of the social media on academic writing?"

Literature review

Academic writing is different from other forms of writing because it is more structured, analytical, and evidence-based. It is used to inform, analyse, and persuade in a straightforward manner and enables the reader to engage critically in a scholarly dialogue. Students are expected to write essays, research papers, reports, written presentations

and dissertations that have to follow the stylistic and linguistic conventions. To understand the role of teachers one needs to go back to the times when academic writing started as a program of import in colleges and universities.

The teaching of academic writing in its relatively global sense starts in some of the developed countries after the Second World War when the influx of returned soldiers to universities brought new diversification and writing instruction again became a priority (c.f. Russell, 1991: 239). Another reason for the Second World War to be the catalyst for teaching academic writing was the lack of communication, both within and between nations (Friedrich, 2008: 7). Since writing has been seen as a daunting task, researchers and practitioners have long looked for appealing and practical ways to improve students' writing skills. Consequently, over the decades, approaches to teaching writing have gone through a myriad of changes.

The literature on academic writing suggests such approaches as the behaviourist approach, contrastive rhetoric approach, the product-orientated approach, the process-orientated approach, and so on (c.f. Azim, 2018: 17). In most non-English speaking countries, academic writing appeared as one of the EFL skills with a particular focus on students' written language production (c.f. Hyland, 1993; Hyland, 2016). However, presently, as most educational institutions offer courses in English, academic writing has acquired a different connotation. Formal writing instruction has traditionally occurred in a particular kind of course, designed to improve the general writing skills of an increasingly diverse undergraduate population. Teaching writing became a profession in itself, distinct from the teaching of other disciplines (Gottschalk & Hjortshoj, 2004: 5). With this in mind, we may assert that presently academic writing is a standalone discipline with its own program and teaching methodology.

Today's academic work, excellent though it may be, is the product of a declining system. The present-day academic writing goes hand-in-hand with information literacy. Additionally, an academic literacies approach, sees learning to write in academic settings, as learning to acquire a repertoire of linguistic practices that are based on complex sets of discourses, identities, and values (Lea & Street, 1998). To this end, instruction is more than just a language-related issue. It teaches the student to effectively produce a piece of writing using the knowledge of the culture, circumstances, purposes, and motives that prevail in particular academic

settings (Paltridge, 2009: 6). Finally, the development of new technology, such as computers and word processing, has attempted to show how students write and how new academic writing is taught (Paltridge, 2009: 79).

Research questions and analysis

The research question that this paper mentioned earlier is should the use of social media be encouraged in the classroom? The answer is a resounding "Yes, without a shadow of a doubt; social media should be allowed in the classroom," exhorted by some teachers from higher learning institutions. In this 21st century technology is ubiquitous. Access to technology may improve student engagement, thereby increasing time spent on the task (De Oliveira & Silva, 2013: 105). It is also clear that keeping students engaged in the course material can often be a challenge. Since increasing numbers of students are using laptops, computers, tablets, and smartphones for note-taking and as replacements for traditional textbooks, it is important for faculty members to explore ways of making these devices an integral part of the learning process, rather than a mere distraction (Buller & Cipriano, 2015: 37). Dunne and Owen (2013) illustrate the creation of a Facebook group used by students to answer any queries from classmates, such as assignment due dates, how to go about re-sitting, if necessary, and other administrative issues. Facebook was selected since it was a daily-used platform. An example of a student who had missed many of the classes and wanted to know how to go about resuming the module, without potentially being reprimanded by the tutor. Today, there are many more platforms, both daily-used and educational, able to provide a space for the stakeholders to collaborate and communicate.

The emerging literature on academics' use of social media tells us how differently forms of social media are employed (Guerin et al., 2020). Researchers (Lupton et al. 2018; Guerin et al., 2020, etc.) categorize social media into:

1. Social networking (LinkedIn, Facebook, ResearchGate, Academia.edu);
2. Social bookmarking and reference management (Mendeley, Zotero);
3. Social data sharing (figshare, SlideShare);
4. Video (YouTube);
5. Wikis (Wikispaces);
6. Blogging (WordPress, Wix);
7. Microblogging (Twitter).

To the second question, "What are the teachers' perspectives on the use and impact of the social media on academic writing?" there were mixed responses. The researcher used a semi-structured interview to ascertain the opinion of teachers. The semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to get specific answers to this issue. Of the 30 teachers interviewed, 16 of them strongly believed that academic writing possesses qualities such as

- Identifying and focusing on a particular topic or idea.
- Presenting an argument clearly and supporting it with relevant evidence.
- Remaining objective and neutral about the topic.
- Using formal English, discipline-specific vocabulary.
- Use of more complex structures and not contraction of words.

Of the 30 teachers which is the sample size used for the purpose of writing this paper, 16 teachers believed that social media directly gives digested views of some self-proclaimed intellectuals who do not quote their sources of information. Therefore, not everything that is said on social media is true or accurate or evidenced. The views expressed are often cryptic and ambiguous. More often than not, the views expressed on

social media sites are subjective, presumptuous, and anecdotal. The data is not based on factual literature or academic research. This they believed can be misleading. The learner tends to be swayed by views which can be dogmatic.

Some of the teachers also stated that social media breaks all conventions of spellings in English by using abbreviations, slang and new spellings.

A few words are cited here as examples:

- Pic for picture, gud for good, wud for would, 4eva for forever, Bcz for because, fone for phone, rly for really and so on.
- Some examples of slang XD- Laughing out loud, mk-mokay, LOL- laughing out loud, NP- No problem, TTYL-talk to you later.
- Some examples of Informal language use: raining cats and dogs instead of raining heavily, the mob was rowdy instead of the crowd was unruly.
- Contractions should not be used in academic writing for example-it's for it is, there's for there is. Common informal phrases such as 'a lot' should not be used. Use of first-person pronouns like 'I' 'we' is discouraged in academic writing.
- Students tend to omit punctuations on social media and often times forget to use them in their academic writing as well.
- Students do not bother if the subject agrees with the verb, this creates a problem for the teachers who expect this basic rule of grammar to be followed in the assignments.
- Students tend to use Emojis and teachers find that annoying as it ruins formal writing skills.

The other 14 teachers had mixed responses.

- They believe that digital media is formal but social media is not so. This distinction should be known to the students.
- Some felt that social media is beneficial as it allows the students with low language competencies to learn the language.
- Some students for paucity of time may not read extensively and so some social media sites could help them get a brief overview of the literature needed for their academic papers. Teachers see no harm in that.
- Yet a few teachers had this strong impression that students engage with social media especially instant messaging forums like WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, which prevents them from sleeping well and sleep deprivation results in them not being active in class, some of them then end up taking drugs to be alert.
- The younger generation are only interested in entertainment at the cost of their mental health.

This being said it is even more essential for teachers to understand and develop their own knowledge on how to use social media in the classroom. Most teachers in the researcher's opinion are uncertain about the viability and the logistical possibility of using social media in the classroom vis-vis the given curriculum.

But with support in developing the skills to navigate through social media and filter through the barriers of entry, teachers can guide students through information that is relevant, more so irrelevant. The negative connotations about lack of security and falsehoods being purported will not be the perception of the latest in information and communication technology.

Conclusion

Teachers may also face challenges in adapting their teaching methods to incorporate social media, and may require additional training and support to do so effectively. Furthermore, there may be cultural and linguistic barriers that

need to be addressed when using social media for teaching academic writing in India. This could be suggested for further research.

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