

WRITING WITHOUT PLAGIARISM: DEVELOPING SKILLS TO WRITE BETTER

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Abstract

This paper investigated the writing level of part time post graduate students as part of a pilot work to test the effect of independent study on academic writing. The focus was writing without plagiarism. The participants were adults between the ages of 25 and 50 all of whom were gainfully employed in diverse educational positions and from different cultures across the country. The same pre and post test was conducted to establish participants' ability to write without plagiarism before and after the treatment. They were to write their own versions of a two - paragraph extract of a journal article. All the 37 participants constituted the experimental group. Findings show that 31 out of the respondents improved radically in the post test. It was recommended that researchers could write better if exposed to what others write, guided on developing specific and personalized style and taught the danger of plagiarism and its damnable consequences.

Keywords: writing, plagiarism, grammar, skills, teaching

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a key skill in lifelong learning as it has the potential to help students express their thoughts and assist school graduates to locate and advance in careers. It ushers young adults into politics and socialization. The emergence of social media, for instance, is only advancing further the possibility of connecting to the world faster through writing than it was in the last twenty years. *"Students struggling with the writing process develop a negative view of writing as well as a negative image of their own abilities to conduct written communication"* (Algozzine, B., Diliberto, J, A. 2004).

Writing, though a strong literacy skill; provides a cover up for people who are weak in speech communication and pronunciation both of which are universal indicators of proficiency in any language as well as yardsticks to measure literacy. As a productive skill, therefore, writing should be approached with the sagacity of sharing authentic materials and resources that are comprehensible. To do otherwise is to promote bigotry and cripple learning and socialization.

As an expressive skill of language, writing showcases people's culture and social milieu, promotes interaction, encourages adaptation and allows for feedback. This makes academic literacy to be broad and wide; while academic writing remains a genre within the larger field of academic literacy. (Lee, 2013, Gijbels, Donche, Richardson & Vermunt, 2014). Students come into the universities not just from varied backgrounds but with diverse experience that would require processing in the face of multiculturalism and heterogeneity of humanity. Such processing is a test of effective academic writing involved in the daily university life. "Academic writing skills are crucial when students, e.g., in teacher education programs, write their undergraduate theses." (Aberg, Stahle, Engdahl and Nyqvist, 2016)

What is academic writing? In the university, students are expected to be involved in multiple tasks that require broad reasoning and critical analysis of issues, notions and ideas. The ability to do independent thinking, synthesise thoughts and extract decisions come under serious scrutiny in report writings of term papers, projects, dissertations and thesis. Hence, academic literacy is all about being able to bring from your 'archive' a scientific induced form of thinking which makes you *a jack of all trade and master of all*. Academic writing tests the scholastic part of a researcher; for example, the one in humanities, reasoning out trends in social and natural sciences to further his arguments. While most researchers tend to shy away from writing, no one doubts the fact that writing skills are required to get established as an authority. (Cameron, Nairn & Higgins, 2009).

2. RATIONALE FOR THIS PAPER

This paper is focused on:

- (a) Presenting a report of teachers' perception of the role of grammar on academic writing
- (b) Discussing the relationship between writing skills and plagiarisms
- (c) Exposing participants to some practical suggestions on writing without plagiarisms

3. BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic writing

Academic writing, unfortunately, is not a linear process. That is, we don't count the teaching or acquisition as well as the knowledge of the skills like we count numbers. Many students might feel disappointed to learn this. Writing skills are acquired in a long time learning processes of building up from resources, materials and personnel on the road map of the learner. The researcher writes, presents drafts for criticism and write again. Academic writing is writing to re-write. Experience has shown that precocious students would be on the lookout for a comprehensive syllabus on academic writing that would spell out the step-by-step approach to acquiring skills for academic writing. Braine (2002) believes that the direction to acquiring literacy for fantastic academic writing includes:

- A working knowledge of learner's specialism
- Research skills
- good reading habit and ability
- genuine interest in writing
- willingness to adapt to university social and academic cultures
- personalities of academic mentors
- demands of academic mentors
- demands and influence of student peers
- textbooks, manuals and handbooks.

And, we can add, to the list of Braine, social media.

Grammar in effective writing

In countries where English is studied as a second language and is utilised for multiple socio-political purposes we are confronted with the question how much grammar is required for effective writing in all

genres? This question arises for the following reasons:

(a) Bad grammar distorts information and makes nonsense of good thoughts and fluid logic. According to Azar (2007), grammar sets the pace for structures because it consists of predictable patterns that allow what we say, hear or write to be intelligible.

(b) Every language is cultural. We dream in our culture, we write in English. Some aspects of the cultures of people learning English as a second language cannot be expressed in the English Language.

(c) In an attempt to 'force' local thoughts into foreign language writers sometimes 'localise' English dictions or water down the effect the native thoughts should have on the reader. The consequence of this may rub on arriving at effective semantics, syntax or morphology of the report.

Plagiarisms

Getting papers published is the mark of scholarship for academia. Though, this is a key factor in upward progression, (Hockenos, 2013), quite a number of people find it very difficult to do an original work without tinkering on others' publications. A plagiarism is an academic fraud. It is wrong, it is unethical and it is unprofessional, (Carrol, 2002; Hawley, 1984; Patel, Bakhtiyari, & Taghavi, 2011).view it to be most common problem in "academic manuscripts"

What plagiarisms means in summary

- Presenting another person's work as one's
- Deliberately escaping a proper acknowledgement of a submitted part or whole work of someone else.
- Every acknowledged work of an author requires quotation marks when copied from another source. Where this is left out, plagiarism offence is committed.
- Not acknowledging, appropriately, submitted materials that are an extract of someone else's work.
- Used someone else's unacknowledged labeled or not-labeled digital image, sound, design, photograph or animation.

Causes of plagiarisms

- Lack of courage to confront phobia for research and writing as a result of self-defeat.
- Copying and pasting as indices of lack of research skills time management and independent study habit.
- Working to answer to meet deadline; resulting in arm chair publication.
- Indolence and inhibited desire to tap innate resources for exploration of available research ideas and absence of interact skills for team work
- Paying leap service to consequence of plagiarism.

How to avoid plagiarisms

- Creating time to gather materials
- Making s good select from available resources
- Plan achievable study programme
- Develop tracking habit, and take good note of quoted authors for proper citation
- Go beyond self – editing. Expose your work to proper review by colleagues and friends
- Keep a working bibliography/ Or learn to track your references
- Keep a research log of your material sources
- Engage in writing practice.
- Familiarization with vocabulary, tenses and simple language use

Suggested checklist of questions to confirm plagiarism or absence of it in your work

- Can my readers tell which of my ideas belong to someone else?
- Am I clear about how I used other's ideas to my own contributions?
- Have I represented others work fairly in the context of my own?
- Where have I contributed something of my own to the discussion?

4. HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant difference in the perception of undergraduate and post graduate students on the relevance of grammar to academic writing

5. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design tested on a hundred participants– 50 undergraduate students and 50 post graduate students each of whom was given a well-structured 25-item questionnaire (Relevance of Grammar to Academic Writing Questionnaire RGAWQ) aimed at eliciting their responses on how they perceived the relevance of grammar to academic writing. Section 'A' of the inventory contains items requesting for participants' bio-data which was actually not used for this research for limited of time and space. With reference to section B, participants were to tick (✓) the correct item on a modified likert structure ranging from 1 (Not all the time) to 4 (Exactly true). The total score obtainable was $4 \times 25 = 100$ and the lowest $1 \times 25 = 25$. High scores were associated with positive view of grammar in academic writing. Touching on the validity of RGAWQ, the instrument has undergone face and content validity through trial-tests in various populations including in-service teachers, online audience and young adults in foundation classes across cultures and nations. The reliability co-efficient was found to be 0.72. The test was administered the same day to all participants.

6. FINDINGS

Table 1. Showing the t-test analysis of difference in the perceptions of undergraduate and post graduate students on the relevance of grammar to academic writing

Fig. 1: Perceptions of Participants on the Relevance of Grammar to Academic Writing

t-value						
	N	X	SD	t-cal	t-cri	Df
Undergraduate Students' perception of the relevance of grammar to academic writing	50	1.92	1.24	5.71	1.92	198
Post - graduate Students' perception of the relevance of grammar to academic writing	50	2.93	1.26			

* Level of significance = 0.05

* H_0 rejected

7. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The t-value (5.71) from the table is significant at 0.05, ($p < 0.05$). It follows therefore that there is significant difference in the perception of undergraduate and postgraduate students on the relevance of grammar to academic writing. It is not surprising that though both groups believe grammar is relevance to academic writing, the postgraduate students with (2.93) mean score have a higher perception. This is probably because they need to do more of writing in their study.

Writing, at this level, can be enhanced through introduction to specific skills in planning, drafting and revising. The road to demystifying conventions and providing explicit feedback to given tasks:

(a) Are more available today through growing technological opportunities like online avenues. Now, in the comfort of their homes, students intending to improve on their study could tap on online resources for

innovative paths to pursuing their writing courses. A lot of worksheets and dummies are available for free.

(b) A good starting point in writing process is the selection of a topic. It is doubtful if a writer will choose a topic he would hardly be able to write about. Writing practice would normally include as well, training in maintaining applying a logical coherence, vocabulary development, style, good grammar and avoidance of plagiarism.

(c) These thoughts of Hacker (2002), on proof reading could assist us further: Although proofreading may be dull, it is crucial. Errors strewn throughout an essay are distracting and annoying. If the writer doesn't care about this piece of writing, thinks the reader, why should I? A carefully proofread essay, however, sends a positive message: it shows that you value your writing and respect your readers." (p. 45).

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