The Impact of Digital Literacy Proficiency on EFL Students’ Academic Writing Performance: A Case Study of Algerian Third Year EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

In light of the increasing recognition of digital literacy in learning and education generally, and in English Foreign Language (EFL) instruction specifically, the purpose of this research article is to examine the impact of digital literacy on EFL students’ academic writing performance. The subjects of this study were 80 third year EFL students from M’silia University. The research instruments included a digital literacy questionnaire and a writing performance test which were given to the study participants to answer. The relationship between students’ digital literacy and their academic writing performance was analyzed using the Spearman’s correlation coefficient. The results revealed that there is a high positive correlation coefficient between the research variables, which was statistically significant at the level ($\alpha = 0.01$). Therefore, it was concluded that digital literacy is an effective factor for the development of English academic writing performance.

KEYWORDS

Academic Writing, Digital Literacy, Digital Technologies, Third Year EFL Students

DOI: 10.4018/IJDLDC.2019100103
1. INTRODUCTION

With the increasing importance of digital technologies in all life aspects during the 21st Century, digital literacy has become a requirement for all individuals to successfully take part in the academic life, workplace and society. It is considered as “a precondition of successful transition to becoming a post-industrial economy and a knowledge society” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2011, p. 14). Digital literacy, which refers to a set of skills that enable people to use technologies in a meaningful way, is no longer a luxury, it is essential “for living, learning and working in a digital society” (Jisc, 2014) and has the same importance given to the traditional literacy consisting of reading, listening, speaking and writing.

Several studies have suggested that there is a relationship between English Foreign Language (EFL) learners’ written language proficiency and their digital literacy. According to Digital literacies researchers (Gee, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011), digital literacy provides context for learners to practice situated writing, and such practice holds rich potential for fostering their writing skills. Being digitally literate provides opportunities for learners to access various amount of content, write on different digital tools as blogs, wikis, and social sites, share their written works and receive social support or feedback from other users, which will in turn influence their writing performance.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This section provides a short overview of the literature related to digital literacy and academic writing skills.

2.1 Digital Literacy

In the recent time, the digital technological tools influence each facet of life, including education. Therefore, if individuals are to function in today’s society, it is essential for them to be digitally literate, because digital literacy affects the educational, personal, social and economic aspects of one’s life (Ferrari 2012). The increasing importance of digital literacy led the educational policy makers to incorporate courses of digital literacy into the curriculum, as it is regarded a requirement for lifelong learning (Payton & Hague, 2010). According to Sharpe (2011) and Martin (2006), digital literacy is fundamentally contributing to the individuals’ knowledge in the sense that it helps to enhance the personal, collaborative, active and autonomous construction of learning throughout the utilization of digital tools. It is considered as one of the key factors for success in learning, profession and other domains of the modern society, especially for students and instructors who ought to be digitally literate in this digital age (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004; Martin, 2006).

There are several definitions to the term “digital literacy” in literature, but the consensus seems to be that it is the masterful and efficient use of digital technologies by people. Paul Gilster (1997) was the first scholar to provide a definition to digital literacy, he defined it as “the ability to understand and use information in multiple
Developing Digital Empathy: A Holistic Approach to Media Literacy Research Methods


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