Chapter 2
Twenty-First-Century Second Language Literacy Development in Universities

Hazel L. W. Chiu

Abstract The literacy skills of reading and writing are important foundation skills for learning. The two skills of reading and writing have often been connected in the exploration of literacy development. A great deal of research has been undertaken on instructional strategies and other means of supporting the development of reading skills, both for young learners and for learners at higher educational levels. Literacy has become a complex issue in the twenty-first century because of the development of technology. Reading and writing today involve multimodal materials, multifarious genres and multiple communicative demands brought by the development of technology and the use of the internet. This requires highly sophisticated skills and abilities, as well as a good understanding of context. In universities in Hong Kong where English is often used as a second language and a medium of instruction, it has become increasingly challenging for students to develop literacy skills both for work and study, and to fulfil the various curriculum targets such as the development of critical thinking skills, creativity, independent and lifelong learning. A number of studies have been conducted in universities in Hong Kong on supporting or facilitating the development of literacy skills (particularly reading skills). This chapter discusses research efforts exploring the benefits of self-directed language learning (such as extensive reading), as well as the role of technological support and curriculum design in enhancing literacy development. Investigating students' literary concepts and practice also helps to improve understanding and develop appropriate strategies to support the development of literacy skills.

Keywords Literacy · Academic literacy · Reading and writing
Technology · Self-directed language learning

H. L. W. Chiu (✉)
University of London, London, UK
e-mail: hazelchiu@hotmail.com

Introduction

The concept of 'literacy' has often been considered as connected to printed texts and how they are produced and used. As suggested by Barton and Hamilton (2000), literacy can be best understood as a set of social practices consisting of observable events which are mediated by written texts. The term 'literacy', therefore, involves the ways in which people interact with texts, and with one another, through the use of texts. It is mainly associated with the activity or ability of 'reading and writing'.

As reading and writing are the foundation skills for education and language development, literacy has always received a great deal of attention in school and university curricula. According to Paxton and Frith (2014), reading and writing are central to the process of learning in any discipline and need to be taken into consideration when planning curricula for different subjects.

A number of studies have been conducted on supporting the development of literacy skills in primary and secondary schools. Some researchers have emphasized the important role of literacy in the school curriculum. Kitson (2015), for example, highlights the importance of developing literacy capabilities for reading comprehension in the curriculum. Raisanen and Korkeamaki's (2015) study also shows the importance of the teacher's constant attention and a reflective attitude in the implementation of the new literacy curriculum in attending to interests which differ from traditional practices.

Literacy has also received a great deal of attention in the university curriculum. Langer (2011) stresses the importance of helping students to develop "academic literacy", that is, the ability to acquire, think and communicate about knowledge in different disciplines, such as building an understanding, bolstering an argument, creating a proof, analysing data and offering evidence. Studies have shown that academic literacy is a great challenge for university students, and needs to be given emphasis in the curriculum (Mkandawire & Walubita, 2015; Pessoa et al., 2014).

In recent years, literacy has been receiving increasing attention because of monumental changes in contemporary literacy practices due to technological advancement. Because of the erosion of the printed text as a medium of communication in modern society due to the development of new technologies, the term 'literacy' has taken on more complex meanings in the twenty-first century. As suggested by Kress (2003), although language-as-speech will remain a major mode of communication, language-as-writing will increasingly be displaced by image in many domains of public communication. The mode of image and the medium of the screen will produce profound changes in the forms and functions of writing.

Warschauer (2007) also asserts that today, literacy no longer means just reading and writing in print forms or on paper. I It may involve other aspects of text-related interaction, such as (a) computer literacy: comfort and fluency in using hardware and software; (b) information literacy: the ability to find, analyse, and critique information available online; (c) multimedia literacy: the ability to interpret and produce documents combining texts, sounds, graphics, and video; and

(d) computer-mediated communication literacy: the mastery of the pragmatics of synchronous and asynchronous CMC.

Vacca, Vacca, and Mraz (2014, p. 12) describes this new literacy as "a synthesis of language, thinking, and contextual practices through which people make and communicate meaning" in ways "complex and multidimensional". Knoll (2003, p. 1) believes that this complexity has been intensified by the phenomenon known as globalization and the "Internet Revolution". To communicate in the contemporary literacy arena "requires a fluency that goes beyond the spoken language and embraces a variety of uses of the written language as well". It also requires a good understanding of social, institutional, and cultural relationships (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003).

A number of studies have also shown the important role of technology in supporting literacy curricula in schools. Leu et al. (2011), for example, argue that the teaching of online reading comprehension skills should be integrated into school reading curricula. Other studies have also shown that multimodal strategies (such as the use of visual art to facilitate reading and writing instruction) are beneficial for the development of literacy skills, as they provide opportunities for making and representing meaning creatively (Barton, 2015; Barton & Baguley, 2014; Butti, 2015; Shaw, 2014).

Aside from conventional academic literacy skills, the continuous development of literacy at university has become an increasingly complex issue because of the increasingly important role of digital communication in society. As suggested by Carr (2014, p. 438) in his discussion on university composition, there is a growing tendency for university writing to be involved in various types of "making" or "doing", as in digital composition or multimodal essays which join written text with aural and visual resources, and involve different means of presentation. These new developments in literacy concepts and practices have eroded conventional literacy standards and expectations and produced additional demands on students in developing the types of literacy skills that suit increasingly complex contexts of social, academic and professional communication.

Types of Reading and Writing Demands at University

University students need to master various different genres for social, academic and professional communication. In places where English as a second language is the medium of instruction, such as in the universities in Hong Kong, literacy challenges for students are greater than those who use English as both a first language and a medium of instruction.

The two major types of reading and writing skills Hong Kong students need to master are academic English and workplace/professionally related English. The former involves the common types of essays, reports, academic papers/articles in books/journals which university students are expected to read and write during their studies, or afterwards if they continue working in academia. The latter involves

materials they will have to handle in the workplace, such as business correspondence, workplace reports and other discipline-specific materials such as computer manuals, laboratory reports and progress reports for architectural projects. In additional to the fundamental reading and writing skills students need to master to complete their studies, many universities also include in the language curriculum the types of reading and writing skills they need to use in their discipline, which will help them to function effectively in their professional workplace later.

Literacy development has become increasingly demanding at universities today, as there is a wide array of curriculum targets which students are expected to accomplish. These often impose additional demands on the development of literacy skills. Aside from acquiring subject knowledge in specific disciplines, students are expected to become rounded, well educated members of society with good general knowledge, critical thinking, creativity, collaborative, independent and lifelong learning skills. As curriculum targets become more divergent, the types of demands on literacy skills also become more challenging.

At the University of Hong Kong, a conventional university with a long history, language enhancement courses start with "Core University English", academic English for all first-year students; this is followed by subjected-related academic or workplace courses in the second year (Centre for Applied English Studies, 2016). The situation is similar in another more technically oriented university, Kong Polytechnic University. In addition to academic or workplace/professionally related courses, there are other language-related courses with specific focuses, such as those related to popular culture or common interest topics like films, fiction, and globalization (English Language Centre, 2016).

In another university offering both face-to-face and distance-learning courses without a language centre to oversee the language enhancement courses for the whole university, the language courses being offered do not seem to be very different either. Sometimes academic or workplace English seem to emerge in the general language enhancement courses entitled "Effective Use of English" or "Effective Communication", such as those offered in language studies or language education, and business administration (School of Education and Languages, 2016; The Open University of Hong Kong, 2016). In other subjects, like translation, university language courses focusing on writing and speaking receive particular attention (School of Arts and Social Sciences, 2016).

Differences in academic and workplace genres are a major source of confusion. While academic genres are for a general academic audience, workplace genres are for a specific audience in a particular profession. The difference in communication style is most obvious in more technical subjects such as science, computing and engineering. Communication in these subjects often involves more technical terminology, and there are institutional constraints on communication for specific communities of practice in terms of style and procedures. Very often, the mode of general academic communication may be quite different from these types of workplace communication. This poses another type of learning demand on students who need to distinguish between these different modes of communication and decide when to make use of which mode of communication strategies.

The need for university students to make use of a wide array of communication genres competently is a also a great challenge for them. Sometimes the different genres students are exposed to may cause interference and confuse students about specific or typical genre features. One of the difficulties is distinguishing the different styles of written and spoken communication. While students are expected to write in formal academic style in written assignments such as essays and reports, in academic spoken communication, such as oral presentation and seminar discussion, they can make use of conversational features similar to those they use in their social communication. These formal and informal features of academic reading and writing on the one hand, and academic listening and speaking on the other, are a source of confusion and often hinder students from producing different types of academic genre to the appropriate standard.

Related to the difficulty in distinguishing between written and spoken genres are the differences between academic genres and everyday communication genres, which is another major source of confusion. In Hong Kong where English is used as a second language, Cantonese or Mandarin Chinese is most commonly used as the language for social interaction. However, English is sometimes also used in social interaction, as university students may make friends with foreigners and mainland Chinese speaking different dialects, when they will need to use English a medium of communication. The need to adjust to different social contexts with different expectations of style and formality deviating from those of academic communication is a great challenge for university students.

The Impact of Technology on Literacy Development

Literacy has become an increasingly complex issue in the twenty-first century because of the development of technology. With the popularity of social media and mobile applications like WhatsApp, written and spoken communication genres often merge and become indistinguishable. As suggested by Tagg (2012), text and talk merge in modern communication. With the immediacy of communication enabled by technology, the distinction between formal, pre-planned written communication and the more casual, immediate spoken communication is eroded, whether in social or workplace contexts. The difference in language style between the two modes of communication has also become less conspicuous. Text messages on mobile devices and social media are basically a kind of written communication. However, because of the immediacy of the communication, they have assumed characteristics of spoken communication, such as more casual/informal communication style, with less emphasis on planning and less compliance with typical genre features. Features of spoken communication can often be found in these written texts which are in fact a type of textual spoken communication.

This type of modern text-talk is often multimodal, involving not just texts as a medium of communication, but also other forms of audio-visual material such as pictures, photos, audio and visual recordings. There is no longer a need to adhere to

typical genre features of some specific written genres, nor even the possibility of doing so, as the use of multimodal materials to fulfil multiple communicative demands often obliterates these specific genre features, and new communication genres also emerge to fulfil changing needs. This multifarious situation results in confusion and mingling of/in communication styles and adherence to genre features, as well as problems in observing standards. Various transgressions in genre features, such as the use of formal/informal language, the use of textual or audio-visual material, and code-switching or code-mixing of different languages have now become increasingly unavoidable or even acceptable.

Communication nowadays is more immediate and more oriented towards individuals. There is wider scope for individuals to express their views and gain information without restriction on the internet. This has certainly fostered a stronger sense of individual autonomy. The freedom of the individual, however, is restricted by how they are expected to behave within different communicative contexts, or communities of practice. While individual freedom seems to have increased, the individual's communicative behaviour is also more subject to public surveillance. Individuals are also expected to take into consideration other people's communicative behaviour and collaborate with others in communication (Tagg, 2012). The two opposing/driving forces of individual autonomy and collaboration in communities of practice is a major feature of modern communication.

Recent Research on Facilitating the Development of Literacy Skills at University

University students have gone beyond the stage of basic literacy development. They are expected to have general competence in reading and writing. However, today's university students are said to have declining skills in reading and writing, as university education becomes popularized, and literacy skills become multifarious in a technology-driven world where literacy standards are being eroded as different genre features mingle and interact with one another. Reading and writing in English are particularly demanding tasks for university students who learn English as a second or foreign language. These students need to handle the conflicting demands of literacy in more than one language, which creates another dimension of challenge in using English appropriately in various different contexts.

A number of studies on supporting/facilitating the development of literacy skills have been conducted in universities in different parts of the world where English is used as a second or foreign language. There are four main types of research effort. One type deals with the development of literacy skills beyond the formal curriculum as a kind of self-directed learning motivation fostered by independent language learning centres often established in universities where English is learned as a second or foreign language. Another type of research study focuses on facilitating the development of literacy skills within the formal curriculum, either the subject or

the language curriculum. The third type deals with the use of technology in facilitating the development of literacy skills. There is also a small body of research which aims to investigate students' literary concepts and practice so as to improve understanding and develop appropriate strategies to develop literacy skills.

Support for Literacy Development in Independent Language Learning Centres

A great deal of research has been undertaken in recent decades to show the benefits of extensive reading for language acquisition, particularly at an elementary or intermediate level of learning English as a second language. Some of the studies have focused on adolescent readers. These studies have demonstrated a strong positive relationship between leisure reading and academic success (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2003; Mokhtari & Sheorey, 1994). Others are related to specific areas of language acquisition, such as those conducted by Gardner (2004) and Kweon and Kim (2008) on vocabulary learning, Bell (2001) and Iwahori (2008) on reading fluency/ability, and Wu (2000) on writing development.

Independent language learning centres are language resource centres which provide different types of learning materials for self-learning. These materials facilitate enhancement of different language skills, and are particularly useful for extensive reading. In some of these learning centres, activities are sometimes organized to encourage extensive reading. A small-scale action research study by Chiu (2015a) conducted guided reading sessions in an independent language learning centre of a university in Hong Kong and aimed to help students access extensive reading materials targeted at general first-language readers. Students were guided to read a short extract from popular fiction or non-fiction material and responded to comprehension questions. They then had a short discussion on what they had read, and reflected on their learning experience. Results seemed to indicate potential for these reading support sessions to develop students' interest and ability in extensive reading. The procedures and support materials developed for these sessions can be easily replicated on different books for use in similar independent language learning centres. Although the books used in the study were slightly above the language level of most of the students, who are L2 learners of English, there is evidence that students were able to be involved and contributed useful ideas in the discussions with teacher guidance. Students felt that they had gained a better understanding of the book by the end of the reading sessions and some of them indicated that they would be interested in reading the book later or watching the film adapted from the book.

Studies have also investigated the use of writing conferences in helping students develop their writing skills, very often as an additional support beyond the classroom. These studies have shown the benefits of writing conferences in enhancing

students' attitudes, abilities, or strategies in writing (Eodice, 1998; Haneda, 2004; Lambert, 1999; Stemper, 2002; Strauss & Xiang, 2006).

At universities, this type of writing conference often occurs in independent language learning centres, which provide both language learning resources and additional language support for students' voluntary independent learning. One study by Chiu (2012) reports the use of one-to-one writing conferences to support the development of writing skills in an independent language learning centre. These learner-centred writing sessions offered assistance to suit the various writing needs of university students, such as: (a) assignments for different subjects (term papers, project reports, theses); (b) various types of applications (for jobs, postgraduate studies, exchange programmes, internships, scholarships); (c) public exam skills development [IELTS, Use of English exam (public pre-university matriculation examination in Hong Kong which some students need to re-take)]; and (d) students' own writing practices for various purposes to develop their writing skills and ability.

The development of good writing skills and extensive reading habits requires self-directed learning efforts. However, these are difficult to develop without initial teacher support. These one-to-one writing conferences are a kind of awareness-building learning session to help students develop the skills to identify problems in their writing and do useful revision on their own. In other words, the consultation sessions are a kind of model reflective exercise for students to imitate in order to improve their writing on their own.

Findings from the study show that students had positive attitudes towards this type of writing conference. A recurring theme in student feedback was the usefulness of teacher guidance to suit individual needs in terms of writing development, and in specific areas such as language, connection of ideas and logical thinking. Some students also felt that the conference sessions were interesting.

Support for Literacy Development in University Curricula

A number of studies investigate the development of literacy skills within the formal university curriculum (Marshall, Zhou, Gervan, & Wiebe, 2012; Olivier & Olivier, 2013; Tribble & Wingate, 2013). Improving or adjusting the curriculum to facilitate the development of literacy skills can take place either in the language curriculum or within the curriculum of a different discipline.

A study by Chiu (2014) reports an attempt at using more unconventional journalistic and literary genres in designing elective (reading and) writing courses for the new language curriculum in response to the university curriculum reform in Hong Kong, which was extended from three years to four years, with more emphasis on the development of generic and literacy skills (The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 2013).

Data were collected from a pilot course to examine whether these unconventional genres help to scaffold the writing ability of students and cultivate their

interest in reading and writing. Results indicate that the use of the unconventional genres of journalistic and literary writing helped to engage students' interest in extensive reading of works other than the formal academic writing they were expected to learn well at university. Students also benefited from the use of a genre-based writing pedagogy in developing their writing skills. Guiding students to analyse writing models helped to scaffold their ability and model their writing for unfamiliar genres. Students also felt that making use of more personal and creative writing strategies was motivating; the writing skills they learned from these unconventional genres were useful for their day-to-day communication and future writing development.

Another study by Cheng et al. (2014) is a writing-across-the-curriculum project which aims to integrate writing activities in courses from different subject areas. In this study, discipline-specific scaffolding activities were designed to facilitate the good use of writing skills in learning and assignments for different subjects across ten academic departments in the university. To support the development of their writing ability, students were given guidance on reading effectively to extract relevant information, and on improving their use of vocabulary and expressions to refine their writing. Findings indicate the benefits of identifying resources and developing activities for supporting the development of writing skills across different disciplines. The sharing of the experience of designing and implementing language activities to facilitate learning in different subject areas was also useful for non-language subject teachers.

Technological Support for Literacy Development

The third type of research deals with the use of technology in facilitating the development of literacy skills. A number of research studies have shown that web-based learning, such as the use of CMC (Cheng, Chen, & Brown, 2012; Li, 2013), blogs (Arslan & Sahin-Kizil, 2010; Sun & Chang, 2012; Vurdien, 2013), and wikis (Aydin & Yildiz, 2014; Liou & Lee, 2011), has the potential to facilitate the development of reading and writing skills.

The study by Chiu (2015b) examines the experience of implementing web-work activities for an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course in a university in Hong Kong. The course covered academic writing and presentation skills using a blended mode of face-to-face classroom teaching and web learning. Aside from classroom learning and conventional assignments, students on this course were required to complete 6 hours of self-learning each week and attain a minimum score of 60% in order to pass the course. These web-based activities included objective web exercises, as well as activities making use of social networking tools such as blogs, wikis and discussion forums for students to share ideas.

A good variety of multimodal materials aimed at attending to a wide range of learning needs have been used for web activities, showing a good effort to enhance motivational engagement. Of the five types of educational materials (narrative,

interactive, adaptive, communicative, and productive) described by Laurillard (2002), at least three are prominently featured in the e-learn materials. These include audio-visual narrative materials, communicative media materials in the forms of blogs, forums and wikis, and materials for adaptive and productive media.

Data were collected and analysed from the pilot of web-based materials in an EAP course. Results indicate that more meaningful and motivating activities with clear purposes, such as the social networking activities, were more welcomed by students, with a higher participation rate than those activities which are mechanical, or too demanding and time-consuming.

The findings point to several major considerations for effective e-learn materials design. The first is integration of purposeful materials to achieve clear learning purposes. The second is the use of a variety of multimodal, interesting and meaningful materials and activities for enhancing motivational and cognitive engagement. Lastly, it is important to provide students with a supportive learning environment to empower them to fulfil their own learning needs or targets autonomously.

Investigating Literacy Concepts and Practice

Research on academic literacy has shown that it is a great challenge for university students, especially for those who are starting their university studies and finding that the literacy skills and abilities they need are very different from those they learned at school (Marshall et al., 2012; Olivier & Olivier, 2013; Tribble & Wingate, 2013). There is a need to find ways of facilitating the development of academic literacy skills within the language and subject curricula, and even beyond them, to involve self-directed learning efforts. More research efforts are needed to investigate students' literary concepts and practice, improve understanding of appropriate strategies to develop literacy skills, and support students' literacy development.

One study by Chiu (2015c) explores the literacy concepts and practices of students in English Language Education in a university in Hong Kong. Data were collected by a small-scale questionnaire survey and a small-group interview, and by analysing students' essay-writing assignments. Findings indicate that students' habits and interest in reading and writing differ greatly in some aspects, but are similar in others.

In the questionnaire, students were asked to indicate their level of agreement (on a Likert scale of 1 to 5) with eight statements about their habits and interest in reading and writing. There was a great difference between individual students' average ratings of the eight statements, with the highest at 4.50 and the lowest at 2.38. This indicates that students' reading and writing habits and interests may differ greatly.

The data collected were quite homogeneous in terms of the frequency of the types of materials students usually read and write for their studies, as well as for

entertainment/personal or social purposes. However, there seems to be a wider variety in the actual types of materials students read and write for their studies, as well as those they read for entertainment/personal or social purposes. There is relatively less variety in the types of materials students write for entertainment/personal or social purposes.

Analysis of their writing shows that students seem to have quite a satisfactory command of academic literacy. They can make quite a clear distinction of literacy demands between communicating academically on the one hand, and communicating for personal and social purposes on the other. Although they cannot make use of all the academic features perfectly, it is clear that they understand the main features and grasp the major differences from social/digital writing style. The variety of social/digital writing features they demonstrated in their writing also show a potency in this new writing medium for creative and interesting communication.

Findings from the interview seem to indicate that although students can make good use of the digital media for social and personal communication, and they also read web materials for their studies, they may not be in favour of more extensive use of digital materials for their academic assignments. For example, they are against the idea of having the multimodal essay as an assignment. Time and convenience seems to be their major consideration for different types of communication. Their negative views of this aspect of digital development for academic studies need to be explored further.

Discussion and Conclusion

The twenty-first-century literacy arena is multi-faceted, particularly at university. It is a colourful picture to exploit for learning, which calls for the use of a variety of skills to meet multiple learning demands and outcomes. Such an environment provides exciting opportunities for making use of higher-order skills in the process of reading and writing development.

The digital medium is a useful means to enhance reading exposure and opportunities, as well as motivation in reading and writing. Research has shown that it can be beneficial not only for enhancing the development of literacy skills, but also in facilitating the use of creativity and critical thinking skills.

Alongside the benefits, the new literacy environment also brings increasing demands on university students. With the erosion of conventional genres and the emergence of new reading and writing genres, literacy expectations are hard to define and are evolving continually. Literary standards are increasingly context dependent and hard for students to grasp. There are no clearly defined rules and models to follow which can facilitate the learning process, while at the same time there are expectations that university students will be versatile in making use of a variety of reading and writing strategies.

The challenge of literacy development in the twenty-first century is that there is a need to maintain an appropriate balance between the conventional and the novel. There is a need to observe certain literacy standards in academia, while allowing scope for creative and unconventional use of the language in reading and writing in line with the inclusive modern literacy environment. In such a complex literacy arena, there is also a need for useful strategies to support the development of different types of literacy skills to help university students function as competent members of academia and the educated public.

There is also a need for further research on university students' literacy concepts and practices to inform curriculum planning to suit modern digital developments. The findings will also be useful for working out useful strategies to support and facilitate students' literacy development.

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