Promoting Social justice through adherence to the formal style of writing in Teaching and Learning

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Abstract: The proposed paper sets out to explore some of the ways in which academic institutions may assist students improve their academic abilities. This with a view that these endeavours will contribute to the success rates particularly of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Literature and data in this area of study tends to suggest that students from disadvantaged backgrounds fare badly in academic literacy compared to their advantaged counterparts. This is evidenced by the lower graduation rates as well as poor academic outcomes of disadvantaged students. Lower literacy, lack of critical thinking and numeracy skills are some of the challenges faced by disadvantaged students. Although the formal curriculum may encompass a broad mix of resources needed by students in order to succeed at university such as mentoring, writing skills, navigating library resources, wellness services etc, the current paper seeks to underscore and argue for the importance of academic writing as being integral in ensuring improvements in academic success rates. By this the researchers have in mind the need for the promotion and adherence to the formal academic style of writing as a means for ensuring improved academic outcomes. Most of the work students perform entails having to express themselves in a formal/academic style of writing; without which their progress can be severely hampered. Accordingly, academic writing involves taking greater care in one's writing, showing objectivity, making appropriate use of gramma, punctuation and the correct use of language. It is therefore, the opposite of informal writing. And although aware of the need to express themselves in a formal manner, often times, students aren't aware how they may go about it. In some instances, even experienced students slip into informal writing. The paper, therefore, will reflect and highlight some of the core issues involved in academic writing such as grammar, formal structure, language and objectivity through the lens of formal writing, also pointing out how these may be approached.

Keywords: academic literacy, formal writing, informal writing, success rate, academic outcomes

Introduction: Why the need to write academically

When we write academically we follow a formal style of writing. It is a form of writing with its own rules, language, structure; different from say informal writing. It entails having to choose words and language carefully in order to communicate complex ideas to your audience. Dissertations, assignments, essays, theses, books, journal articles etc. belong to this genre of writing. What we often find however, is that, although aware of the need and imperative to write in an academic fashion, students tend to slip into informal language, thus abandoning the formal protocols of academic expression. The reasons are manifold with the main being inadequate preparation at lower levels of study, cognitive challenges, instructional gaps to name but a few. These challenges are more pronounced among disadvantaged students, due to lack of adequate exposure. For our purposes, we will within the scope of the current article focus on the latter, namely how Institutions of higher learning may improve their instructional designs in order to assist and improve students' writing skills. For, academic literacy challenges behoove Institutions of Higher learning with the responsibility to develop and equip students with academic literacies particularly in relation to academic writing.

Most of the students' functions and success at University still hinge a great deal on their ability to write academically. Their assessments whether essays, assignments, dissertations etc. are very much conducted in written formats. This notwithstanding, Luke Strongman (2013) laments the fact that language has in recent past become increasingly oral.

This he ascribes to the rapid intensification of technology as "shaping devices of how language is used" (2013: 1). Despite these developments occurring on the technological front however, the written word, like any language, still carries a significant weight in the academic life of a student at university. As Strongman observes, "essay writing is still one of the foundational building blocks of academic research, teaching and learning" (2013: 1). As a form of 'language' therefore, academic writing espouses its own conventions, style and rigor which students need to get familiarized with in order to succeed. Its mastery therefore, has the potential to meaningfully extend inclusion and participation particularly to less advantaged students and thereby democratize the academic space in the process.

We tend to write (and talk) formally to audience that we are less familiar with. This includes occasions whereby we are addressing ourselves to formal authority. Accordingly, in formal writing such as when writing a thesis, the audience is both not familiar to us and is an authority in the field or discipline. Examples in this regard include examiners, reviewers and scientific committees among others. Thus, in accordance with the audience, the author needs to adopt a tone, language and structure that befits the occasion. Furthermore, the author is expected to remove personal opinions, untested beliefs and bias. Departure from these academic imperatives will certainly affect not only the academic merit of the output so produced but may also affect the reputation of the author as a scholar. As Gusti A. Praminatih et al. observe "The absence of formality in an academic writing can become disadvantageous to the author of academic writing and the content of the writing itself" (2018: 102).

Another important reason for formality in academic writing is that ultimately a formal qualification will be conferred by an academic institution, usually a university. A university itself is a formally constituted entity, which as centers of excellence have in place standards which are used in order to ensure quality and consistency. For our purposes however, as authors, students in particular need to eschew informal language and begin addressing themselves in accordance with the demands and confines of academic expectation. Ken Hyland and FengJiang (2017: 41), describe 'the formal' or 'formality' as a "very correct and serious rather than relaxed and a friendly" style of writing. This is because, in informal language the audience and context is rather less formal; it is usually people that are familiar to us. Furthermore, the context is usually relaxed conversational, personal and allows for use of personal anecdotes/experiences for which the audience being addressed can relate.

Formality on the other hand, requires something other than the conventional mode of conversing, it requires thoughtfulness and objectivity. Furthermore, formality requires a specific method and procedures to be followed in adherence to established rules and customs of the academic world. Thus, contrary to the informal style whereby the audience is familiar, the bureaucratic and impersonal nature of academic writing requires a similar detachment by the author/s. Echoing the sentiments by Heylighen and Dewaele, the authors (Hyland and FengJiang) remark that the formal style is thus characterized by the qualities of "detachment, accuracy, rigidity and heaviness" (2017: 41). This means that the author ought to stand at a distance from that which they are investigating so as to proffer objectivity without being affected by personal biases. It is thus in this way that 'truth' is revealed or 'unconcealed' to use Martin Heidegger's expression.

However, perhaps one of a useful way of grasping academic writing is to consider it as scientific writing. This is because both constitute a specialized form of writing with common sets of gathering, processing and disseminating information. The sharing of information in particular, has to occur within the ambit of a certain standard and format. It is for this reason therefore that Ahmet Akkaya and Gulnur Aydin (2018) comment that the terms 'academic writing' and 'scientific writing' are in fact interchangeable, for both make use of similar principles: "All principles considered while reporting an academic research and process of textualizing it is called 'academic writing' or 'scientific writing' (2018: 129). The ultimate objective is to produce scientific findings without any form of prejudice. Thus, of particular importance when writing within this frame is the need to produce "structured ideas, with well thought-out, verified points and to consider different opinions" Akkaya & Aydin (2018 129). So although the structure of writing is important particularly for other researchers to become acquainted with how the researcher arrived at his/her conclusions, what is also critically important is that the points must be verified, factual, and be truthful. Only in this way may the findings of the study be deemed to be sound. So at another level, the extent to which the author adheres to the academic style/format becomes a means by which academic output itself is evaluated.

What Academic Writing Entails

As already noted from the preceding discussion, academic writing is a highly specialised genre of writing for academic intentions and concerns a particular style of expression that researchers use in order to strive to define the intellectual

boundaries of their respective disciplines and specific areas of expertise, whether in inter, trans or multidisciplinary endeavours. Being able to write effectively and well in an academic style is fundamental for disciplinary learning and

it is essential for one to succeed academically. It involves one expressing their ideas as a response to another person or group of people and this needs to be done fastidiously and thus good elaboration is vital. Academic writing is hence a system of evaluation that requires one to establish their knowledge and demonstrate their ability when it comes to critical thinking, interpretation, and presentation of research that is undertaken by them. At the outset one needs to ensure that one's opinions and the facts are disconnected. Any possible biases must be recognised and eliminated as should any inferences and assumptions (Thais & Zawacki, 2006). What one writes needs to be well supported from wider readings and research on a theme that is selected and logically arranged. The writer's reasoning must be thorough and well aligned to the selected theme.

There are numerous types of academic writing done for diverse purposes. One may *inter-alia* write a literature review, review a book, write a chapter in an edited volume, an academic article or shorter essay, a paper for a conference one wishes to attend, an argumentative essay for a magazine responding to the writings of others on a particular issue of concern, a memorandum, an explication which is typically a short factual note explaining some part of a particular work or even a grant proposal.

Naturally, the diverse types of academic writing have their own intention, organizational structure, and even linguistic features (Nesi & Gardner, 2012; Fang, 2021). Research reports are written on empirical fieldwork or research that is undertaken, and dissertations and theses result. There are also monographs in which scholars analyse diverse cultures, or recommend new theories, or they may even develop new interpretations from archived works creating new knowledge by filling a gap in a particular field of study. Academic writing must always be objective and deal predominantly with a range of ideas, generalizations, concepts and interpretations of arguments and also consider the background of authors who present their ideas or arguments in sources studied. Academic writers need to carefully acquaint themselves with the conventions of their particular discourse community. This is accomplished by scrutinising existing literature in the field. This will permit a writer to communicate their ideas and arguments far more meaningfully and effectively (Hyland, 2004).

Academic writing is generally very solidly composed, speculative, empirically grounded, rigorous, and firmly bound. It uses linguistic methods that help an author to realise accuracy and inform others as desired, it needs to carefully avoid being ambiguous and misinterpret issues under investigation and must drive the establishment of both its authority and credibility. Authors must be thorough in their logic of argument, and their ideas or opinions must be carefully stated and then restated and further refined. Their reasoning and information must therefore be well developed and highly structured.

One seeking to develop the required expertise to produce quality academic writing requires commitment and patience. It is by no means a quick process. It is invariably an extended and challenging process that can take one many years to refine and there will always be room for improvement. One is thus perpetually required to be prepared to strain both emotionally and intellectually and above all be realistic in striving to become a good academic writer. Consequently, a well-grounded mix of skills, habits, and above all, a sound mindset are needed. The accepted form of academic writing in disciplines can of course vary depending on their norms and background, the methodological approach used to gather data, and of course the intended audience. An academic writer must always strive to identify the originality of their position and then make a claim or thesis, while always acknowledging previous works. The writer must also carefully locate their claim within their disciplinary setting.

The starting point of any academic writing must be a particular perspective, position or even belief taken to establish, prove or disprove solutions to a research problem posed based on higher-order thinking skills that are applied to understand the research problem at hand (Candlin, 2016). In academic writing there is always a statement of a problem under investigation and the research questions, but this is not enough. An academic writer needs to suggest how their work will make a contribution to the area under study, why it is crucial to do so, and how they will gather needed information to guide the implementation of their writing (Fang, 2021). In addition, complex information must be summarised into a well-organized combination of ideas, concepts, and ultimately recommendations that may contribute to an enhanced understanding of the research problem. Specialist language used formally is important in academic writing, but this is not to suggest that 'fancy' words should be used all the time. An academic work must be more about substance as opposed to style (Nygaard, 2015; Silvia, 2007).

One may argue that research jargon is very important to consider and refers to language specific to a particular discipline, community of scholars and researchers. It relates to and represents specific language and the meaning that is assigned to words and phrases that are specific to a particular discipline or area being studied. Having said that, a writer needs to carefully select their choice of words, thus one's choice of words or diction is important (Hartley, 2008). Always use unambiguous language in well-formulated paragraphs and concise sentences that allow a reader to

easily comprehend your line of reasoning. A writer should not overuse jargon as this may well promote a misinterpretation of what is stated. Carefully say what you want to say! An academic writer also needs to always carefully consider the punctuation used in writing so as to separate sentences and their various aspects and clarify meaning for the intended audience. This means that one needs to have linguistic perception and grammatical understanding (Sword, 2017).

Academic writing always needs to embrace a formal tone, with the predominant use of the third - person as opposed to the first-person perspective narrative voice (Hartley, 2008). There must always be an evident focus on the research problem that is under investigation. When one reads academic writing, it should almost always communicate an agreed meaning about complex ideas, theories, or even the concepts used, as typically understood in a community of intellectual specialists and experts in a field of study (Giltrow & Valiquette,1994).

The structure of all academic writing must be formal and rational (Luey, 2010). The abstract and introduction ought to always include at least some description of how the rest of the academic writing has been structured and flows logically. Every source used must be cited carefully according to the required single style that is used. All arguments put forward should be fairly presented (Wellington, 2010). One should never be biased and whatever one investigates must be truthfully and neutrally stated in the research problem that is being considered and in the corpus of the work. Intellectual integrity, the ethical advancement of knowledge, and a fairly rigorous application of disciplinary methodology is imperative (El-Sadig & Drid, 2020). Language is not on any way a collection of prescriptive rules or linguistic principles. It is in essence an imaginative resource for achieving meaning on some or other aspect.

The academic citing of sources expedites intellectual breakthrough, critical thinking, and employing an intentional approach of traversing the scholarly environment by tracing how cited works are transmitted by scholars (Candlin, 2016). Fundamental to academic writing is its engagement with relevant seminal past and current scholarly conversations and the avoidance of stereotyping (Biber & Gray, 2010). This involves a fastidious citing or referencing of academic work used, which highlights the writer's involvement in the broader community conversation on a research topic. Academic writing thus needs to demonstrate at least some support for arguments put forward with evidence from academic or peer-reviewed sources (Luey, 2010). All writing ought to be organized in a way which that exhibits clarity of thoughts (Wellington, 2010). Plagiarism or the unlawful misuse of another author's work including thoughts, ideas, or utterances, through representation of them as one's own original work is of course academic dishonesty and has very severe legal consequences.

In a nutshell, an academic writer is required to have a good understanding of the academic conventions and be well acquainted with structure, tone, citation styles and use formal language. This is accomplished by reading widely in their discipline so as to better comprehend how arguments are developed, and evidence is used to support them. One should avoid using inessential words and jargon unless they are related to a field of study and absolutely needed. It is critical to ensure that there is always a logical flow between various ideas, paragraphs, and sections of work and all terminology that is complex should be clarified (Yarris et al, 2020). One's thesis or statement or theory that is proposed as a premise to be maintained or proved, and the key arguments put forward and evidence for them must be carefully considered. This means that one must engage analytically with all sources used and then make original arguments. Once done, there needs to be a check for precision, consistency, grammar, and sound reasoning and careful proofreading is non-negotiable**.**

How academic institutions may assist students bridge knowledge and skills gaps

It is not an exaggeration to claim that any guide to effective knowledge about writing is somehow influenced by William Skunk's and E.B White's (2000) classical book entitled "*The Elements of Style*". What this book emphasizes is that writing must always use clear, concise and precise language. It states that the writer should always engage the reader's attention through anecdotes, illustrations, examples and also avoid using opaque jargon, strange vocabulary when expressing complex ideas. It informs us to vary our vocabulary, sentence structure and frames of reference. It instructs us to favor active verbs and concrete nouns, and to write with passion, verve and conviction (Skunk and White, 2000 in Sword, 2012). Helen Sword (2012) thinks that an academic writer should be someone whose writing commands attention, whose words command passion and commitment, someone who engages us in a direct and visceral way. He indicates that those who employ a good style of academic writing use the following principles: i) they use many concrete nouns, and vivid verbs when discussing abstract concepts; ii) they keep nouns and verbs close to each other so that the reader can easily identify who does what; iii) they avoid weighing down their sentences with unnecessary words, and phrases or clutter (Sword, 2012).

In our view, the above narrative about writing can also be tied to what most South African institutions of higher education command every student to grasp and employ in their academic writing. However, some students in South Africa are faced with academic issues such as the difficulty with the English language as a medium of instruction and communication (Nel, 2014, 737). In this case, the English (academic) language plays a crucial role in the development of subject learning, assessments and the understanding of formative feedback (Ndebele, 2020, 45). Academic literacy in higher education involves reading and writing in different disciplines where 'reading and writing' establish the main process through which university students learn new subjects and develop their skills. For most students who are enrolled at a particular university, the nature of this 'reading and writing' differs from that which they have studied at High School. That said, 'reading and writing' are key in students' learning and their acquisition of knowledge during the first year at the University could be a critical factor in their success (Schalkwyk, Bitzer, and van der Walt, 2009, 192).

Academic writing is, therefore, a literacy practice which builds the connection between the student's entry into disciplinary commitments and their acquisition of the formal convention associated with the academy. In other words, the importance of (written) language in the students' experiences of learning is central to the academic literacies model. Lecturers who teach these students have different expectations of what students have to prepare in their written texts. Some may place greater emphasis on grammar and spelling than the content covered by students' texts. And these expectations indicate the manner in which some lecturers perceive academic literacy and writing. Their interpretations of the discipline and its conventions, and their use of the disciplinary discourse have a particular influence on i) the setting of disciplinary boundaries and ii) the students' access to the academic community (Starfield, 2004, 67 in Schalkwyk, Bitzer, and van der Walt, 2009, 195). It is said that classes that have many students make it difficult for the lecturer to provide feedback or adequately deal with large volumes of assessment to be marked. Hence, the quality of response and academic integrity of student (academic) writing is compromised (Mahabeer and Pirtheepal, 2019 in Ndebele, 2020, 42).

South African students, like their global counterparts, encounter certain challenges in mastering, among others, academic writing. The acquisition of academic literacies is further exacerbated by the persistence of apartheid and colonial knowledge paradigms which students in certain academic departments are persuaded to transfer while developing their academic literacies. Acceptable modes of writing and argumentation that are emphasized by academic disciplines were once withheld from the oppressed masses. Prior to the new democratic dispensation, and possibly continuing even today, South Africa underwent inadequate pre-university education and were excluded from interacting with disciplinary discourses and literacies (Aybers, 2023, 49). Political change in South Africa pressured most historically white institutions to evolve (Seabi, Seedat, Khoza-Shangase and Sullivan, 2014, 68). With the massification of higher education many students, particularly Black students, were struggling to maintain academic writing standards that are acceptable in higher education (Ndebele, 2020, 40). These White Universities were also pressured to transform and perform so that a new vision of educational reformations can be ushered to restructure and transform programs and institutions to accommodate marginalized groups who were denied the right to education by the apartheid government. These institutions were expected to respond better to human resources, economic and developmental needs of the previously oppressed citizens. They were expected to provide optional opportunities for learning, the production of knowledge to redress past discrimination policies and ensure representation and equal access (Seabi, Seedat, Khoza-Shangase and Sullivan, 2014, 68). This pressure had far more reaching implications for teaching and learning as well as student literacy practices like academic writing (Ndebele, 2020, 40). Students from non-English speaking backgrounds struggle with academic writing, and this often results in most students getting to postgraduate education without understanding how to write academically (Archer and Parker, 2016, 47).

However, to break free from the challenges facing students and their poor or low-quality writing, academic institutions of higher education have introduced different measures (academic writing centers, excess programs or augmented curriculums, and some decolonial approaches etc.) which play an important role in the redress of basic academic literacies. The motive behind the promotion of writing centers was one of remediation and acculturation of students into academic discourse. It was construed as "a fix-it shop" in the business of changing textual features of academic writing (Archer and Perker 2016, 44). Historically, the value of the support offered in a writing center was considered to be a North American creation. Some of these centers were concerned with creating better writers and not better writing (Rambiricrch, 2018). Now, these centers have developed into more process-oriented spaces that change writers (Archer and Perker, 2016, 44). In definitional terms, the writing center is, in South Africa, a collaborative learning space that encourages transition and transformation within the academic institutions of higher learning (Archer and Perker, 2016, 43). The learning space is a place of transition and transformation where students experience a shift in

their written perspectives or life worlds. Transition here implies moving from one place to another. This movement can be difficult and can also be an opportunity for personal growth and change (Archer and Perker, 2016, 44).

Therefore, writing centers are important academic sites for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. They make a positive impact on teaching practice with reference to dealing with English additional language or disadvantaged students. They also have a huge impact on the incorporation of an academic development's perspective into mainstream teaching (Archer and Perker, 2016, 43). English additional language students or those who are on the fringe of grasping academic discourse are always propelled to seek guidance at the writing center (Archer and Perker, 2016, 47). These centers are sometimes occupied by consultants that are diverse in race, age, ethnicity, sexual/religious orientations and discipline of study. As a group, these consultants may speak a combination of at least five different South African languages that disadvantaged students could choose when they bring a draft of the text they are working on (Rambiritch, 2018, 51). Geographically, writing centers are located within the premises of the University, and function as an integral part of the University's center of academic activity (Archer and Richards, 2011). They are dialectic spaces that embrace the complex relationship between the spoken and the written (Archer and Perker, 2016, 44). Even postcolonial writing centers welcome and foster multiple styles, processes and perspectives in students. Some scholars argue that social justice and the democratization of higher education have always featured in the missions of writing centers (Trimbur, 2014, 67 in Archer and Perker, 2016, 44).

However, the extended degrees or diploma programs have also become a familiar arrangement in the Higher education sector (Schalkwyk, Bitzer, and van der Walt, 2009, 189). Hence, some academic institutions offer excess/extended programs that allow less prepared students to register certain modules that are designed to address the issue of students' poor or low-quality writing (Nel, 2014, 732). In other universities, students who are enrolled for an extended "engineering" program have a first-year module called "Fundamental Research Practice". This module is particularly designed to improve students' written and spoken English competencies since most of them have language barriers (Nel, 2014, 737). These programs provide students with the opportunity to break free from language proficiency issues, and under-preparedness related with their transitions from High School to Universities. The students' inability to address their obstacles is generally associated with factures such as poor language proficiency. The under-preparedness is conditioned by the fact that students from both urban and insular areas cannot function effectively in their city-style university environments, and the exclusive use of English as a medium of instruction etc. (Nel, 2014, 732). Some scholars go as far as exploring the expressions of these under-prepared students who are also enrolled for an extended program. These scholas do this to determine how the students managed to acquire certain skills associated with "Academic Literacy" which was one of the modules that were offered by this program (Schalkwyk, Bitzer, and van der Walt, 2009, 189). Others are concerned with the generic and disciplinary sterile literacy courses and offer a decolonial alternative model that seeks to incorporate discourse, Afro-centric and decolonial principles. This model is the one that revises generic literacy study guides to generate disciplinarity. It is motivated by the idea that the revisions of academic literacy study guides can be a great method for decolonized academic literacy courses (Aybers, 2023, 50).

Artificial Intelligence and Academic Literacy

A study by the University of Johannesburg guides that institutions are encouraged ought to develop clear guidelines and curricula that incorporate AI literacy, helping students understand the appropriate use of these tools within academic contexts (2023). Building on this view, it becomes evident that AI and educational technologies are not merely secondary tools but central enablers in addressing persistent structural and pedagogical challenges within higher education. As Luckin et al. (2016) observe, the scale of some learning environments often hinders the provision of personalised attention. In such instances, AI-driven applications such as intelligent tutoring systems, adaptive learning platforms, and automated feedback mechanisms offer tailored instructional support and immediate academic guidance to students. These systems would help students improve their writing by giving feedback on things like grammar, clear ideas, good arguments, and correct referencing, even when a teacher isn't always available (Bai & Stede, 2022). In institutions with constrained support infrastructure, a situation not uncommon in rural-based universities, free or low-cost AI applications such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and QuillBot afford students access to critical writing assistance, thus supporting independent learning and skills development. Such technologies not only ease the pressure on lecturers faced with the challenge of assessing large volumes of student work but also enable them to dedicate more time to high-level mentoring and academic engagement. Moreover, AI-powered learning analytics facilitate the early identification of at-risk students, enabling timely pedagogical interventions that may ultimately improve retention and academic achievement (Holmes et al., 2019). These technological opportunities are instrumental in advancing educational equity by extending quality academic support to students from under-resourced settings, thereby narrowing the gap historically experienced by learners from disadvantaged communities. As higher

education continues to undergo digital transformation, the integration of AI holds considerable promise in fostering a more inclusive, responsive, and learner-centred academic environment.

Furthermore, beyond its contribution to writing support and formative assessment, AI plays a crucial role in promoting student engagement and cultivating digital literacies essential for academic and professional success. Through interactive platforms such as virtual simulations, chatbots, and voice-enabled learning tools, AI caters to diverse learning styles and linguistic needs, a feature particularly advantageous in institutions where access to advanced teaching modalities remains limited (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). In addition, AI applications bolster students' cognitive and research competencies by supporting argument development, source validation, and the ethical use of information through automated citation and paraphrasing assistance (Aleven et al., 2017). As these tools gain wider traction, they not only enhance the broader academic support ecosystem but also prepare students to navigate the complexities of a digital academic landscape. The deliberate integration of AI into teaching and learning frameworks thus has the potential to cultivate independent learners who are better positioned to overcome structural inequalities and achieve academic success. In addition to enhancing the mechanics of writing, AI technologies can serve as catalysts for deepening students' critical thinking and metacognitive awareness. Several studies suggest that the process of engaging with AI-powered tools encourages students to reflect more deliberately on their own reasoning, vocabulary choices, and syntactical structures (Pramjeeth & Ramgovind, 2024). This iterative process of receiving instant feedback and making successive refinements can foster a more reflective and independent learning outlook among students, which is vital for their transition into advanced academic discourse communities. Furthermore, the intelligent scaffolding provided by these tools aligns with Vygotskian principles of learning through mediated support, wherein learners gradually assume greater responsibility over their cognitive processes as they internalise academic norms (Lee & Chen, 2018). By making writing practices visible and modifiable in real time, AI-based systems allow for an embodied and dialogic engagement with academic texts, effectively transforming the writing process into a dynamic site of learning and intellectual development.

Moreover, the integration of AI into academic environments holds the potential to be more inclusive, by way of decentralising expertise and reducing dependency on overburdened academic staff. In contexts such as South Africa, where higher education institutions often contend with severe disparities in student preparedness and institutional capacity, this role becomes more urgent. As noted by Bosch et al. (2023), many South African students use AI platforms not merely as drafting assistants but as exploratory learning environments that help unpack complex readings, facilitate conceptual clarity, and develop multilingual competence. This is particularly significant in a post-apartheid educational landscape that is still grappling with linguistic, epistemic, and technological inequalities (Bosch et al., 2023). By offering real-time academic support to students from diverse linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds, AI can serve as a countermeasure to systemic exclusion. However, to maximise these benefits, institutions must invest in building critical AI literacies among both students and faculty, ensuring that such technologies are employed ethically, responsibly, and within the pedagogical frameworks of academic integrity (University of Johannesburg, 2023). Equally important in the conversation around Artificial Intelligence and academic literacy is the role of AI in supporting multilingualism and promoting epistemic access. South Africa's diverse linguistic landscape means that many students are second-language English speakers who may face significant challenges articulating complex academic arguments in a non-native tongue. AI-based language models can mitigate these challenges by enabling students to translate, paraphrase, and refine their writing while maintaining academic formality and coherence (Nakazawa et al., 2022). According to Kurniati and Fithriani (2022), AI tools such as QuillBot and ChatGPT assist students not only in grammatical correction but in improving sentence variation and enhancing the academic tone of their work. This capacity to fine-tune linguistic output across languages serves as a crucial intervention in advancing epistemological access for students whose voices have historically been marginalised in the academy. Consequently, AI does not merely enhance language correctness, it can be harnessed as a powerful enabler of decolonised academic participation by affirming linguistic diversity within formal scholarly discourse (Guleria et al., 2023).

While the educational benefits of AI are considerable, its integration into academic spaces must be guided by clearly articulated pedagogical frameworks and ethical considerations. As observed by Lund et al. (2023), the unchecked use of AI technologies in academic contexts raises legitimate concerns regarding plagiarism, data privacy, and the erosion of student originality. These concerns are particularly salient in an era marked by massification and the increasing reliance on technology-mediated learning. It is thus imperative that institutions not only integrate AI literacy into their curricula but also actively promote responsible and transparent use of these tools. As Firat (2023) argues, when AI is aligned with institutional goals and embedded within a culture of academic integrity, it becomes a complementary

force that supports rather than undermines authentic learning. Institutions must, therefore, balance the affordances of AI with the need to cultivate critical consciousness, ethical reasoning, and scholarly autonomy among their students.

Conclusion

The article had sought to explore ways in institutions of higher learning may promote social justice within the scope of work which they perform. It was noted that many students especially from disadvantaged backgrounds struggle with academic literacy challenges. These challenges become apparent especially when the students arrive at university and other tertiary institutions. In essence these challenges speak to the under preparedness among many of the students upon arriving at university. Unfortunately, tertiary institutions cannot wish these students away, but need to find ways in which they can assist them improve their academic abilities. The chapter paid particular attention to the need to improve students' academic writing abilities. A significant amount of students writing abilities, as was noted, significantly revolve around the need by students to master the art of academic writing. Academic writing a decisive impact on whether or not a student succeeds in their studies. And precisely because of this fact, tertiary institutions are thus duty bound to assist improve their academic writing abilities. The finds that such interventions will greatly assist to make the academic space less alienating and more meaningful and engaging for the students affected. Moreover, for the institutions themselves, this will assist improve the sector's academic outcomes. Academic writing does not come naturally for most students if at all, but needs to be cultivated. The ethical injunction on the part of universities that students need to be taught such skills, learned and practiced over time.

It was also noted that academic institutions have in various ways, heeded the challenge and devised important responses towards addressing them. In this regard, the article highlighted the introduction of Writing Centers as well extended programmes that have been introduced by universities in order to assist the students. Moreover, AI and educational technologies were deemed integral in addressing persistent structural and pedagogical challenges within higher education. AI driven applications such as intelligent tutoring systems, adaptive learning platforms, offer tailored instructional support and immediate academic guidance to students. It is therefore recommended that such applications should be adopted in order to help students improve their writing by giving feedback in order to improve grammar, good arguments, correct referencing, especially when a teacher isn't always available. These technological opportunities are instrumental in advancing educational equity by extending quality academic support to students from under-resourced settings, thereby narrowing the gap historically experienced by learners from disadvantaged communities.

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