



## EXPLORING HOW SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE WRITING SKILLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY AT A PRIVATE UNIVERSITY IN SABAH, MALAYSIA

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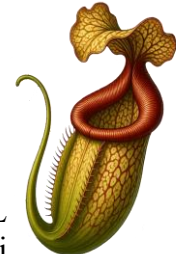
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**Abstract** Academic writing is one of the most challenging skills to acquire as it requires high precision, where the diction, tone and context of the text must be precise. The advent of information and telecommunication technologies has resulted in transformative changes and brought about a new era of educational practices. One critical change is in the adoption of social media for classroom pedagogy. The wide application of social media has massively influenced university students' reliance on these platforms for social and, to some extent, academic development at higher learning institutions. It is essential for maintaining social contacts and communication with family and friends, providing entertainment, and serving as a platform for collaborative learning. This study explores undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions regarding the integration of social media to enhance their academic writing skills at a private learning institution in Sabah, Malaysia. By employing a qualitative case study, it explores how students utilise social media to support their academic writing endeavours and understand how they perceive social media use for improving their academic writing skills. Through purposive sampling, 15 undergraduate students participated in semi-structured interviews designed to elicit in-depth feedback on their experiences, exploring benefits, challenges and the impact of social media on their writing. The findings provide insights into how writing practices can be enhanced using social media by facilitating idea exchange through real-time feedback, and collaborative learning among peers. This study contributes to the ongoing discussion about integrating social media to support academic writing and its potential to complement traditional learning approaches.

**Keywords:** Academic writing skills, collaborative learning, educational technology, social media, undergraduate students

### INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, the omnipresence of social media has significantly impacted the lives and educational experiences of English as a Second Language (ESL) students (Muftah, 2022). Social media platforms have become essential to modern society, shaping communication practices and influencing various aspects of academic life, offering new opportunities for learning and skills enhancement. Today's youth rely heavily on technology and are frequently engaged with social media. In higher education, writing is an often-



required ability and a crucial skill for academic achievement. Attaining proficiency in ESL has always been challenging for most students (Lakhal, 2021). According to Siti and Lilliat (2021), writing can be one of the most challenging tasks for students, especially in learning a second language (L2). Zheng et al. (2018) highlight that writing on social media allows English learners to communicate with native English speakers and practise written language in authentic and motivating ways.

In relation to these challenges, many studies have focused on writing errors among ESL learners. According to Sermsook et al. (2017), errors should be meticulously analysed to provide insights into the learners' language acquisition process and identify areas that require more learning, especially in writing for academic purposes. Puspita (2019), on the other hand, concluded in her study that errors can help teachers emphasise specific aspects, give feedback, and dedicate extra attention to the L2 learning processes so that students can avoid or overcome the anticipated challenges. According to Shanti and Jaafar (2021), difficulties in producing an error-free piece of writing among ESL learners are challenging, and therefore, it is crucial to address this issue. A competent language user should be able to write in English without errors. However, this is not necessarily true for many undergraduates. Many students still struggle to write error-free academic essays (Siti & Lilliat, 2021). Academic writing is a fundamental skill that should be acquired at the undergraduate level and serves as the foundation of critical thinking, analytical abilities, and knowledge in various disciplines (Tahira et al., 2019). Across all fields, undergraduate students are required to submit essays, research papers, and reports following specific academic guidelines that cover clarity, coherence, and citation style (Nunan & Choi, 2023). Students' academic performance is closely tied to this writing style, which is distinguished by formal tone, orderly organisation, and reliance on evidence-based arguments (Rahmat et al., 2020). Many ESL students find the transition to academic writing challenging (Ramzan et al., 2023b). Apart from mastering grammar and vocabulary, students must adapt to new conventions and avoid common errors such as informal language, unsupported statements, and structural inconsistencies (Lea & Street, 1998). The complexity of academic writing and the requirements of academic assignments highlight the importance of specialised support that helps undergraduates foster this skill. In today's highly digitalised era, social media has become increasingly integrated into educational practices, offering a contemporary avenue to complement traditional learning methods. Traditional pedagogical approaches may not suit modern learners, but various digital resources and contemporary pedagogy these days are essential to maintain students' learning interests. Nevertheless, the use of social media is "not meant to replace or to revolutionise the traditional learning process fundamentally" (Platon et al., 2018).

In this study, social media refers to online platforms and applications students use to interact, share information, and engage with academic resources. It includes platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and WhatsApp, facilitating various learning and communication activities. Academic writing skills produce formal, coherent, and evidence-based written work (Nunan & Choi, 2023) that meets higher education standards for clarity, structure, and argumentation (AlMarwani, 2020). Undergraduate students are enrolled in bachelor's degree programmes (Sharaievska & Harmon, 2020). In this case, students engage in coursework and assignments that require developing academic writing skills in a private higher learning institution in Sabah, Malaysia. These definitions are related to this research as they outline the parameters of the students' social media interactions and competencies being studied. This study explores undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions regarding the use of social media as a tool to enhance their academic writing skills.



Students' perceptions are crucial for a better comprehension of factors that influence the learning process. These perceptions significantly influence learning environments and the efficiency of teaching and learning (Tahmina, 2023). To understand social media utilisation and its impact on enhancing writing skills, this study seeks to answer two main questions: Q1. How do undergraduate students utilise social media to support and improve their academic writing skills? Q2. What are the perceived benefits and challenges faced by undergraduate students when integrating social media into their academic writing endeavour?

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Writing skills are vital for academic success, especially in higher education, where students must communicate ideas clearly and critically. However, for many Malaysian ESL students, writing academically in English remains a significant challenge due to the limited mastery of formal structure, language, and academic conventions (Akhtar, 2020; Kurniati & Fithriani, 2022; Siti & Lilliat, 2021). Poor sentence construction and limited exposure to academic conventions further hinder their performance (Sundari et al., 2021). Traditional classrooms often lack the time and resources needed to address these issues effectively (Budjalemba & Listyani, 2020). As a result, students are increasingly turning to alternative tools like social media, valued for its accessibility, flexibility, and collaborative features (Liu et al., 2022; Gill, 2021). While social media is widely used for academic purposes, its specific role in enhancing ESL students' academic writing in private higher education remains underexplored.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Davis (1989) as the theoretical framework of TAM, which is a model that explains how users come to accept and use technology. The model proposes that when users are presented with a new technology, two specific factors influence their decision about how and when they use it (Alsyounf et al., 2023), specifically perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU). PU is the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance (Charness & Boot, 2016). In contrast, PEOU refers to the degree to which a person believes using a specific system would be free of effort (Alsyounf et al., 2023). In the context of this study, TAM is adopted to explain the acceptance of social media platforms as tools to improve academic writing. It assesses how students' beliefs and perceptions about the benefits and ease of using social media affect their willingness to engage with it for academic purposes. This model has been widely used in education-related research to understand how learners accept and use technology for learning purposes.

### Social Media Acceptance and Writing Development

In recent years, social media platforms have increasingly been integrated into educational settings, offering new opportunities for language and development. Their interactive nature and accessibility make them valuable tools for supporting students' writing practices. Alkhaldi (2023) revealed that EFL students in Saudi Arabia considered Instagram a helpful platform for improving their writing skills. The students found it accessible, engaging and interactive, contributing to their positive perception of its usefulness and ease of use. These findings align with two constructs of TAM, where students' positive beliefs about Instagram influenced their intention to use it for writing development. Similarly, Lakhal (2021)



conducted a study on the effectiveness of Facebook in improving writing skills among students in Algeria. The explanatory sequential mixed methods study revealed that social media use for academic purposes has positively influenced students' writing abilities. The study found that students accepted Facebook as a learning tool due to its effective features and ability to provide instant feedback. The platform's ease of use and perceived usefulness were significant factors that contributed to its acceptance among students.

### **Language Challenges and Influence of Social Media**

Academic writing in higher education often presents challenges for ESL learners, particularly when transitioning from informal to formal language use. In today's digital age, social media has become an influential factor that shapes students' writing practices. Siti and Lilliat (2021) investigated writing errors among Malaysian ESL learners in their academic writing, emphasising first language (L1) interference and developmental issues. Using Corder's (1971) Error Analysis framework, they analysed 30 university essays and found grammatical errors, specifically in subject-verb agreement (27%) and verb tense (26%) to be most frequent. These stem from Malay's simpler grammar, lacking complex verbs from agreement rules, which hinders English accuracy. While insightful, the study overlooks modern factors like social media, which may reinforce informal language norms. Unlike their L1-focused approach, this study examines how social media influences vocabulary growth and the adoption of non-standard grammar in academic writing. Exploring this broader context helps identify strategies to bridge informal learning with formal standards and improve students' writing proficiency.

Göçer et al. (2023) investigate the influence of communication on students' formal writing skills. The study aimed to identify academic errors stemming from the pervasive use of texting and social media platforms. The descriptive study analysed students' writing samples to pinpoint common errors attributed to informal digital communication habits. The findings revealed significant infiltration of texting and social media language into academic writing, including abbreviations, acronyms and grammatical structures. The authors raised concerns about the degradation of formal writing standards among students. Hence, they suggest that while digital communication offers convenience, it also inadvertently fosters habits that affect academic writing quality. The authors recommended exploring intervention strategies educators can implement to mitigate these effects, especially among undergraduate students.

### **Collaborative Writing and Digital Tools in Education**

Understanding the patterns and purposes of social media use among undergraduate students is crucial for comprehending its potential impact on academic writing practices. Haidari et al. (2020) synthesised how digital tools like social media and Wikis enhance ESL/EFL learners' writing styles. Their review highlighted the growing role of platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Skype in facilitating collaborative writing, brainstorming and instant feedback. These tools were found to promote communication, critical thinking, and group work, which contribute to writing improvement. Wikis, in particular, supported collaborative editing and peer review, enhancing fluency and skill development. While the study effectively outlined the benefits of digital platforms for writing, it paid limited attention to the informal language norms embedded in social media use, which the current research aims to address to balance the advantages of informal digital interaction with the demands of academic writing standards.

### **Student Perceptions of Social Media for Writing Practice**





Purnama (2024) examined the impact of social media in inspiring students and increasing their English writing proficiency. The study used questionnaires and interviews with 54 participants from an English class to reveal students' perceptions of social media as a supplementary learning tool. The findings show that students believe social media significantly aids their writing development. Social media facilitate writing practice through creating captions, commenting, and chatting, which help improve writing skills and vocabulary. The participants reported increased motivation and enjoyment in writing on social media due to these platforms' interactive and informal nature. Their regular practice exposed them to diverse vocabulary, positively affecting their English proficiency.

In another study, Khan et al. (2024) investigated WhatsApp's function in improving EFL learners' academic writing and creativity using a mixed-method approach. The study revealed that students found that platform helpful for improving spelling, punctuation, grammar and capitalisation due to its quick feedback and ease of communication, which encouraged regular writing and collaboration. However, teachers expressed concerns about its informal nature, distraction and limited formatting features. Students also faced challenges like poor internet access, weak planning and the use of informal language. These findings are relevant to the current study, highlighting both the benefits and challenges of using social media in writing instruction. While WhatsApp promotes interactions and writing fluency, its informal influence aligns with this study's concern about blurred boundaries between casual and academic writing. The absence of clear intervention strategies in Khan et al.'s study highlights the need for targeted solutions.

### **Impact of Social Media on Language Use and Academic Writing**

Munisvararajan (2024) investigated the impact of social media use on English language literature. The quantitative study shed light on how social media influences writing, particularly regarding using short forms, grammar and bilingual words. The findings revealed that frequent use of social media contributed to students adopting informal language, including abbreviations and slang, which seeped into their academic writing. Several students admitted to using short forms in their writing due to habitual social media use. While grammar was less affected, some students also noted issues with maintaining formal standards. Additionally, bilingual word usage in writing also raised a concern as it may potentially disrupt the fluency and coherence of English writing. These findings are mainly related to the current study as they highlight both positive and negative influences of social media on students' writing. The habitual use of informal language, driven by social media interaction, aligns with the challenges this study aims to explore in maintaining academic writing standards amidst growing digital literacy.

Language education scholars have increasingly explored social media's potential for enhancing students' academic writing skills. Hamadeh et al. (2020) investigated using social media to increase language learning among non-native English students. The research gathered data from 149 students across three schools and insights from seven English teachers. The findings highlighted that social media significantly fostered language learning by creating collaborative environments that encourage communication, interaction, and vocabulary learning. The teachers and students largely viewed social media use in classrooms positively. They highlighted that it helped bridge the gap between technological engagement and educational outcomes. However, concerns about privacy, distraction, and the informal nature of social media were raised. While the study demonstrates that social media can foster creativity and improve language skills through interactive and collaborative practices, it also highlights concerns that align with the focus of this current study.



### **Social Media for Knowledge Sharing and Academic Achievement**

A study by Sivakumar et al. (2023) investigated how social media usage impacted knowledge sharing. The study gave helpful information about the advantages of incorporating social media into education and learning. The findings showed that social media platforms have positively influenced knowledge sharing through document exchange, knowledge formation, and student engagement. The study emphasised that collaborative content creation and document sharing on platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook can significantly contribute to knowledge development and learning performance. It also highlighted that social media use could boost student motivation and engagement, which is critical for learning efficacy. These findings are relevant to the current study illustrating how social media facilitates engagement, motivation, and learning through collaborative interaction and resource sharing, which can translate into enhanced writing skills.

Ramzan et al. (2023a) investigated the relationship between social media usage and academic achievement among ESL learners. The findings indicate that students are actively engaged with social media platforms. A significant result was that higher levels of social media engagement were linked to better academic performance in English for students who used these platforms for educational purposes. The research highlighted that social media facilitated access to educational resources, peer interaction and language practices that could potentially impact language learning and academic success. These findings are significant to the current study as they underline how, when utilised purposefully, social media can contribute to language and writing enhancement.

This study focuses on undergraduate students' experiences and opinions on using social media to improve their academic writing skills. It employs a qualitative case study approach to investigate how students use social media to enhance their academic writing and understand their perceptions of using social media to improve their writing skills.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The qualitative case study design is particularly useful for deeply exploring complex phenomena. According to Nassaji (2015), qualitative descriptive research is often favoured in the language learning context because it allows for a rich, detailed understanding of learners' experiences and perspectives. The qualitative approach was adopted to explore how social media influences students' academic writing skills within authentic educational contexts. This aligns with the study's aim of examining the phenomenon through students' perspectives and supporting this with document analysis.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants with relevant experience, following Chou's (2014) emphasis on gaining deeper insight by focusing on individuals with specific academic backgrounds. The sample consisted of 15 final-year TESL undergraduates from a private institution in Sabah, enrolled in both the Final Year Project and English for Academic Purposes courses. In-depth, semi-structured interviews served as the primary method of data collection, allowing for detailed exploration of participants' experiences.

Following the data collection procedures illustrated in Figure 1, two methods of data collection were adopted: interview and document analysis. Both sets of data were analysed

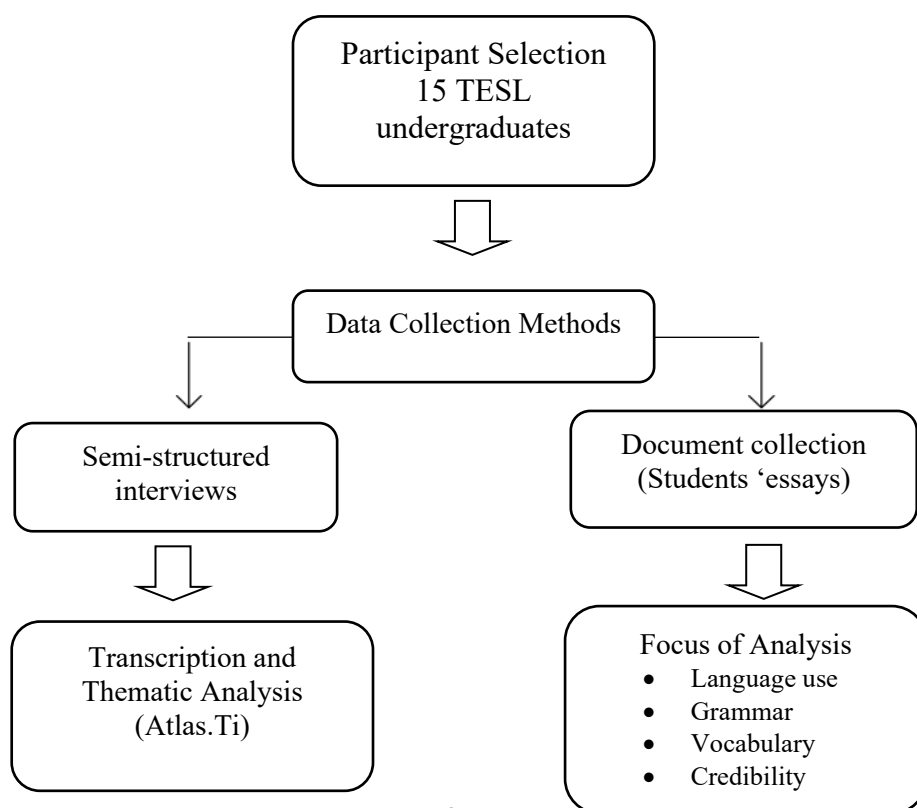


qualitatively. Interviews were semi-structured and guided by pre-established questions and prompts (Appendix A). The interviews explored how students used social media to support and enhance their academic writing skills. The focus was on understanding which platforms they used, how they engaged with them, and their perceptions of associated benefits and challenges. The interview covered specific platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube, exploring how these tools contributed to vocabulary development, idea generation, collaboration, and writing improvement. Participants were also asked about difficulties they faced, such as distractions and misinformation, and their overall opinions on the role of social media in academic writing. For document analysis, data in the form of a) students' academic writing samples, including report and article writing, and b) social media posts and contents that are related to language learning and academic writing skills were collected. These provided insights into how they utilise social media resources in learning academic writing.

### Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed using Atlas.ti, reducing reliance on manual coding and improving data validity (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The coding process involved identifying patterns, establishing themes and integrating findings from transcripts and document analysis. This transparent and systematic process enhanced the reliability and trustworthiness of the research findings.

Document analysis was conducted to identify whether social media exposure influenced students' writing styles and language choices, particularly the use of informal expressions. Grammar and syntax were examined to trace the potential effects of social media norms on academic accuracy. Vocabulary range was also assessed to determine whether social media affected students' academic lexicon. Furthermore, the study investigated the impact on students' ability to structure arguments and maintain coherence in their writing assignments. This study also examined students' perceptions of source reliability and citation practices to evaluate how social media affects referencing and source credibility. Writing motivation and engagement were also reviewed to understand how online interactions influence students' attitudes towards academic tasks.





**Figure 1**  
Data Collection Procedure  
**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The themes were derived inductively from the initial codes generated during the analysis phase. These codes were grouped based on their conceptual similarities and relevance to the research objectives. These four generated themes are presented with supporting extracts from participant responses and document samples, followed by a detailed interpretation.

### **Theme 1: Information Access and Collaboration**

This theme explores how students utilise social media platforms to access academic content, share resources, and engage in collaborative learning. The findings highlight the importance of peer interaction and digital networks in supporting writing development outside formal classroom settings. Based on the analysed interviews, most students reported using platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, ResearchGate, and Academia.edu to access learning materials, engage with peers, and get feedback on writing tasks. These platforms promote collaborative learning and knowledge sharing beyond the boundaries of formal academic settings.

*“I often use TikTok... easier to access and share the information.”*  
(Respondent 2)

Respondent 2 highlights TikTok’s engaging and accessible format for acquiring advanced vocabulary. The phrase “bombastic word” and the mention of “learning in a fun way” suggest that the platform’s informal, creative content encourages lexical enrichment, an essential component of academic writing.

*“Usually, I use Facebook.... I learn how people convey and express their thoughts.”* (Respondent 13)

Respondent 13 illustrates how Facebook functions as a collaborative platform where students can observe diverse writing styles and rhetorical expressions. By reading others’ posts, learners are exposed to different tones, structures, and methods of argumentation. This is valuable for improving their own academic writing.

*“There are groups on Facebook... often share useful articles and journals... related to my topic...”* (Respondent 1)

Additionally, Respondent 1 emphasises the role of Facebook groups in directing students toward academic resources, such as journal articles and Google Scholar content. These interactions cultivate students’ research and citation skills, both of which are essential for formal academic writing.

These findings suggest that students leverage social media as a non-traditional space for developing academic writing skills. Platforms like TikTok and Facebook not only promote vocabulary acquisition and idea sharing but also facilitate peer feedback and access to academic resources. These engagements support students in constructing evidence-based arguments and adopting more formal writing conventions, demonstrating social media’s





potential to enhance writing through accessible, collaborative environments. From the perspective of the TAM, these findings reflect students' PU and PEOU of social media platforms for academic purposes. Students reported that platforms like TikTok and Facebook were easy to navigate, engaging, and highly useful for accessing academic materials and learning from peer contributions. This aligns with the TAM's principles, which suggest that students are more likely to adopt social media as an academic tool when they believe it enhances their writing and is effortless to use. The collaborative features, user-generated content, and availability of academic resources contribute to the perceived effectiveness of social media, thereby encouraging its use in developing academic writing.

## **Theme 2: Vocabulary Enhancement**

This theme explores how students use social media to acquire and apply new vocabulary, which they perceive as improving academic writing. Participants frequently mentioned platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter as effective for learning new words, understanding grammar, and reinforcing sentence structure. The multimodal and interactive features of these platforms contributed to deeper retention and contextual use of vocabulary.

*"YouTube videos have helped me learn new words and improve my writing. I watch educational channels... on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation... immensely beneficial for my academic writing." (Respondent 10)*

Respondent 10 identifies YouTube as a key platform for learning vocabulary and improving writing mechanics. The combination of visual, auditory, and contextual learning enhances retention, especially when content is delivered in engaging formats. This supports the idea that YouTube's multimodal content deepens vocabulary retention and enhances language use in writing.

*"I follow language learning accounts on Instagram and Twitter, where I come across new words and expressions every day. The visual and interactive nature of these platforms makes it easier to remember and apply the vocabulary in my writing assignments." (Respondent 13)*

Respondent 13's experience demonstrates the power of repeated exposure and interactive content in reinforcing vocabulary learning. These platforms present daily, bite-sized language input, often through infographics or short captions, enabling learners to process and recall new expressions more effectively.

*"...social media help me improve my writing skill in terms of using the appropriate cohesion, grammar and academic words... advanced vocabs...sentence structure... through this I am able to write argumentatively..." (Respondent 5)*

Respondent 5 connects vocabulary acquisition to broader writing development, such as cohesion, grammar, and argumentative clarity. This suggests that the lexical input students receive from social media is not isolated but integrated into complex writing tasks, helping them express academic arguments with precision.

Although traditionally considered entertainment-focused, these platforms serve as informal learning environments where students engage in self-directed vocabulary learning. Several participants reported saving useful posts, revisiting language content, and actively applying



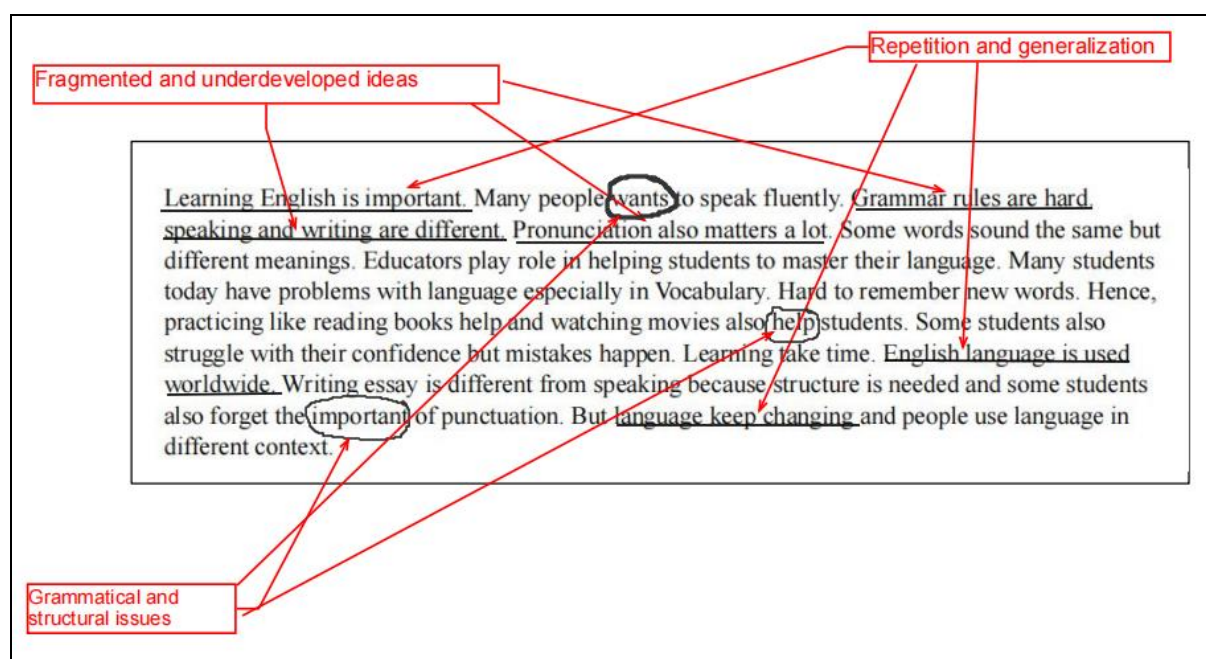
new vocabulary in their assignments. This indicates the value of incidental learning, where students acquire language skills outside formal instruction through everyday digital interactions. From the lens of the TAM, students' consistent use of social media for vocabulary development reflects both PU and PEOU. Learners view platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter as effective tools for enhancing their academic writing due to their accessible, engaging, and easily navigable formats. The ability to interact with short, informative content and revisit language materials supports students' belief that using these platforms meaningfully contributes to their writing skills. As such, their willingness to integrate social media into their academic routines is shaped by positive perceptions of both the benefits and the effortlessness of these tools, which is a central tenet of TAM.

### Theme 3: Distractions and Challenges

Despite the benefits, students also emphasised the challenges associated with social media use, including distractions, irrelevant content, spelling errors, and misinformation. Due to social media's pervasiveness in their lives, they highlighted difficulties in sustaining focus and productivity, which led to worries over academic performance and time management.

Respondent 3 described how social media can be distracting when completing assignments:

*"Social media can be distracting... making it challenging to focus on writing tasks. I often find myself scrolling through my feed while working on assignments... affects my focus, productivity and time management."*  
(Respondent 3)



**Figure 2**  
Excerpt from Respondent 3's essay

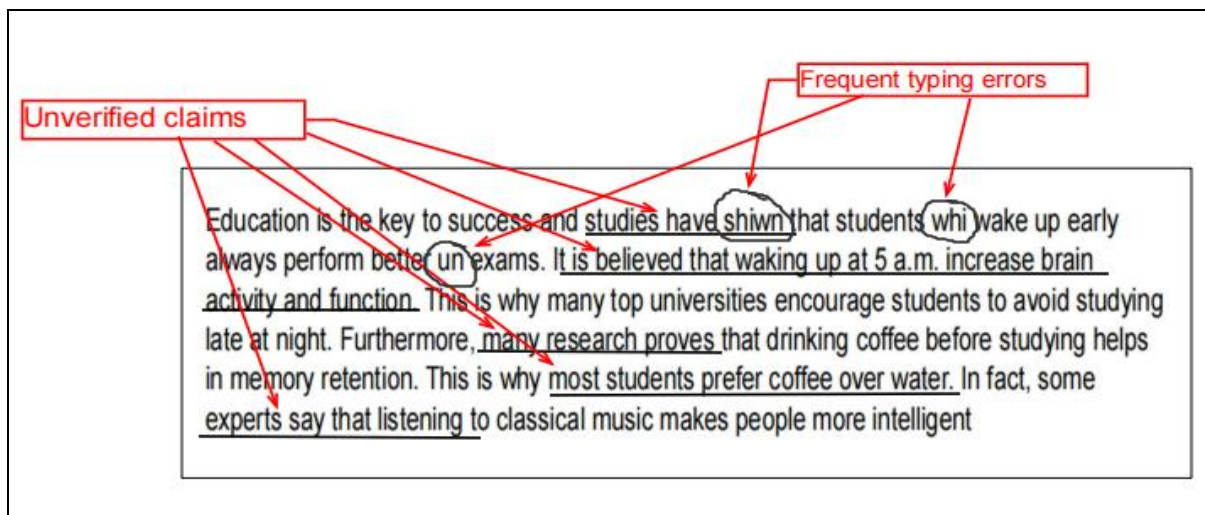
Figure 2 in Respondent 3's essay excerpt reflects the distracting influence of social media on academic writing. As shown in the excerpt, she often gets sidetracked while doing her assignments. The paragraph lacks depth, coherence and logical flow. Several sentences are fragmented and underdeveloped, such as the underlined "*Grammar rules are hard.*"



*Speaking and writing are different. Pronunciation also matters a lot.*” This abruptness may indicate a lack of focus during the writing process. Additionally, the excerpt shows frequent grammatical and structural errors like “Many people wants”, “Learning take time”, and “Forget the important of punctuation”. These mistakes suggest insufficient proofreading or idea organisation, possibly due to multitasking or mental disengagement. The lack of cohesive structure, such as an introduction or clear argument, further supports the idea that digital distractions diminish writing quality by limiting concentration.

Respondent 4 expressed caution in handling social media content:

*“For me, the information that I found on social media, for example, on Instagram, I always double-checked the information on other platforms because not every content creator able to teach or give sufficient information, and sometimes the information can be incorrect as well. So, I always double-check. After double-check then I apply it into my writing.” (Respondent 4)*



**Figure 3**  
Excerpt from Respondent 4's essay

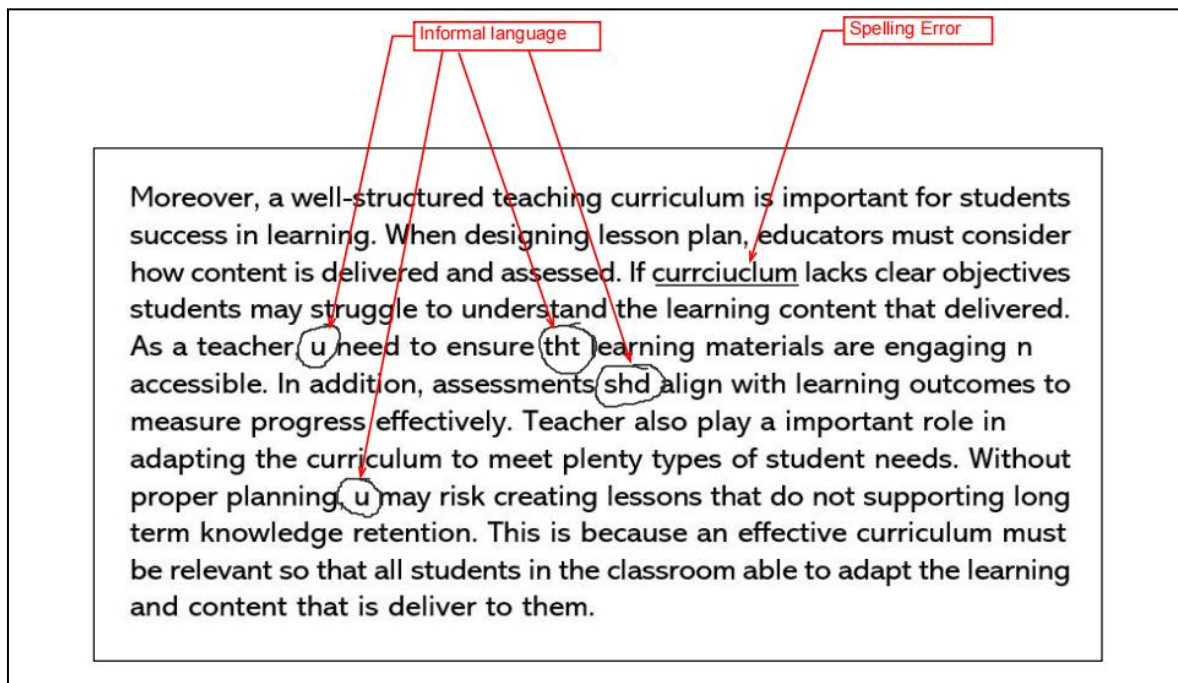
However, the essay excerpt (Figure 3) indicated a contradiction between intention and execution. Statements like “many research proves” and “some experts say” are vague and unsupported. Claims such as “students who wake up always perform better” and “listening to classical music makes people more intelligent” resemble simplified, viral content often circulated on social media. The language and structure mirror informal sources like blogs or influencer posts rather than scholarly writing. While the respondent claims to “double-check”, the evidence suggests a verification process that may not meet academic standards. This highlights the gap between perceived critical thinking and actual academic writing practices, underlining the need for stronger information literacy education.

Respondent 10 voiced concern about social media's influence on spelling:

*“Using social media for writing skills enhancement is nice. However, I believe it also affect my writing; I would say especially spelling-wise. I often make a spelling mistake when I wrote. For example, the word ‘you’, I wrote ‘u’, as we often use the short forms on social media, and this is honestly worrisome.” (Respondent 10)*



Most obviously, in the use of abbreviations such as “u” for “you”, “tht” for “that”, and “shd” for “should” (see Figure 4). These forms mirror standard texting and online communication patterns used across platforms like WhatsApp or Instagram, where the shortened version is preferred over the standard form. In the interview, the respondent openly acknowledged these habits and expressed her concerns about how frequently she unconsciously uses short forms due to social media exposure. This self-awareness is crucial, but such informalities in the essays indicate that the habits are deeply ingrained and may surface during formal writing tasks or assignments. As remarked above, the essay also shows spelling issues, such as “curricium” instead of “curriculum”. There are also some grammar and clarity issues in her essay. The fast-paced, instantaneous nature of social media content consumption and creation likely exacerbates this. The student’s overreliance on casual digital communication appears to compromise the standard expected in academic discourse. This supports the broader claim that social media can negatively influence students’ spelling accuracy and language formalities. The finding indicates the reinforcing need for targeted intervention in academic instruction.



**Figure 4**  
Excerpt from Respondent 10’s essay

Highlighting another concern with social media use, Respondent 15 noted:

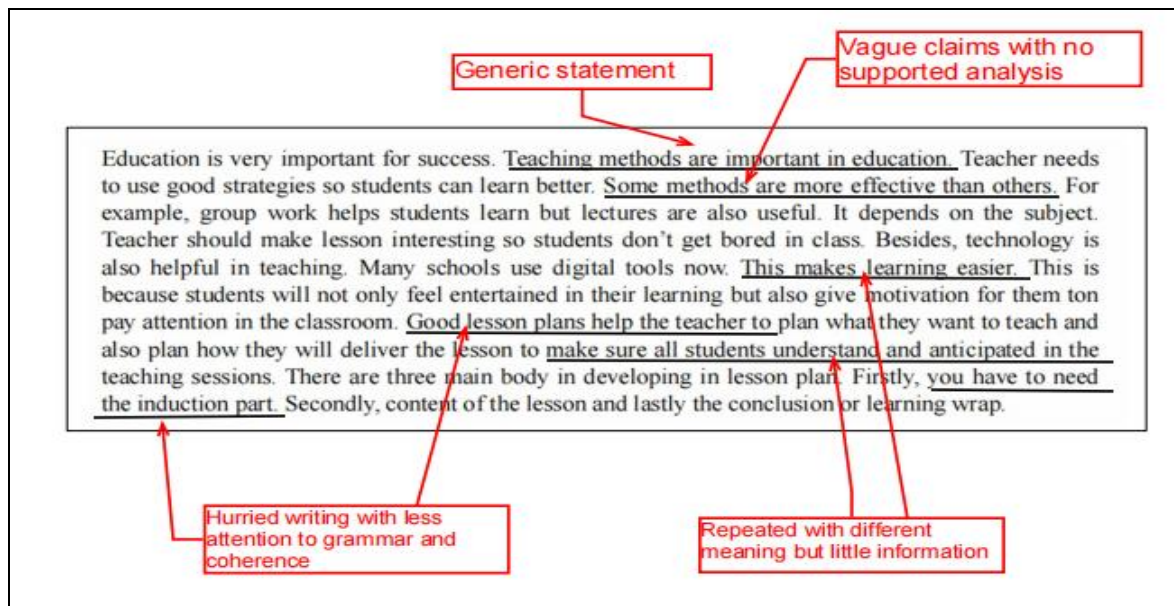
*“...social media also made me rely too much on social media to learn... sometimes it is very distracting and make me procrastinate more...”*  
(Respondent 15)

His essay excerpt (Figure 5) demonstrates a lack of depth and development. Phrases such as “Teaching methods are important in education” and “Some methods are more effective than others” show a vague claim that is not supported with any analysis. Repetitive, vague statements and grammar issues such as “This makes learning easier” and “Good lesson plans help the teacher...” are repeated with different wording but little new information. Statements such as “You have to need the induction part” and “make sure all students





*understand and anticipated in the teaching sessions*” suggest rushed and unfocused writing, aligning with his claims of distraction and procrastination.



**Figure 5**  
Excerpt from Respondent 15's essay

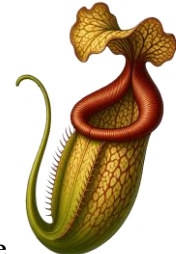
While social media platforms offer tools and opportunities for collaboration, the findings in this theme reveal that without structured guidance, students may internalise unproductive habits, such as distraction, over-reliance on casual language, and poor fact-checking practices. These challenges can be understood through the lens of the TAM, which emphasises how perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use influence users' acceptance of technology. In this context, students may find social media easy to use and engaging (high PEOU), but their perception of its usefulness for academic writing may be undermined by distractions and informal content. When students rely heavily on social media without critical awareness or academic guidance, their writing may reflect the platform's informal norms rather than formal academic standards. These findings highlight the importance of educator support and structured interventions to help students use social media meaningfully and enhance its perceived usefulness as a tool for academic development while mitigating negative impacts on writing quality.

#### **Theme 4: Educational Support and Strategies**

Several students expressed the need for greater institutional guidance in using social media for academic writing. Suggestions included forming online communities, offering workshops, and providing access to relevant digital resources. Participants emphasised that educators and institutions play a critical role in helping students navigate social media productively and develop writing skills.

*"I wish our institution would offer more guidance and workshops on using social media for writing. While social media has its benefits, it's important to learn how to use it effectively and responsibly for academic purposes."* (Respondent 11)





Respondent 11 highlighted the importance of structured support to encourage responsible and effective use of social media for academic tasks. She noted that without proper guidance, students might rely excessively on informal content, leading to inappropriate language use and weaker source credibility.

*"I am hoping that our institution could maybe provide a platform where all students would be able to collaborate and help students to explore more platforms on social media that can support their writing, as we the undergraduate students are naïve and need a lot of guidance to find appropriate platforms that we can used in our academic achievements." (Respondent 13)*

Respondent 13's statement highlights the need for institutional spaces that promote collaborative learning. A community where students can exchange ideas, share resources, and provide feedback on each other's work could foster vocabulary growth, critical thinking, and analytical skills. This would encourage deeper engagement with content and promote a more thoughtful approach to writing.

*"Specifically, for academic writing purposes, I am hoping that our institution maybe conducts an online book club or online writing club because I haven't seen that yet, but some other institutions have made that." (Respondent 3)*

Respondent 3's suggestion reflects a desire for regular writing engagement and peer-based learning. Writing clubs or book discussions could offer opportunities for students to practise writing consistently and receive formative feedback while drawing inspiration from social media content.

*"Our professors could incorporate social media into classroom discussions and assignments, allowing us to practise academic writing in a digital environment. By integrating social media into our coursework, we can develop the necessary skills to thrive in today's digital age." (Respondent 14)*

Respondent 14 proposed integrating social media into classroom activities and assignments. This approach would utilise students' familiarity with digital platforms while teaching them to critically evaluate and synthesise digital content for academic use. It promotes balance between contemporary relevance and academic standards.

The perspectives from students point to a clear gap between social media use in informal learning and its guided application in formal education. While students recognise the potential of social media for collaboration, exposure to authentic language, and continuous writing practices, they also acknowledge the risks of unstructured use. The repeated calls for workshops, institutional platforms, and writing clubs reveal that learners are not resistant to academic guidance but are actively seeking it. This indicates a strong willingness to bridge informal and formal practices if institutions provide proper scaffolding. Moreover, their emphasis on collaboration reflects an understanding that writing is not only an individual task but also a socially situated practice, aligning with constructivist views of learning.

### **Emerging Discussion**

While social media provides opportunities for language development and engagement, its benefits can only be fully realised through structured educational support. The lack of



institutional guidance can leave students navigating these tools with varying degrees of success. Challenges such as informal tone, unreliable sources and weak idea development point to the need for targeted support from educators. Structured workshops, online writing clubs, and integrated coursework can provide the scaffolding students need to transform informal online interaction into strong, articulate academic writing demonstrating digital fluency and academic rigour.

The findings of this study reveal that integrating social media has a significant impact on enhancing students' academic writing skills. Among the platforms explored, TikTok was notably identified by several undergraduates as beneficial in developing writing proficiency. Its user-friendly interface, interactive features and engaging content make it an attractive learning tool. Many students highlighted short TikTok videos' key advantage of catering to short attention spans while delivering concise educational content. Others pointed out that exposure to sophisticated vocabulary on the platform has helped expand their lexical range. These findings are consistent with previous studies. For example, Aziz and Sabella (2021) acknowledged TikTok as an effective educational tool that supports English language development, particularly writing skills. Similarly, Novitasari and Addinna (2022) found that TikTok enhances English proficiency through accessible, engaging and diverse content, exposure to native speakers and ease of understanding.

Apart from that, Facebook was identified as a valuable platform for collaborative learning and writing improvement. Students appreciated the role of Facebook groups in facilitating idea exchange, peer support and collective feedback. This aligns with the findings of Kabilan et al. (2010), who asserted that Facebook can support autonomous English learning in an online environment. Chen and Ramzan (2024) also found that Facebook posts related to ESL learning significantly boost learners' motivation and comprehension, reinforcing the social and interactive dimension of language learning. YouTube also emerged as a key tool in students' academic writing development. Tahmina (2023) similarly highlighted that YouTube fosters vocabulary acquisition and overall English proficiency by offering entertaining and educational content, quick access to relevant material and a user-driven pace of learning.

However, the study also identified notable challenges associated with social media use in academic contexts. Students reported issues related to procrastination, distractions, misinformation and difficulty maintaining focus. These challenges are likely rooted in social media's informal and entertainment-oriented nature. These findings are echoed by Koehler and Vilarinho-Pereira (2021), who emphasised that social media use in education can lead to cognitive overload, misinformation and blurred boundaries between personal and academic contexts. From the perspective of the TAM, these challenges may stem from the same constructs that drive adoption. While PEOU encourages engagement, it can also promote over-reliance and multitasking behaviours that reduce focus. Similarly, PU may lead students to trust and apply information from social media without sufficient verification, increasing the risk of misinformation. This dual influence reinforces the need for structured meditation when using social media for academic purposes.

Additionally, students expressed difficulty in organising ideas, using appropriate grammar structures and applying academic conventions, highlighting a need for more structured educational support when integrating social media into academic writing. While social media provides a valuable opportunity to enhance academic writing through vocabulary development, collaboration, and accessible learning resources, it also introduces challenges



that must be addressed. The findings highlight the importance of institutional guidance, structured training, and responsible platform integration to ensure that social media contributes positively to academic writing development.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the relationship between social media use and academic writing skills among undergraduate students. The findings reveal that while social media platforms offer valuable opportunities for information access, collaboration, vocabulary enrichment, and feedback, they also pose challenges such as distraction, reliance on informal language, and risk of misinformation. These dual impacts highlight the importance of structured educational support and guided engagement. The findings suggest that students' acceptance and use of social media for academic writing are influenced by their perceptions of its usefulness and ease of use, the core construct of the TAM. Platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube were perceived as beneficial due to their engaging, accessible, and supportive features, which contributed to vocabulary development and collaborative learning. However, their ease of use led to over-reliance, informal habits, and distractions, highlighting the need for guided educational strategies.

As emphasised in this study, there is a need to foster critical digital literacy to ensure students use social media responsibly and effectively for academic purposes. Institutions should consider implementing structured training, integrating social media into writing curricula, and offering support systems such as online writing communities and workshops. These strategies can help students manage distractions, assess source credibility, and apply appropriate language conventions in academic contexts. This study is limited by its focus on a single private institution in Malaysia and its reliance on self-reported data. As such, the findings may not be fully generalisable. Future research should include participants from multiple institutions and diverse regions to improve the generalisability of findings, explore the long-term effects of social media use on writing performance, and investigate TAM-based interventions that balance informal learning with academic standards.

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## APPENDIX A

### IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

#### Section A: General Background

- Can you tell me a bit about your experience with academic writing in English?
- How confident do you feel about your academic writing skills?

#### Section B: Use of Social Media in Academic Writing

- Which social media platforms do you often use in relation to your studies?
- Have you ever used any social media platform to help improve your academic writing skills? If yes, how?

#### Section C: Platform-Specific Use

- How do you use TikTok for academic purposes, particularly in improving your writing skills?
- What kind of TikTok content helps you the most in learning vocabulary or writing techniques?
- Have you used Facebook for group discussions or collaborative writing tasks? Can you describe that experience?
- In what ways does Facebook help you generate ideas or structure your writing?
- Have you watched YouTube videos to support your writing? What kind of videos are most useful to you?

#### Section D: Benefits and Challenges

- What benefits have you experienced when using social media for academic writing?
- Have you faced difficulties using social media to support your writing? (e.g., distraction, misinformation)
- Do you feel that social media helps improve your vocabulary or grammar? Please explain how.

#### Section E: Attitudes and Perceptions

- What is your overall opinion about using social media for academic writing improvement?
- Do you believe social media should be integrated into academic writing instruction? Why or why not?

#### Section F: Suggestions and Improvement

- What features or content do you wish social media platforms had to better support academic writing?
  - What advice would you give to other students who want to use social media to improve their academic writing?



**Follow-Up questions:**

- If you could improve how social media is used for academic writing, what would you suggest?
- Do you think your writing would be different without the influence of social media? Why or why not?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience using social media for academic purposes?