E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (EHASS)
ISSN – Online 2720-7722 | Print 2821-8949
Volume 7 Issue 10 2026 pp. 3109 -3120
Available online at: https://noyam.org/journals/ehass/
DOI: https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.202671013

Check for updates

Academic literacy skills as crucial workplace competencies: Perspectives of Higher Learning Institution Teachers

Zameka Primrose Yengwayo [1], Bulelwa Makena [2] & Nomxolisi Mtsi[1]

[1] Business Management and Economics, iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu, Komani, South Africa.
[2] Continuing Professional Teacher Development, iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu, Komani, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

Academic literacy skills are increasingly recognized as crucial for enhancing students' preparedness for the labor market and fostering successful academic performance. This paper explores the various dimensions of academic literacy within the higher education context, critically examining its implications for students' academic and workplace competencies. It emphasizes the interrelationships among theoretical concepts, pedagogical practices, and real-world applications, thereby outlining a holistic approach to integrating academic literacy across curricula. For this investigation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five purposively identified participants from a higher education institution. The open-ended question types elicited a wide range of responses. The main findings illustrate that academic literacy encompasses traditional reading and writing skills, as well as digital literacy and disciplinary knowledge frameworks. The paper concludes with recommendations for future research, emphasizing the need for collaborative curriculum development that integrates academic practices with students' diverse backgrounds. The study contributes to scholarship by providing insights into teachers'perspectives on the role of academic literacy in preparing students for academic success and workplace demands within higher education. The findings contribute to discussions on curriculum development and the integration of academic literacy skills across disciplines.

Keywords: Academic literacy, Collaborative learning, Language, Communication skills, Educational outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

The transition from academia to the workplace requires students to possess a robust set of academic literacy skills.[1] These skills, encompassing reading, writing, critical thinking, and digital competencies, are fundamental for engaging with complex texts and communicating effectively in professional

[1] S. Arkoudis and P. Kelly, "Shifting the Narrative: International Students and Communication Skills in Higher Education," *International Education Research Network (IERN) Research Digest* 8 (2016).

CORRESPONDENCE – Bulelwa Makena **Email:** bmakena@wsu.ac.za
PUBLICATION HISTORY - Received: 10th February, 2026 | Accepted: 2nd September, 2026 | Published: 20th November, 2026.
TO CITE THIS ARTICLE – Yengwayo, Zameka Primrose, Bulelwa Makena, and Nomxolisi Mtsi. "Academic literacy skills as crucial workplace competencies: Perspectives of Higher Learning Institution Teachers." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 7, no.10 (2026): 3109 - 3120. https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.202671013
COPYRIGHT AND LICENSING - © 2026 The Author(s). Published and Maintained by Noyam Journals.
This is an open access article under the CCBY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

contexts.[2] In recent years, there has been a notable shift in educational paradigms, recognizing that academic literacy must adapt to the complexities of contemporary knowledge environments, driven by advancements in information and communication technologies (ICT). This paper examines the significance of academic literacy skills in higher education, focusing on their relationship with employability and overall academic success.

In the contemporary educational landscape, academic literacy skills are increasingly recognized as essential competencies that closely correlate with students' academic success and career readiness. Academic literacy extends beyond the traditional framework of reading and writing; it encompasses a broader range of skills, including information literacy, critical thinking, and digital competency.[3] The diversification of academic literacies has become particularly critical as the workforce evolves, necessitating a skill set that enables graduates to adapt to dynamic environments characterized by rapid technological advancements and interdisciplinary collaboration. This paper aims to investigate the significance of academic literacy skills in higher education and their implications for both student learning outcomes and employability.

The paradigm of academic literacy has transformed in response to the challenges confronted in the digital age, where information is abundant and often unstructured.[4] Students not only need to analyze and synthesize information from various sources but must also adapt to diverse communication modes. A study by Ndibalema discussed how traditional academic literacy frameworks are often insufficient in workplace contexts, prompting a re-evaluation of how information literacy is perceived within academic environments.[5] This underscores the need to integrate academic literacy training into curricula to equip students with the competencies required for both academic and professional success.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature highlights a multi-dimensional understanding of academic literacy, emphasizing the need for an integrated approach that considers social practices and disciplinary contexts.[6] Suárez-Brito et al. argue that academic literacy must align with complex thinking, facilitating students' adaptation to both academic and work environments. Clarence and McKenna elucidate that the development of academic literacies is fundamentally linked to the nature of disciplinary knowledge, which shapes students' academic practices and expectations.[7] The shift towards recognizing information literacy as a socially situated practice further underscores the need to contextualize literacy instruction within specific disciplines.[8]

The evolution of academic literacy concepts has been shaped significantly by sociocultural theories that emphasize the contextual nature of literacy practices.[9] This paradigm shift acknowledges that literacy is not merely a set of technical skills but is deeply embedded in cultural and social practices. Academic literacy is now viewed through the lens of disciplinary knowledge, in which different fields of study set varying norms and expectations for literacy practice.[10] This disciplinary

---

[2] C. N Nwokorie and C. C Onichakwe, "Assessing Artificial Intelligence Influence on Students' Academic Outcome at Imo State University Owerri, Nigeria," *African Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 2024, 14–17.

[3] Emily Edwards et al., "An Institution-Wide Strategy for Ongoing, Embedded Academic Language Development: Design, Implementation and Analysis," *Journal of Academic Language and Learning* 15, no. 1 (2021): 53–71.

[4] John Olayemi Okunlola, "Investigating Perceptions and Practices of Plagiarism among Nigerian Undergraduates in the Fourth Industrial Revolution Era: The Role of ChatGPT," *E-Journal of Humanities, Art and Social Sciences (Online)* 1808 (1796).

[5] P. Ndibalema, "Rethinking Information Literacy in the Workplace: A Critique of Traditional Frameworks," 2025.

[6] Rachel Masika and Jennie Jones, "Building Student Belonging and Engagement: Insights into Higher Education Students' Experiences of Participating and Learning Together," *Teaching in Higher Education* 21, no. 2 (February 17, 2016): 138–50, https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2015.1122585.

[7] Sherran Clarence and Sioux McKenna, "Developing Academic Literacies through Understanding the Nature of Disciplinary Knowledge.," *London Review of Education* 15, no. 1 (2017): 38–49.

[8] Lindsay G. Oades et al., "Wellbeing Literacy and Positive Education," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 325–43, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64537-3_13.

[9] Robyn McWilliams and Quentin Allan, "Embedding Academic Literacy Skills: Towards a Best Practice Model," *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* 11, no. 3 (2014): 1–20.

[10] Tomoyo Okuda and Tim Anderson, "Second Language Graduate Students' Experiences at the Writing Center: A Language Socialization Perspective," *Tesol Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2018): 391–413.

specificity necessitates adaptive teaching approaches that consider students' diverse backgrounds and learning needs, fostering inclusivity and engagement within educational frameworks.

Research indicates that students entering higher education often lack the requisite academic literacy skills necessary for success in complex learning environments.[11] Increasingly, academic institutions are recognizing the need for enhanced pedagogical strategies that incorporate inquiry-based learning and collaborative techniques to improve academic literacy outcomes. Furthermore, studies highlight that effective academic literacy instruction includes reflection and practical engagement with learning materials, thereby promoting deeper understanding and critical analysis.[12] This multifaceted approach not only supports student learning but also ultimately prepares them to navigate the complexities of the modern workplace.

The integration of academic literacy into pedagogical practices is particularly vital in light of rapid technological advancements and the rise of digital platforms. The shift to online learning environments during the COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the importance of digital literacy as a foundational component of academic literacy[13]. Research indicates that the ability to engage with digital tools and resources significantly influences students' academic performance and their capacity to effectively participate in a digitally mediated workforce.[14]

Academic literacy has evolved beyond mere proficiency in reading and writing, now encompassing digital literacy and critical engagement with texts in various formats.[15] It is imperative that academic institutions acknowledge the diverse backgrounds of students, who often bring varying degrees of preparedness for academic writing and literacy, creating disparities in learning outcomes.[16] The landscape of higher education is increasingly characterized by the need for interdisciplinary knowledge and the ability to navigate multiple literacies to succeed both academically and professionally.

Therefore, the contemporary emphasis on academic literacy skills reflects a broader understanding of the demands of both higher education and the professional sphere. As this paper explores, academic literacy is a multidimensional construct that calls for innovative pedagogical approaches and collaborative initiatives to foster an environment conducive to the successful development of all learners.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sociocultural theory serves as a foundational perspective for understanding academic literacy, where literacy is viewed as a social practice shaped by cultural contexts and power dynamics within the academic setting. This theoretical lens suggests that interventions aimed at improving academic literacy must go beyond traditional instructional models to embrace a collaborative, contextualized approach that resonates with students' backgrounds and experiences.[17] The implications for educators include the necessity to design curricula that foster inclusive practices and accommodate diverse student needs, thereby promoting equitable learning opportunities.

Educational Implications of Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory, notably advanced by Vygotsky, posits that learning and development are fundamentally social processes that occur through interactions between individuals and their sociocultural environments. The application of sociocultural theory in educational contexts has

[11] Norah Almusharraf and Hind Alotaibi, "An Error-Analysis Study from an EFL Writing Context: Human and Automated Essay Scoring Approaches," *Technology, Knowledge and Learning* 28, no. 3 (2023): 1015–31.

[12] Burhan Ozfidan, Dina Abdel Salam El-Dakhs, and Lama Adel Alsalim, "The Use of AI Tools in English Academic Writing by Saudi Undergraduates.," *Contemporary Educational Technology* 16, no. 4 (2024).

[13] Karen Gravett, Carol A. Taylor, and Nikki Fairchild, "Pedagogies of Mattering: Re-Conceptualising Relational Pedagogies in Higher Education," *Teaching in Higher Education* 29, no. 2 (February 17, 2024): 388–403, https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1989580.

[14] Steph Ainsworth and Jeremy Oldfield, "Quantifying Teacher Resilience: Context Matters," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 82 (June 2019): 117–28, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.03.012.

[15] A. Al-Azri, et al."Academic Literacy and Digital Engagement in Higher Education.," 2023.

[16] Margaret L. Kern and Jessica A. Taylor, "Systems Informed Positive Education," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 109–35, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64537-3_5.

[17] María Estela Brisk, *Engaging Students in Academic Literacies* (New York: Routledge, 2022), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003329275.

profound implications, particularly for understanding and enhancing academic literacy practices among diverse student populations.[18]

1. **Emphasis on Contextual Learning**
   One significant implication of sociocultural theory is the importance of contextual learning. By recognizing that knowledge is co-constructed through social interactions, educators are encouraged to tailor their teaching practices to their students' cultural and social contexts. For instance, Wang et al. advocate for culturally sustaining pedagogy that aligns with students' backgrounds and experiences, promoting an educational environment where learners feel valued and understood. This approach not only enhances engagement but also fosters a sense of belonging, ultimately contributing to academic success.[19]
2. **The Role of Language and Dialogue**
   Another critical aspect of sociocultural theory is the emphasis on language as a mediating tool in cognitive development. In supportive educational environments, dialogue plays a pivotal role in the learning process, as students articulate their understanding and collaborate with peers and instructors. Huerta and Pérez point to the value of engaging immigrant students in discussions that traverse their bilingual landscapes, facilitating their assimilation into academic literacy norms while respecting their cultural narratives. This focus on dialogue underscores the necessity for educators to provide opportunities for collaborative learning, enabling students to construct knowledge in social contexts.[20]
3. **Fostering Identity and Agency**
   Sociocultural theory also highlights the importance of identity in academic literacy development. Eybers and Paulet emphasize that literacy practices are shaped by individuals' cultural identities, suggesting that a pedagogical framework should empower students to navigate multiple literacies while affirming their backgrounds.[21] By fostering students' identities as learners, educators can create more inclusive environments that acknowledge and celebrate diverse perspectives, thereby enhancing academic performance.
4. **Integrating Multiliteracies**
   Modern educational contexts demand that literacy extends beyond traditional reading and writing to encompass digital and multimedia literacies. The integration of sociocultural theory into early childhood education emphasizes the need for literacy practices that accommodate diverse learners and utilize multiple modes of communication. Educators must integrate multiliteracies into the curriculum, inviting students to engage with texts in a range of formats, thus enriching their learning experiences and preparing them for increasingly complex communication landscapes.
5. **Focus on Collaborative Learning**
   Sociocultural theory advocates for collaborative learning experiences that mirror real-world contexts. As noted by Murray and Nallaya, leveraging students' diverse cultural backgrounds enhances bilingual and biliteracy practices.[22] By implementing collaborative projects in which students work together to solve problems, educators cultivate higher-order thinking skills while fostering interpersonal skills critical to collaborative work environments. This collaborative focus aligns with contemporary workforce expectations and prepares students to work effectively in teams.

---

[18] Oliver Meyer et al., "A Pluriliteracies Approach to Content and Language Integrated Learning – Mapping Learner Progressions in Knowledge Construction and Meaning-Making," *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 28, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 41–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2014.1000924.

[19] Ursula Wingate, "Academic Literacy across the Curriculum: Towards a Collaborative Instructional Approach," *Language Teaching* 51, no. 3 (July 19, 2018): 349–64, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444816000264.

[20] Rick Fisher, "Reconciling Disciplinary Literacy Perspectives with Genre-oriented Activity Theory: Toward a Fuller Synthesis of Traditions," *Reading Research Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (2019): 237–51.

[21] O Eybers and K Paulet, "Cultural Identities and Literacy Practices in Higher Education.," 2025.

[22] Neil Murray and Shashi Nallaya, "Embedding Academic Literacies in University Programme Curricula: A Case Study," *Studies in Higher Education* 41, no. 7 (July 2, 2016): 1296–1312, https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.981150.

6. Inclusion and Equity in Education

Lastly, sociocultural theory holds substantial implications for inclusion and equity within educational frameworks. Cumming-Potvin and Sanford review the need for teacher education programs to counteract the disparities present in literacy instruction predicated on traditional models. By adopting a sociocultural lens, educators can design interventions that bridge access and resource gaps, thereby promoting equitable academic opportunities. This approach addresses the varied literacy demands placed on students from different backgrounds, ensuring that all learners can succeed.[23]

Therefore, the educational implications of sociocultural theory are far-reaching, emphasizing contextual, collaborative, and identity-driven approaches to learning. By incorporating these principles into educational practices, instructors can create inclusive environments that enhance academic literacy and promote overall student engagement and success. This comprehensive understanding of sociocultural dynamics in education equips educators to effectively meet the diverse needs of their students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore teachers' perspectives on the role of academic literacy skills in enhancing students' academic success and workplace preparedness in higher education. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of participants'experiences, perceptions and understanding of a particular phenomenon.[24] Although relevant literature was reviewed to inform the conceptual framework and the development of the interview guide, the primary data source consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted with participants; the study was primarily empirical in nature and relied on data generated through semi-structured interviews. This approach allowed the researchers to gain rich insights into teachers' understanding of academic literacy and its significance within higher education and workplace contexts.

Sampling and Participants

In qualitative research, sampling is a foundational step that involves selecting specific individuals from a larger population to yield rich, in-depth data. Researchers adopted a purposeful sampling approach, aligning the sample directly with the study's objectives and targeting information-rich participants who offer detailed insights. This method helped to enhance data relevance and depth without pursuing statistical generalizability. Five teachers who offered in year one were purposefully identified for the experience they had already accumulated in their couple of years of service at this research site, which is a rural institution of higher learning within the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. While the study involved a small sample drawn from one institution, the purpose of the research was to obtain in-depth and contextualised insights rather than to achieve statistical generalisation. The findings may therefore offer transferable insights to similar higher education contexts.

Data Collection Method

Semi-structured interviews, a common approach in qualitative research for gathering in-depth insights from participants, were conducted to collect data. Brayda and Boyce argue that interviews provide a culturally sensitive means of exploring participants' subjective experiences within their socio-political contexts.[25] This method was effective in this educational research, where understanding personal experiences illuminated the role of academic literacy in students' educational journeys. Further

[23] Helen Basturkmen, "Developing Writing Courses for Specific Academic Purposes," in *Discipline-Specific Writing* (Routledge, 2016), 45–59.

[24] John W Creswell, *Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Sage, 2014).

[25] Winsome Chunnu Brayda and Travis D Boyce, "So You Really Want to Interview Me?: Navigating 'Sensitive' Qualitative Research Interviewing," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 13, no. 1 (2014): 318–34.

engagements through these interviews allowed for a deep dive into personal meanings and interpretations of academic literacy practices. As the interview schedule consisted of open-ended questions, the study participants were able to freely share their experiences and collective challenges during the discussions.

Data Analysis

The data analysis entailed the systematic organisation and interpretation of non-numerical data, such as interview transcripts and field notes, to discern emergent patterns, themes, and meanings within participants' lived experiences, privileging inductive reasoning, contextual depth, and transferability over statistical generalisation. Prominent methods include thematic analysis for identifying patterns in graduates' workplace readiness. This study highlights the significance of academic literacy skills in the workplace, the challenges engineering graduates face during their transition from academia, and the role of mentorship programmes. The study concluded that a combination of enhanced soft skills training, industry-academia collaboration, and mentorship programmes can significantly improve the readiness of engineering graduates for professional practice. Recommendations are provided to address the gaps identified in the study and to ensure that engineering graduates are better prepared for the demands of the workplace.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study to ensure the protection of participants and the integrity of the research process. Before data collection commenced, participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews were conducted. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without negative consequences. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, participants' identities were not disclosed in the reporting of the findings, and pseudonyms were used where necessary. All interview data were securely stored and accessed only by the researchers. The study adhered to the ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation throughout the research process.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The findings are presented under four themes that emerged from the interviews with teachers regarding the role of academic literacy skills in higher education and workplace preparedness.

Theme 1: Academic Literacy as a Multifaceted Competency

Participants viewed academic literacy as extending beyond traditional reading and writing skills. They described it as encompassing critical thinking, communication, digital literacy and discipline-specific knowledge necessary for academic success and workplace effectiveness.

Participant 1 stated:

'*Academic literacy is not only about reading and writing. Students need to think critically, communicate effectively and engage with information using digital platforms.'*

Participant 3 Observed:

'Different disciplines require different literacy practices, and students need support in understanding the expectations of their field of study.'

These responses suggest that teachers perceive academic literacy as a complex and multidimensional construct that supports both academic achievement and professional competence.

Theme 2: The importance of Social Interaction in Academic Literacy Development

Prticipants emphasized the value of collaborative learning and classroom interaction in developing academic literacy skills. They noted that students learn more effectively when they engage in discussions, group activities and peer learning opportunities.

Participant 2 commented:

'Students develop confidence when they discuss ideas with their peers. Through interaction, they learn how to express their views and engage with academic concepts.'
Participant 4 stated:
'Collaborative activities create opportunities for students to learn from one another and strengthen their understanding of academic content.'
These findings support the view that academic literacy development is enhanced through meaningful social interaction and collaborative learning experiences.

Theme 3: Digital Literacy as an Essential Component of Academic Literacy
Participants highlighted the growing significance of digital literacy in modern higher education. They indicated that students are expected to access, evaluate, and use digital information effectively for academic purposes.
Participant 5 explained:
'Technology has become part of teaching and learning. Students must know how to search for information, evaluate sources, and communicate using digital platforms.'
As Participant 2 noted:
'Some students struggle with online learning systems, which affects their ability to engage with academic materials.'
These findings demonstrate that digital literacy is increasingly viewed as a fundamental aspect of academic literacy in higher education.

Theme 4: Challenges Faced by Students in Developing Academic Literacy Skills
Participants identified several barriers that hinder students' development of academic literacy skills. These included limited exposure to academic discourse, language difficulties, and inadequate preparation from previous educational experiences.
Participant 3 remarked:
'Many first-year students struggle to understand academic literacy language and the expectations of university- level learning.'
Participant 5 indicated:
'Students from disadvantaged backgrounds need additional support because they are not familiar with academic writing and referencing conventions.'

These findings illustrate that academic literacy encompasses a spectrum of skills, including critical thinking, digital competency, and the ability to engage with multifaceted texts. Students' success in academic discourse often hinges on their ability to navigate these literacies within their specific fields of study. Furthermore, institutions that effectively integrate academic literacy pedagogy into their curricula report improved student engagement, retention, and employability outcomes.[26]

The study on academic literacy skills through the lens of sociocultural theory yielded several key findings that are crucial for understanding the intersection of academic success, employability, and the learning environment. The research revealed that academic literacy is not a single concept but a complex, multifaceted construct that varies across disciplines and cultural contexts. This diversity in academic literacy practices encompasses critical thinking, digital literacy, and discipline-specific skills. Students from various cultural backgrounds experience academic literacy through different lenses, revealing that traditional literary frameworks may not adequately support their development.

It was found that meaningful social interactions, as posited in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, significantly enhance students' understanding and application of academic literacy practices. The qualitative data indicated that collaborative learning experiences foster richer peer-to-peer dialogues, enhancing both comprehension and retention of knowledge. This underscores the need to create classroom environments that prioritize discussions and collaborative tasks. The research also

[26] Nigel A Caplan and Scott G Stevens, "'Step out of the Cycle': Needs, Challenges, and Successes of International Undergraduates at a US University," *English for Specific Purposes* 46 (2017): 15–28.

highlighted the growing importance of digital literacy, especially in contemporary educational environments that are predominantly mediated by technology. Students demonstrated varied competencies in using digital tools for learning, impacting their ability to engage with academic content effectively. These findings echo the need to integrate digital literacy into academic curricula as a fundamental aspect of academic literacy.

Finally, the data revealed that many students experience significant barriers when navigating the complexities of academic literacy. These challenges stem from a lack of familiarity with academic discourse, particularly among first-generation college students or those from non-traditional educational backgrounds. Addressing these barriers is crucial for fostering an inclusive learning environment that enables all students to thrive.

DISCUSSION

The discussion elucidates the critical role of academic literacy in bridging the gap between academic training and professional demands, particularly for engineering students transitioning to workplace roles in higher education contexts.[27] It emphasizes the need for institutions to create transdisciplinary spaces that foster collaboration among disciplines, enhancing multifaceted skill sets such as critical thinking, technical writing, and digital competencies, thereby enabling students to adeptly apply these literacies in real-world scenarios and bolstering the relevance of their education.

The findings underscore sociocultural theory's profound implications for reshaping educational practices to bolster academic literacy, revealing academic literacy as a multifaceted construct varying by discipline and cultural context, and emphasising the role of social interaction. The findings advocate a rethink of academic literacy training in higher education. As academic literacy varies across disciplines, it is crucial for institutions to develop tailored programs that reflect the specific literacy demands of each field. This approach would not only benefit student learning outcomes but also prepare graduates for the diverse communicative practices they will encounter in their professional lives.

The emphasis on social interaction as a catalyst for learning requires educators to adopt pedagogical strategies that prioritize collaboration. Integrating cooperative learning experiences into curricula allows students to draw on one another's strengths and backgrounds, fostering a sense of community that enhances engagement and learning. Programs that leverage peer feedback and group projects can facilitate deeper learning experiences and promote diverse perspectives.[28]

The findings strongly support the need for culturally sustaining pedagogies that validate students' identities and cultures. Educators should strive to create curricula that reflect students' diverse backgrounds, thereby improving their academic literacy skills and overall engagement. This requires a shift away from traditional pedagogical frameworks, which often marginalize the experiences of non-dominant cultural groups.

Given the emphasis on digital literacy, it is imperative that academic institutions prioritize integrating digital skills training across disciplines. Training programs should focus on developing critical digital literacy skills that prepare students to navigate, evaluate, and produce information in digital formats. This includes not only technical proficiency but also a critical understanding of the implications of digital engagement.

The study's insights into the challenges faced by diverse learners necessitate that institutions recognize and address systemic barriers to academic literacy development. Programs aimed at supporting first-generation students, non-native speakers, and students from under-resourced backgrounds can play a vital role in levelling the playing field. Providing tailored academic support services can empower these students to overcome challenges in their educational journeys.

The interplay between sociocultural theory and academic literacy offers critical insights into how educational practices can evolve to meet the needs of diverse learners. Through concerted efforts to redefine academic literacy, foster collaborative learning environments, embrace cultural responsiveness, integrate digital competencies, and address systemic barriers, educators can enhance

[27] Wingate, "Academic Literacy across the Curriculum: Towards a Collaborative Instructional Approach."
[28] Jackie Tuck, "Academic Literacies: A Critical Lens on Writing and Reading in the Academy," 2016.

their students' academic success and employability. Future research should continue to explore these intersections to inform innovative practices that resonate with the realities of today's dynamic educational landscape.

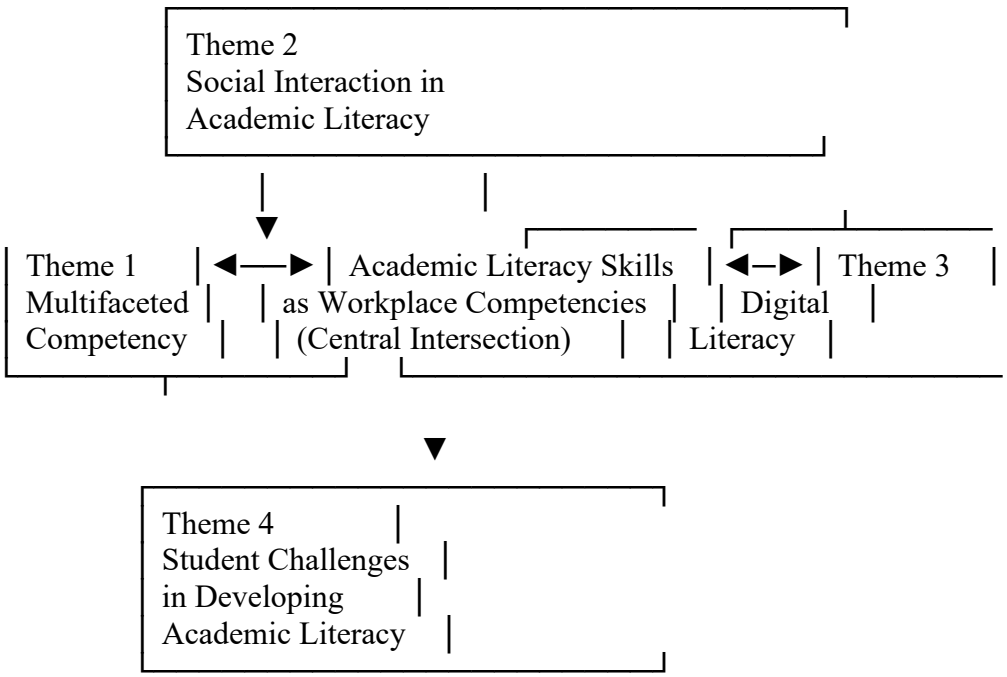


Figure 1: Conceptual Representation of the themes[29]

As indicated by the figure above, the conceptual representation of the findings of this investigation indicates that academic literacy encompasses a broad range of interconnected competencies that go beyond conventional reading and writing abilities.[30] It includes critical thinking, effective communication, information processing, and problem-solving skills, highlighting its multidimensional nature. Higher education teachers revealed that these competencies are primarily cultivated through meaningful social interaction and active collaboration with lecturers, peers, and wider academic communities. Participants also stressed that, within contemporary higher education and professional settings, digital literacy has become an essential component of academic literacy. Students are increasingly required to engage with digital technologies, critically assess online information, and communicate effectively across various digital platforms. Despite the importance of these competencies, their development is often hindered by several student-related barriers, such as language challenges, disparities in access to digital resources, and inadequate academic preparedness. Taken together, these findings, aligned with the themes that emerged, suggest that academic literacy should be understood as a comprehensive set of competencies shaped by both social and technological environments, while also influenced by contextual and developmental obstacles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, higher educational institutions should integrate academic literacy development across all curricula by embedding discipline-specific reading, writing, critical thinking and communication activities within course content. This approach will ensure that students develop academic literacy skills that are relevant to their specific fields of study. Institutions should also implement targeted interventions, such as first-year academic literacy programmes, writing support

[29] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Teaching, Supervising and Examining for Quality Thematic Analysis," *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*, 2022, 1–34.
[30] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Teaching, Supervising and Examining for Quality Thematic Analysis," *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*, 2022, 1–34.

centres, peer mentoring initiatives and digital literacy workshops to address the diverse learning needs of students and promote equitable access to academic resources. Furthermore, collaboration with industry partners can further enhance the relevance of academic literacy skills, ensuring alignment with workforce demands. To align academic literacy skills with workforce demands, universities should collaborate with industry partners through internships,workplace-based projects, guest lectures and curriculum review processes. These partnerships can help ensure that students develop workplace-relevant competencies such as professional communication, report writing, critical analysis, teamwork, and digital communication skills. Finally, institutions should regularly monitor and assess students'academic and digital literacy development to identify learning gaps and provide timely support. Such measures can contribute to improved student success, retention, and graduate employability.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of academic literacy skills in higher education and workplace preparedness through the lens of sociocultural theory. The findings revealed that academic literacy is a multifaceted construct that extends beyond traditional reading and writing skills to include critical thinking, communication, digital literacy and discipline-specific competencies. The study also highlighted the importance of social interaction in academic literacy development, demonstrating that collaborative learning experiences enhance students'engagement, understanding and confidence. Furthermore, the findings identified digital literacy as an essential component of academic success in modern higher education, while also revealing challenges faced by students, including limited exposure to academic discourse, language barriers and inadequate academic preparation.

Based on these findings, the study concludes that academic literacy plays a critical role in preparing students for both academic achievement and workplace success. Higher education institutions therefore have a responsibility to create learning environments that support the development of academic, digital, and professional communication skills through inclusive and context-specific teaching practices. By integrating academic literacy across curricula, promoting collaborative learning, strengthening digital literacy and providing support for diverse student populations, institutions can enhance student success, retention, and employability.

Ultimately, academic literacy should be viewed as a foundational graduate attribute that equips students with the knowledge and skills required to navigate the demands of higher education and an increasingly complex professional environment. Academic literacy skills are essential to cultivating capable graduates who can thrive in complex and dynamic work environments. This paper advocates a reimagined approach to academic literacy that encompasses both traditional and contemporary dimensions, including digital and information literacy. By prioritizing academic literacy within curricula and institutional practice, higher education institutions can play a pivotal role in preparing students for both academic success and professional endeavours.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Future research should focus on longitudinal studies examining the impact of integrated academic literacy training on student outcomes and employability. Additionally, exploring the effects of diverse learning environments and technological advancements on literacy development will be crucial in adapting educational practices to meet emerging challenges.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ainsworth, Steph, and Jeremy Oldfield. "Quantifying Teacher Resilience: Context Matters." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 82 (June 2019): 117–28. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.03.012.

Al-Azri, A., et al. "Academic Literacy and Digital Engagement in Higher Education.," 2023.

Almusharraf, Norah, and Hind Alotaibi. "An Error-Analysis Study from an EFL Writing Context: Human and Automated Essay Scoring Approaches." *Technology, Knowledge and Learning* 28, no. 3 (2023): 1015–31.

Arkoudis, S, and P Kelly. "Shifting the Narrative: International Students and Communication Skills in

Higher Education." *International Education Research Network (IERN) Research Digest* 8 (2016).
Basturkmen, Helen. "Developing Writing Courses for Specific Academic Purposes." In *Discipline-Specific Writing*, 45–59. Routledge, 2016.
Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Teaching, Supervising and Examining for Quality Thematic Analysis." *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*, 2022, 1–34.
Brayda, Winsome Chunnu, and Travis D Boyce. "So You Really Want to Interview Me?: Navigating 'Sensitive' Qualitative Research Interviewing." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 13, no. 1 (2014): 318–34.
Brisk, María Estela. *Engaging Students in Academic Literacies*. New York: Routledge, 2022. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003329275.
Caplan, Nigel A, and Scott G Stevens. "'Step out of the Cycle': Needs, Challenges, and Successes of International Undergraduates at a US University." *English for Specific Purposes* 46 (2017): 15–28.
Clarence, Sherran, and Sioux McKenna. "Developing Academic Literacies through Understanding the Nature of Disciplinary Knowledge." *London Review of Education* 15, no. 1 (2017): 38–49.
Creswell, John W. *Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage, 2014.
Edwards, Emily, Rosalie Goldsmith, Caroline Havery, and Neil James. "An Institution-Wide Strategy for Ongoing, Embedded Academic Language Development: Design, Implementation and Analysis." *Journal of Academic Language and Learning* 15, no. 1 (2021): 53–71.
Eybers, O, and K Paulet. "Cultural Identities and Literacy Practices in Higher Education.," 2025.
Fisher, Rick. "Reconciling Disciplinary Literacy Perspectives with Genre-oriented Activity Theory: Toward a Fuller Synthesis of Traditions." *Reading Research Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (2019): 237–51.
Gravett, Karen, Carol A. Taylor, and Nikki Fairchild. "Pedagogies of Mattering: Re-Conceptualising Relational Pedagogies in Higher Education." *Teaching in Higher Education* 29, no. 2 (February 17, 2024): 388–403. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1989580.
Kern, Margaret L., and Jessica A. Taylor. "Systems Informed Positive Education." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education*, 109–35. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64537-3_5.
Masika, Rachel, and Jennie Jones. "Building Student Belonging and Engagement: Insights into Higher Education Students' Experiences of Participating and Learning Together." *Teaching in Higher Education* 21, no. 2 (February 17, 2016): 138–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2015.1122585.
McWilliams, Robyn, and Quentin Allan. "Embedding Academic Literacy Skills: Towards a Best Practice Model." *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* 11, no. 3 (2014): 1–20.
Meyer, Oliver, Do Coyle, Ana Halbach, Kevin Schuck, and Teresa Ting. "A Pluriliteracies Approach to Content and Language Integrated Learning – Mapping Learner Progressions in Knowledge Construction and Meaning-Making." *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 28, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 41–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2014.1000924.
Murray, Neil, and Shashi Nallaya. "Embedding Academic Literacies in University Programme Curricula: A Case Study." *Studies in Higher Education* 41, no. 7 (July 2, 2016): 1296–1312. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.981150.
Ndibalema, P. "Rethinking Information Literacy in the Workplace: A Critique of Traditional Frameworks," 2025.
Nwokorie, C. N, and C. C Onichakwe. "Assessing Artificial Intelligence Influence on Students' Academic Outcome at Imo State University Owerri, Nigeria." *African Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 2024, 14–17.
Oades, Lindsay G., Lisa M. Baker, Jacqueline J. Francis, and Jessica A. Taylor. "Wellbeing Literacy and Positive Education." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education*, 325–43. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64537-3_13.
Okuda, Tomoyo, and Tim Anderson. "Second Language Graduate Students' Experiences at the Writing Center: A Language Socialization Perspective." *Tesol Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2018): 391–413.

Okunlola, John Olayemi. "Investigating Perceptions and Practices of Plagiarism among Nigerian Undergraduates in the Fourth Industrial Revolution Era: The Role of ChatGPT." *E-Journal of Humanities, Art and Social Sciences (Online)* 1808 (1796).

Ozfidan, Burhan, Dina Abdel Salam El-Dakhs, and Lama Adel Alsalim. "The Use of AI Tools in English Academic Writing by Saudi Undergraduates." *Contemporary Educational Technology* 16, no. 4 (2024).

Tuck, Jackie. "Academic Literacies: A Critical Lens on Writing and Reading in the Academy," 2016.

Wingate, Ursula. "Academic Literacy across the Curriculum: Towards a Collaborative Instructional Approach." *Language Teaching* 51, no. 3 (July 19, 2018): 349–64. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444816000264.

ABOUT AUTHOR(S)

Zameka Primrose Yengwayo, as an emerging scholar and a Lecturer at Walter Sisulu University, South Africa, has engaged with a range of scholars through the conferences attended. Soon after graduating with her Honours degree, she began writing papers and has published several journal articles and conference proceedings. Through the professional guidance of her supervisors during her Master's studies, which she completed earlier this year, her scholarly mindset has been reshaped and strengthened.

Bulelwa Makena is an Associate Professor of Language Education and has served as a member of the Faculty of Education Higher Degrees and Ethics Committee at Walter Sisulu University, South Africa. As a self-motivated, achievement-oriented, lateral-thinking, doer, she is an author who has published scientific papers on DHET-accredited platforms. As a session chair at both national and international conferences, supervising postgraduate students to the completion of their research projects/graduations, and a mentor for mentees who have successfully published articles, she has gradually sharpened her research and paper-writing skills. As charity begins at home, it is worth mentioning that mentoring colleagues within her department has also benefited the departmental and faculty throughput.

Nomxolisi Mtsi is a Senior Lecturer and academic in the Faculty of Education at Walter Sisulu University, South Africa. As a dedicated scholar specializing in Science Education, she holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), and her research focus includes rural education and the adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT) in teaching and learning. This seasoned scholar has published in peer-reviewed journals. Dr Mtsi has collaborated on research projects, including studies on case-based learning to enhance Science Education and the use of technology in rural teacher education.