

Digital Writing: Enhancing Ways of Teaching and Learning Writing

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Abstract

Situated within the field of teaching and learning writing in English as a foreign language context, this paper proposes using digital writing environments for classroom activities to complement writing instruction. Several types of digital writing, which are popular among Generation M learners, including blogs, instant messaging, and social network sites, are reviewed. Some characteristics of digital writing are proven to be effective and can alleviate problems in teaching writing, especially for struggling writers. Having examples of writing activities or mini-lessons using digital writing along with general pedagogical guidelines provided, writing teachers can adapt and supplement digital writing to their teaching routine. This paper also suggests significant concerns on the use of digital writing environments in writing instruction.

Keywords: digital writing, digital literacy, teaching writing, computer mediated communication

การเขียนในสื่อดิจิทัล: แนวทางเพื่อส่งเสริมการเรียนการสอนการเขียน

ฤดีรัตน์ ชูชนะโชติ

คณะครุศาสตร์ จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้นำเสนอศักยภาพของการใช้การเขียนในสื่อดิจิทัลประเภทต่างๆ เพื่อเป็นกิจกรรมส่งเสริมการเรียนการสอนการเขียนในบริบทการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ การเขียนในสื่อดิจิทัล อาทิ บล็อก (Blog) ระบบส่งข้อความทันที (Instant Messaging) และเว็บไซต์เครือข่ายสังคมออนไลน์ ล้วนเป็นที่นิยมในหมู่นักเรียนยุคศตวรรษที่ 21 (Generation M) ด้วยลักษณะสำคัญหลายประการทำให้การเขียนในสื่อดิจิทัลมีประสิทธิภาพ ช่วยแก้ปัญหาการเรียนการสอนการเขียนได้ โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งสำหรับผู้เขียนที่มีปัญหา ผู้สอนสามารถนำตัวอย่างกิจกรรมการเรียนการสอนโดยใช้การเขียนในสื่อดิจิทัลพร้อมแนวทางการใช้การเขียนในสื่อดิจิทัลไปปรับใช้ในการเรียนการสอนการเขียนปกติได้ อีกทั้งบทความนี้ยังเสนอประเด็นที่พึงระวังในการใช้สภาพแวดล้อมการเขียนสื่อดิจิทัลในการสอนการเขียนด้วย

คำสำคัญ: สื่อดิจิทัล, การเขียน, ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ, การสื่อสารผ่านคอมพิวเตอร์

Science and technology multiply around us. To an increasing extent they dictate the languages in which we speak and think. Either we use those languages, or we remain mute.

– J.G. Ballard

Not only do some language teachers believe that students are deficient in writing practice, but they also complain about the lack of genres to keep students interested in writing and the development of positive attitudes towards writing. While teachers feel that teaching writing is not easy, students also find that writing is a difficult task and often challenging to master. Besides experiencing the demands of writing, students are often bemoaning how boring writing class can be due to the teacher's control of the genre and topic, about which they are not interested in writing. As a result, students may develop negative attitudes toward writing and some of them even resist learning to write. The challenge is even higher with struggling writers and those who have language problems such as some English as a foreign language (EFL) student.

Currently, the Internet plays an important role in teenager's lives. This Internet has transformed the ways in which they read, write, and communicate. It has changed the writing genre from pen and paper or even the use of paper in a typewriter to a monitor and a keyboard, even transitioning to a phone screen and its touch screen keyboard. Much of current writing operates through different mediums such as email, instant messaging (IM), text messaging, Twitter, Line, Facebook, and blogs. This screen-based writing itself does not strictly follow traditional conventions; rather, it has additional features, e.g., images, audio, slang, shorthand, emoticons (a textual representation of a writer's feelings or facial expressions; for example, [:-]), which represents a smile).

Although many language teachers may be concerned about the negative impact of writing in different digital mediums, nowadays teenagers' academic writing using this digital method can be considered an instructional advantage. That can be attributed to the fact that many students spend lots of their free-time using digital devices for non-academic writing activities, e.g., emailing, writing blog, sending instant messages, chatting in chat-rooms, writing their status and commenting others in the Facebook, tweeting in Twitter, and sending messages through SMS or Line. Although students may

not use English in writing, they have good attitude toward these online writing activities (Donaldson & Kötter, 1999). By integrating fun digital writing exercises into otherwise dull academic writing courses, writing class will carry a higher moral and no longer be the same, especially for struggling writers.

In this article, the application of digital technology in a writing classroom and writing instruction are explored, especially in an EFL context where English language resources are limited compared to those in an ESL context. This paper first summarizes some problems that occur in teaching writing, especially for struggling writers. Second, the scope of digital writing and some more defined types of digital writing are reviewed. The paper then examines some major characteristics of digital writing. Additionally, some recommendations for using digital writing in the writing classroom are provided along with general guidelines. This paper concludes with some awareness on the use of the digital writing environment. For the purpose of this article, I draw on the understandings of writing in a different way, rejecting the traditional form of writing with the absolute formal, structured, rhetorical, and format oriented writing. Moreover, many commercial digital writing applications or websites mentioned in this paper are with regard to academic purposes only.

Problems in Writing Classes: Struggling Writers

Many scholars (e.g., Graham & Harris, 2005; Graham, Harris, & Troia, 2000; Hunt-Berg, Rankin, & Beukelman, 1994; Lin, Monroe, & Troia, 2007; MacArthur, 2000) have studied difficulties that struggling writers often have in common. Besides the physical or cognitive problems, many struggling writers have language difficulties. According to Graham et al. (2000), this group of struggling writers is often less motivated to write and fails to organize their ideas. These learners usually have poor handwriting (or has difficulty to write) and writes slowly or illegibly. They also have problems in expressing their idea through composition and sometimes have trouble communicating and understanding their teachers and peers during discussion in the classroom.

Additionally, many struggling writers' primary writing problems involve a lack of confidence in producing text and insecure feelings about showing their writing to

others, in particular to their peers. Lastly, struggling writers are likely to develop negative attitudes towards writing and, thus, often have low motivation to write. This results in spending less time writing, reviewing, planning, etc. These problems will be worse when learners have to write in languages other than their native language such as in EFL classes.

Struggling writers may often include other students who have different difficulties; therefore, there is no perfect method that works in all cases. However, teachers should find ways to alleviate their problems. Since each learner is unique, everyone has different interests and needs, as well as personality and learning styles. As a consequence, digital writing can be an effective and practical means to create positive writing environments for active and positively motivated writing experiences.

Digital Writing

Digital writing is becoming a standard way of life for young learners within Generation M. Generation M (Vie, 2008), Millennial students (Godwin-Jones, 2005), Neomillennials (Baird & Fisher, 2005), Digital Natives (Prensky, 2001, p. 1), and the Net Generation (Tapscott, 2009) are those who were born in the early 80s or late 90s. The fact that this group of young learners views computers and technology as a part of their everyday lives, and who rapidly and abundantly consumes information in different ways from how previous generations has led to their unique learning style (Prensky, 2001). The ways that computers and technology have become basic needs for Generation M have given rise to digital writing as the medium to communicate with each other. Their writing, therefore, does not follow the conventions of what is considered traditional writing. Rather, it is less formal, often has conversational style, involves shorthand, is less focused on grammar and writing patterns, and sometimes features images and audio (Sweeny, 2010).

Scholars have used different terms to describe skills to produce text (along with graphic, audio, and other media) on the Internet through different mediums such as email, Instant Messaging (IM), text messaging, Twitter, Line, Facebook, and blogs using different devices such as computers, mobile phones, and tablets. They are regarded as digital writing (Grabill & Hicks, 2005; Merchant, 2008), new literacy (Sweeny, 2010;

Lankshear & Knobel, 2003), techno-literacy (Marsh, 2004), new-media writing/composition (DeVoss, Cushman, & Grabill, 2005). In this paper, the term digital writing is used to define a change in the writing environment where writing is produced on the computer, mobile phone, and tablet, and then distributed via Internet networks (Grabill & Hicks, 2005).

Types of Digital Writing

Over the past decade, increasing numbers of digital writing tools have emerged within the field of teaching writing. Three major tools are reviewed as a source for teaching writing: blogs, instant messaging and social network sites.

Blogs

A blog is a discussion, informational article or personal journal, published on the World Wide Web, which is often frequently updated. The entries (also called posts) are usually displayed in reverse chronological order (the most recent entry appearing first). Blogs typically include many features such as comments, archives, hyperlinks, and “Like” features to increase user interactivity.

Blogs allow people to post or exchange information with no constraints on time and space. Many people use blogs as a medium to update journals or post their experience, such as dinners, music, holiday trips, hobbies, and product reviews, to broaden their horizons, and to fulfill their needs and interests. Thus, blogs provide opportunities, inspirations, and motivations for personal writing (Godwin-Jones, 2008) and promote authorship. In fact, Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010) claims, “blogs created more authors than probably any other medium in human history” (p. 4).

Instant Messaging (IM) – MSN, Line, Twitter, Skype, chat-room

As a type of synchronous communication, Instant Messaging (IM) is a form of Internet-based, real time text communication between users on the same system. Normally, IM allows one-on-one communication, although the users can invite a third or fourth person to join an already active conversation. Presently, IM appears on many websites, online services, and applications, some of which combine the text as well as

voice communication, both on the computer and on the phone, such as MSN, chat-room websites, Skype, Line, iChat, Twitter, and Facebook.

Many researchers reported positive findings of IM on various communicative aspects. For example, IM promotes negotiation of meaning (Pellettieri, 2000; Warschauer, 1998), reduces anxiety (Kern, 1995), encourages self-repair (Kern, 1995; Pellettieri, 2000), and enhances spelling performance in young adult L2 learners (Powell & Dixon, 2011), as well as motivation and attitude in L2 learning (Donaldson & Kötter, 1999).

Social Network Site (SNS)

A social network site (SNS) is a website or an online service platform in which people share interest, create a public or semi-public profile, and interact with other users. Not only do SNSs enable users to connect with friends and strangers, but they also allow users to broadly view their social networks and to make more connections. Many SNSs, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and My Space, combine various features of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) technologies (e.g., instant messages, emails, blogs, and message boards), mini-applications (e.g., quizzes and games), and some other features (e.g., “Follow” feature and “Like” feature).

The use of SNSs in education and language instruction has been prominent. Since learners use language as a tool to communicate and deliver their message, they will construct new knowledge about language as they interact on SNSs. Suthiwartnarueput and Wasanasomsithi (2012) reported the positive effect of SNSs on EFL learners’ English grammar and writing. Moreover, Shih (2011) found that according to the results of the pre-test and post-test of English writing the learners in all groups (high score, medium score, and low score groups), who were in the Facebook integrated blended learning community, had improvement in their writing abilities, including paragraph organization, grammar, vocabulary, and spelling.

Characteristics of Digital Writing: Features that Support Struggling Writers

Digital writing has distinctive characteristics and strengths. Generation M learners use digital writing as a channel of text communication, in which users can be in many different parts of the world and still be connected. Many researchers reported

positive findings of digital communication applications on various aspects related to language learning. Concurrently, some characteristics of digital writing have enhanced the teaching of writing especially with struggling writers.

First, many digital writing applications offer an anonymity feature. They provide opportunities for users to use nicknames or pseudonyms. This anonymous identity results in less anxiety (Kern, 1995) and more pleasant classrooms, and therefore can benefit students who might be risk-averting in learning writing within the normal classroom environment. By reducing anxiety, which has a negative effect on language learning, a digital-integrated writing class has the potential to be an avenue for nurturing writing skills. A work by Pennington (2004) supports this claim by reporting that learners are likely to contribute more through digital writing. Yuan (2003) reports that synchronous computer-assisted class discussion reduces anxiety and enhances interlanguage communication. Moreover, according to Murphy (as cited in Suthiwartnarueput & Wasanasomsithi, 2012), digital writing, especially SNSs namely Facebook, creates a state of anxiety-free relaxation with the sense of anonymous communication.

Additionally, the anonymity feature of digital writing enhances a peer feedback activity as students feel less threatened and less pressured when giving or receiving feedback. Tuzi (2004) found that the feedback that students received from online CMC had a greater impact on students' revision than oral feedback. According to MacLeod (as cited in Tuzi, 2004), this is due to the fact that students are more honest in stating their true thoughts and can criticize peer's writing anonymously without having to face the author. Under this low affective filter environment, learners can ask and talk (write) freely without any fear of making mistakes, which leads to the enhancement of language learning. Furthermore, with the anonymity feature, struggling writers feel that writing in the digital world is less stressful than having to submit their writing to the teacher or peers in person, publicly.

Second, in digital writing, learners actually type out what they want to communicate to the group or readers. This emulated real-time communication is perceived as advantageous since learners can see what their partners intend to communicate through the typed text. Moreover, as the learners can view their language messages as they produce them, they are more likely to "monitor" and self-repair or edit

their messages; hence, they tend to produce more structured language (Pellettieri, 2000; Warschauer, 1998; Yuan, 2003). Thus, this may be beneficial for struggling learners or those who have problems with spelling and low command of vocabulary (Graham & Harris, 2005; Hunt-Berg, Rankin & Beukelman, 1994) since being able to see what they would like to communicate to a conversation partner allows learners an opportunity to ponder and recheck their ideas before transmitting their response.

Third, digital writing promotes learners' equity in terms of interaction. Since all users are able to see everyone's messages and respond to those messages in real-time. Learners do not have to raise their hand and wait for the teacher to call on them as they do in the traditional classroom. All users have an equal opportunity to type their messages and respond to other people's messages. This feature reduces teachers' authority, increases student-centered learning, promotes student participation (Freiermuth, 2001; Kern, 1995), and fosters negotiation of meaning (Pellettieri, 2000; Warschauer, 1998). This feature, furthermore, encourages collaborative learning (Meskill & Mossop, 2000), which has a positive effect on students' writing proficiency, especially with struggling writers and students who are shy and passive learners. In writing instruction, many studies reported positive effects of collaborative work on improving writing proficiency, especially with struggling writers (Collins, 1998; Graham et al., 2000).

Many digital writings, such as instant messaging, have history logs where users can view the history of the conversations they have had with others. With this feature, instructors are able to keep track of learners' interaction records through the history logs with no intervention to learners while actively writing. Learners, on the other hand, are willing to write more freely without the sense of submitting their writing to the teachers. Moreover, this history log is useful for noting students' writing development over time, conducting an in-depth analysis, and preparing class lessons and activities. For instance, Toyada and Harrison (2002) claimed that history log in the chat-room or instant messaging chat could be used for linguistics analysis of target language and comprehensive study of a relationship between communication and culture.

More importantly, digital writing offers authentic language environments. Jiménez-Caicedo, Lozano, and Gómez (2014) studied the use of blogs in Spanish as a

foreign language class for undergraduate students and found that the participants saw the blog as a place to use language to engage in authentic communication instead of a place where they can learn and improve their language. While learners write in these Internet-based writing setting, e.g., blogs, Facebook, chat-room, etc., they work in authentic learning contexts and meaning-making communication (Merchant, 2008). The language used in digital writing is the language that is used in real life since the main focus of digital writing is to convey the information and to communicate to real audiences. This authentic language is agreed to be an essential input for learners in order to increase their language proficiency. Thus, writing in multimedia technology is an educational tool that could provide authentic cultural context, which is pivotal for language learning.

Finally, since digital writing involves different modes of representation combining text, audio, video, still images, animation, and/or interactive features (e.g., hyperlink) together—this multimedia writing environment can capture learners' attention and interest and suits learners' different learning styles. Many scholars have found positive impacts of digital writing on learners' motivation and attitude toward writing (Donaldson & Kötter, 1999). Furthermore, many digital writing environments, such as chat-rooms and blogs, are available in various styles, differing discussion topics, and different interests; therefore, learners have the motivation to write about topics that they are interested in and learn to share their knowledge about their interests with other users who have similar interests. Consequently, digital writing is flexible for teachers to modify contexts to suit learners' language needs and interests (Freiermuth, 2001).

Activities for Teaching Writing with Digital Writing

Technology and the Internet have offered learners and teachers various new educational tools to practice and instruct writing in a more authentic and innovative way. However, many writing teachers still continue to rely solely on the conventional essay writing genre with the traditional parameters assessment (Anson 1999). In fact, the role of a writing teacher is to help learners improve what they are incapable of doing (Elbow, 1997). Therefore, in this section, I provide some examples of writing activities or mini-lessons using digital writing. These mini-lessons and/or activities are ideally designed for

students with lower intermediate proficiency and up. However, the appropriateness varies depending on the topic of the discussion and nature of assignments.

Activity 1: Affiliate Group Chat

The teacher divides students into groups according to their interests—such as sports, fashion, traveling, computer games, etc. By using Instant Messaging (IM) as a form of a chat-room tool, students can exchange their expertise and opinions within their group members. In addition, students can chat with other people around the world who are online in the same chat program in real-time. Some chat-rooms allow people to chat within users' preferred theme; others allow the teacher to set up private chat rooms.

A variation of this activity is that the teacher can invite a guest, whom the teacher knows in person and/or who has some qualifications which may be interesting to students, such as a person who is in a music band or who has been abroad, to participate in the chat-room or group chat with students. The teacher should provide the guest's background, so that students know who this person is and are able to prepare questions to ask him/her (which can be done as part of the pre-writing activity). Furthermore, the teacher can assign follow-up activities such as writing a summary of what students learned from the group or write a story or a biography using information gathered from the guest.

Another variation is that the teacher can create a group chat via Social Network Site (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter or organize a blog writing assignment. Many blog websites offer different themes and topics, such as fashion, pets, sports, movies, and shopping. The teacher can assign students to write a review on restaurants, tourist attractions, hotels, beauty products, movies, etc. Some quality blogging websites are WordPress, Blogger, GooglePlus, Tumblr, and TripAdvisor, some of which the user can also create a self-hosted blog.

Activity 2: Guess Who

The teacher gives each student a pseudonym. Students will be paired up with a secret peer. Each student will try to gather information from his/her IM chat partner as much as possible. Students can interview their peers about future plans, interests,

hobbies, favorite food, travel plans, things they usually do at school, and/or opinions on a specific topic. Later, the students guess who their partners are.

A variation of this activity is to guess the partner's favorite celebrity or athlete. Before the day of this activity, the teacher may ask students to research the person whom they choose. Students should let the teacher know the name of the person they have chosen, so that the teacher can pair students with others who have a similar interest. Then students will ask questions to learn information from their partner. Finally, the students have to write up this learned information. This activity can be followed by having the whole class guess that person's partner based on the students' description.

Activity 3: Scavenger

Students are divided into groups of 4-8. Each group should have at least 4 cell-phones with Internet or Wi-Fi access. The group selects one person to be a team leader. The leader will assign the members to find the answer to the questions that were previously prepared by the teacher. The leader will be in the room with the teacher while the rest go to different places trying to locate the answer for the leader. All communication will be through IM synchronous chat such as Line, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, etc. Students will form a group chat with the all group members and the teacher so that the teacher can monitor the conversation. The teacher gives the leader a set of tasks in the form of questions. All questions should be written in the native language so that the students need to use English by themselves. Some example questions are as follows:

- Go to the library and find the definition of the word "scavenger" in the Webster Dictionary.
- How many tables/chairs are there in the canteen?
- How many teachers are there in the Foreign Language Department?
- What is the name of the security guard?
- How many stair-steps are there from the 2nd floor to the 3rd floor?

The questions should require some clarification in order to promote negotiation of meaning between the leader and the group members. The questions should be grouped according to the location of the answer. Some questions may vary such as different

words, floors, places, etc. Each group should start from different locations to prevent overcrowding in one location.

Activity 4: Little Reporter

With the use of a private self-hosted blog or Social Network Sites' closed group like Facebook or Twitter, students will act as reporters for a school newspaper. They will write something about what happens in school or in the classroom. The topic can be varied such as student spotlight, student life, sports, polls, and gossip.

Activity 5: Secret Admirer

The teacher asks students to electronically follow a person whom they admire. This person can be their friend, a singer, or a movie star. Students have to understand the purpose of the activity and be considerate of the constraints when choosing the person whom they will follow. The person should be active in Social Networking Sites. The students will follow that person's timeline using Facebook, Twitter, or other SNS for a week or two. The students can then follow-up by writing a story about that person or a diary entry on that person's weekly activities.

Activity 6: Role Play

Here, the teacher assigns each student a role to play along within the context of the story/setting. For example, a reporter interviews a famous superstar about his/her new movie. Students will take the identity of the person they are pretending to be or are assigned to be and chat with their partner according to the given context.

The teacher should create a context or provide background information for the students so that it is easier for them to communicate with their partner using digital writing tools, especially, IM and Social Network Site' IM chat functions. For example, one student is the reporter and the other student is Britney Spears. The context for this pair can be, "Yesterday Britney Spears had an appointment with a reporter at a coffee shop on Hollywood Boulevard." Moreover, one student can take a role as Batman and the other as Superman within the context of, "Last night Batman met Superman walking out of the telephone booth wearing his costume." The follow up activity for this role play

activity is to write a report of what happened and present it to the class. In this activity, the teacher can introduce different genres for students to write about such as a narrative essay or a column in a magazine or newspaper.

Activity 7: Peer Feedback

In students' learning process, feedback is believed to be an essential element (Pearce, Mulder, & Baik, 2009). It provides students opportunities to practice analytical skills, explore to new ideas, as well as, perspectives of the writing process (ibid., p. 3). This benefits both reviewers and the reviewees. However, peer review sometimes is a tense activity; yet can be more pleasant with the help of digital writing. Peer feedback sessions can be done using IM as in MSN, Line, Facebook, Twitter, and Skype instead of a face-to-face session. Both the author and the reviewer(s) can be anonymous.

This activity is very helpful especially with struggling writers who may be both embarrassed to be criticized face-to-face or too shy to give feedback to their peers directly. This form of peer review activity will not consider language competencies to be a priority in providing feedback. Rather, they can give comments on anything such as topic, content, writing style, organization, etc. The teacher may introduce a compliment sandwich technique. First, students share a compliment about the writing, and then a criticism and follow-up with a final compliment. This technique helps to keep the writer positive about their work being judged.

Activity 8: Closed Group Community

With a feature in the Social Network Site (e.g., Facebook or Twitter), the teacher can create a closed group. Students can use this closed group as a channel to submit any assignment to their teacher, share ideas to the group, share pictures and songs they like with some expressions (emojis). This is a type of learning community where students have a chance to share and learn from each other. Some creative writing assignments can be done by writing a caption of a picture, composing a poem, writing a wish for a classmate's birthday, etc.

The activities using the digital writing tools suggested above only serve as a guideline for teachers to get started with digital writing for the classroom. These activities can be varied depending on the types of the classrooms, students and teachers. Some activities may work well in some classes, but not in others. The topic of the writing is important as well. Many of the suggested activities above offer students the opportunity to write based on their interests. That is because when students have choices to write about their personal interests, they are likely to have better motivation to write and participate in activities; thus, they become active learners (Elbow, 1997).

This is not to say that digital writing is better than any other classroom activity without the use of technology. Yet, it can help fill the gaps that traditional classroom teaching has created. Moreover, instructors can also use digital writing for outside school activities. However, teachers should be sensitive about the issue of equality since not all students will have access to a computer and/or the Internet at home. In this case, teachers may use digital writing as supplemental writing practice and not make it obligatory.

Digital Writing: Some Concerns on Academic Writing

Although digital writing provides many advantages in writing teaching and learning, many English teachers are still concerned that its specific register such as shorthand and emoticons may yield negative impact to many teen users. In particular, digital writing discourse is an informal, speaking style of language which is full of shorthand, abbreviations, and emoticons. This specific discourse register has been continually debated among scholars whether or not it can harm young Generation M learners' academic discourse.

On the one hand, English teachers and scholars are worried that these easy-to-use symbolic abbreviations will likely deconstruct verifiable grammatical rules. They also complain about teen's use of digital writing, especially when using IM, that teens often use a language "style" in their academic writing. For example, teachers found students' papers with shorthand words, characters like '&', and inappropriate capitalization and punctuation.

On the other hand, some linguists and scholars such as L'Abbe (as cited in Zeff, 2007) argue that digital writing discourse does not harm students' language. Crystal

(1998) regards the abbreviations and shorthand which is the phonetic replacement, in which a word such as ‘you’ becomes ‘u’ and ‘everyone’ becomes ‘every1,’ as a type of word play. He argues that this word play is important in the development of an advanced literacy. “[T]he greater our ability to play with language, . . . the more advanced will be our command of language as a whole” (Ibid., p.181). Hence, from this viewpoint, digital writing register with shorthand and abbreviations leads to increased literacy in adulthood.

Aziz, Shamim, Aziz, and Avais, (2013) find that only 0.03 in every 100 words written by 50 bachelor’s degree students were found to be influenced by SMS language. They finally conclude that the concern about the negative effect of SMS language on the standard academic writing is “exaggerated or misplaced” (p. 12889). They further discuss that the errors that students made regarding punctuation is mainly because of students’ carelessness and lack of knowledge or training.

From the sociolinguistic scholars’ perspective, each of us is a member of many discourse registers, each of which is similar and different to some extent (e.g., Gee, 1996). We learn to use appropriate language within each discourse community, school, friends, and family. Digital writing discourse can be treated as another discourse community where users use shorthand and abbreviations which are known and common among digital writing users. The danger is when teenagers use digital writing discourse in other discourse communities such as school and academic writing. Therefore, language teachers need to educate young Generation M learners on the importance of language appropriateness. They should be aware that this digital writing discourse, shorthand, abbreviations and emoticons make no sense outside of the digital writing discourse community. Thus, they should not use the digital writing discourse in the academic writing discourse.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, digital writing offers numerous benefits to writing instruction. Yet, the impact of digital writing on learners’ learning depends on how effectively teachers integrate these Internet-based writing environments into their teaching as a supplementary activity. This is not to say that digital writing can solve

students' problems in language proficiency, but it definitely can raise students' motivation and create another attractive and interactive writing environment. It proposes another channel to write English more freely. Therefore, it promotes students to use English communicatively and meaningfully. This, however, does not imply that digital writing can replace conventional, academic writing learning. This digital writing does not enhance learning on its own; however, its effectiveness lies in the way the activities are planned and carried out within the framework of the syllabus of a course. It is the teachers' responsibility to learn how to use this environment in order to design optimal conditions for the students' performance.

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