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Sibomana, Emmanuel

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CHALLENGES FACED BY POSTGRADUATE FRENCH SPEAKING STUDENTS WHO ARE LEARNING IN ENGLISH: A CASE STUDY OF RWANDAN STUDENTS IN THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

Emmanuel Sibomana

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Award of the Degree of Master of Arts in English Language Education

Johannesburg, March 2010

DECLARATION

I, Emmanuel Sibomana, declare that this research report is my own original unaided work. It has never been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university. I am submitting it for the degree of Master of Arts in English Language Education at the Faculty of Humanities of the University of the Witwatersrand.

Signed …….

11 March 2010

DEDICATION

To Marie Jeanne Myirandamira, my beloved wife;

To Rebecca Ashimwe-Umuhoza, my daughter;

To Athalie, my mother and Jonas, my late father;

To my brothers, sisters and friends.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I thank the Almighty God, for all the blessings He bestowed upon me, particularly during the course of my Masters studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am also thankful to the Government of Rwanda for funding of my studies through the Students' Financing Agency for Rwanda (SFAR).

The present work is the fruit of the combined efforts of many people to whom I am sincerely grateful. In a particular way, I am indebted to Ms. Yvonne Reed who, despite many other commitments, eagerly accepted to supervise this work. Her encouragement and advice during the course of this work are worth acknowledging. May she find here my heartfelt gratitude.

I am also grateful to all lecturers of the Applied English Language Studies (AELS) Department in the School of Education in the University of the Witwatersrand. I particularly acknowledge the contribution of Professor Hilary Janks through the course of Research Design which made me more familiar with the world of research. The other lecturers include Ms Stella Granville, Dr Pinky Makoe and Dr Kerryn Dixon.

I am also indebted to all the Rwandan postgraduate students studying in the Wits School of Education in 2009 who participated in this research. I hope that this work will contribute to the improvement of the learning support offered to them by the university and to their success in their studies.

Last, but not least, my thanks go to my family in general, and to my beloved wife Marie Jeanne Nyirandamira in particular, for enduring my absence from home during the course of my studies at Wits. Equally, Rebecca Ashimwe – Umuhoza, my daughter, cheered me up and this increased my courage. I am grateful to all friends that I made during my Masters studies at Wits including Agostinho, Babazile, Daniela, Pamela, Jacinta and Beverly. I also acknowledge the spiritual and moral support of all Wits SDASM members, especially Boa, Sbusiso, Zukisa, Kathleho, Zinhle, Michel and James. God bless all those who, in one way or another, have contributed to the completion of this work.

ABSTRACT

It is widely recognized that language plays a central role in learning (Evans and Green, 2007; Abasi and Graves, 2008). Rollnick (2000, p.95) argues that "language is the link between the learner and the teacher." Stressing the importance of English as a medium of instruction, Hyland (2002, p.2) points out that "for college and university students in many countries, mastering English, and the right English, to succeed in learning their subjects through the medium of English in textbooks, lectures, study groups and so on is a matter of great urgency." According to a number of scholars (Burke and Wyatt-Smith, 1996; Cummins, 1996; Cadman, 2000; Deem and Brehony, 2000 and Evans and Green, 2007) second language speakers of English are likely to experience difficulties in using this language in their studies, since it is a language that they have not yet fully mastered.

One aim of this qualitative research project was to understand the challenges faced by a group of Rwandan French-speaking postgraduate students in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, who are now learning and researching in English. A second aim was to understand the strategies used by the students to address these challenges and a third aim was to investigate the degree and kind of institutional support offered to these students. Questionnaires were administered to 22 students and interviews were conducted with four students and three lecturers/supervisors. Artefacts such as assignment tasks and lecturers' feedback on assignments and research work also contributed to the data.

Findings from the case study suggest that these postgraduate students' previous 'ways with words' (Heath, 1983) differ from those of the institution in which they are now studying. The main difference is that their previous educational institutions adopted a predominantly "banking approach" to education, while the University of the Witwatersrand adopts mainly a "problem posing approach" (Freire, 1968). Moreover, the use of 'academic English', which is a genre of English itself (Rollnick, 2000; Paxton, 2007), is a great challenge especially for those who did not use this language as a medium of instruction in their previous studies.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AELS: Applied English Language Studies

BA: Bachelor of Arts

BSc: Bachelor of Science

BPES: Bureau Pédagogique de l'Enseignement Secondaire

EAP: English for Academic Purposes

EAL: English Additional Language

ELL: English Language Learner

ESL: English as a Second Language

Hons: Honours

IELTS: International English Language Testing System

KIE: Kigali Institute of Education

L2: Second Language

MEd: Master of Education

MINECOFIN: Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning

NES: Native English Speakers

NNES: Non Native English Speakers

PGDE: Postgraduate Diploma of Education

PhD: Doctor of Philosophy

SDASM: Seventh Day Adventist Students' Movement

SFAR: Students' Financing Agency for Rwanda

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

TOEFL: Test Of English as a Foreign Language

TV: Television

UG: Universal Grammar

Wits: University of the Witwatersrand

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The internationalization of postgraduate education is a well established item on the agendas of many universities. Such universities promote themselves as welcoming international postgraduate students[1] through their internationalization programmes (Cadman, 2000). Todd (1997), in Cadman (2000, p.476), points out that "there is an influx of postgraduates into many universities. Many of these scholars may bring distinctive learning traditions and find our academic contexts different from their previous experiences in terms of expectations and academic requirements." While these international postgraduate students may have to make adjustments to adapt to the new systems, the universities may also find it necessary to change some of their practices in order to accommodate these students and to respond to their needs.

One of the most challenging adjustments that international postgraduate students may be faced with involves studying in a language (of that institution) that they have only previously encountered as a subject and not as a medium of instruction. It is widely considered that the ability to use the language of the institution is central to academic success (Evans and Green, 2007; Abasi and Graves, 2008). Kramsch (1993), in Burke and Wyatt-Smith (1996, p.2), points out that "learning involves thinking about, reflecting on and solving cultural problems with language." Thus, language plays a central role in the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge. Ability to use proficiently the language of instruction and research in a particular institution contributes to success; difficulties in using the language contribute to problems experienced by students in completing their studies (Deem and Brehony, 2000).

[1] Abasi and Graves (2008) define international students as students who come from different parts of the world to study in countries other than their own.

Among the languages used in academic settings, English takes the lead on a global scale. Bhatt (2001, p.529) quotes Kachru (1992a) who stated: "now at the dawn of the twenty-first century, we are witnessing John Adam's prophecy coming true: that English will become the most respected and universally read and spoken language in the world." Crystal (1997), in Altbach (2004, p.9), argues that "English is the Latin of the 21st century. In the current period, the use of English is central to communicating knowledge worldwide, for instruction even in countries where English is not the language of higher education, and for cross-border degree arrangements and other programmes." English plays a crucial role in the academic field because it is the medium of instruction in many of the prominent academic systems, all of which enrol large numbers of overseas students. The role of English affects higher education policy and the work of individual students and scholars. English language products of all kinds dominate the international academic marketplace. This is especially true for journals and books (Altbach, 2004). In the same vein, Phillipson (1997, p.5) cites Burchfield (1985) who argues that "English has become a lingua franca to the point that any literate educated person is in a very real sense deprived if he does not know English." Thus, it seems that anyone who wants to participate in the international academic world needs to familiarize him/herself with English and be able to use it effectively.

The argument above probably explains in part why some countries, such as Rwanda and Mozambique, are switching from other languages to English as a medium of instruction at all levels. This means that the ability to use English is becoming a necessity for academic success. This situation has led Hyland (2002, p.2) to argue that "for college and university students in many countries, mastering English, and the right English, to succeed in learning their subjects through the medium of English in textbooks, lectures, study groups and so on is a matter of great urgency."

Learning a new language and being able to use it also involves learning a great deal about the community in which the language is used. This is especially the case when one needs to live and/or work in this community. Zamel (1993, p.3) emphasizes this by claiming that "it is clear that being acculturated into a new academic community does not simply

involve practicing the discipline-specific language, norms and conventions that many textbooks on academic reading and writing seem to imply." Thus, entering and adapting to a foreign academic community is another challenge that international students are likely to face.

Notwithstanding the above challenges, the number of international students continues to increase, partly because many countries find it necessary to send their citizens to study abroad, especially in fields and at levels that these countries' education systems do not offer. For example, the government of Rwanda has identified education as one of the six pillars of development in the country's vision 2020 which aims to build a human capital (MINECOFIN, 2007). This central African country is now restructuring its educational sector to improve the quality of education while at the same time increasing the enrolment of students in schools and universities. Within this framework, the Rwandan government is sending many of its citizens abroad to study in areas of specialization that are not established in its universities, especially at the postgraduate level.

1.2 Background to the research

According to Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, "the growth of English as the leading language for the dissemination of academic knowledge has transformed the educational experiences of countless students who must now gain fluency in the conventions of English academic discourses to understand the disciplines and to successfully navigate their learning" (2002, p.1). French speaking postgraduate students who enrol for tertiary education at universities in which English is the medium of instruction find themselves in this situation. They have to carry out their studies in English, a language they may not be competent enough to use in their academic work. Bearing in mind that being able to use the language of instruction is one of the main factors in academic success (Evans and Green, 2007), these students are likely to face a number of challenges in their academic life. Myles and Cheng (2003, p. 247) point out that "research has shown that international non native English speaking (NNES) students face many difficulties in their adjustment to higher education in English speaking western-style universities."

Many Rwandan postgraduate students, who went through their undergraduate studies in Rwanda used French as the medium of instruction, and then used this language together with Kinyarwanda in their work places. Some of them studied English as a school subject, but others are likely not to have encountered this language in their previous studies, depending on which schools they attended.

Concerning the history of English in Rwanda, in the early 1960s the teaching of English as a foreign language was introduced in secondary schools. It was allocated six lessons per week to arts pupils and two lessons to others. In 1975, the National Curriculum commission published the "Official English Programme" to be used in secondary schools. Later in 1976, an English language section charged with standardizing English programmes in all secondary schools and organizing English teacher training and seminars was created in BPES (National Office for Secondary School Curriculum Development). Similarly, an English language department was created at the National University of Rwanda but it was not until the early 1990s that English was introduced in Radio Rwanda broadcasts.

After the 1994 genocide, many Rwandan citizens who had been exiled to foreign countries and those who were born while in exile came back home. Many of them had been in Anglophone countries and spoke English. Some did not speak either French or Kinyarwanda while others spoke only one of these languages. Yet these two languages were the ones widely used in Rwanda at that time. In respect of these citizens' rights and in order to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities, English was made an official language as stipulated by the 2003 Constitution, in its article 5: "the national language is Kinyarwanda. Official languages are Kinyarwanda, French and English." Since then, English was expected to be used alongside French and Kinyarwanda in all areas of life in Rwanda. Some secondary schools introduced English as a medium of instruction to accommodate Anglophone students. Today, English is taught as a subject at all levels of education and used as a medium of instruction from upper primary to tertiary education in Rwanda. English is also used on the national radio and television stations and on other private radio stations as well as in printed media. It is a lingua franca for commerce, law

and other facets of human life for Rwanda and other member countries in the East African Community.

However, reports from the Rwandan third National Census of Population and Housing of August 2002 reveal that foreign languages (French, English and Kiswahili) are spoken by very few people as figures in the tables below illustrate[2]. This can partly be attributed to the fact that Rwanda is a homogeneous linguistic community where all the citizens speak the same mother tongue: Kinyarwanda.

Speakers / Language	Number of monolingual speakers	Percentage
Kinyarwanda	7,420,785	91.29
Kiswahili	4,709	0.05
French	3,032	0.03
English	938	0.01

Table 1: Distribution of monolingual speakers of major languages spoken in Rwanda

Speakers / Language	Number of speakers	Percentage
Kinyarwanda	7,916,026	99.4
Kiswahili	310,588	3.9
French	151,312	1.9
English	238,914	3.0

Table 2: Distribution of monolingual and multilingual speakers of the main languages spoken in Rwanda

The data in these tables indicate that using English for communication in Rwanda is rare. Only 0.01% of the Rwandan population use English on a regular basis since it is the only

[2] The data presented in the above tables were taken from the 3rd National Census of Population and Housing Report of August 2002, Kigali, Rwanda

language they can speak in Rwanda. As for the multilingual speakers of English, they are likely not to use it most of their time, since they interact with other Rwandans with whom they share at least one of the other languages spoken in this country. This suggests that Rwandan postgraduates at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) are likely not to have had many opportunities for using English in their own country**.** Therefore, their challenges related to the use of English as a medium of instruction and for research at the postgraduate level are likely to be considerable and worth researching. These challenges include the one of becoming insiders in an English academic community and culture. That is why this study aimed to achieve the following aims:

- To identify and analyse the challenges facing Rwandan French speaking postgraduate students in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand;
- To identify and analyse how these challenges affect these students' academic activities;
- To identify and analyse the strategies that these students are adopting to address these challenges;
- To identify and analyse the support that the institution is offering them in this regard.

Since the raison d'être of all research is to find answers to questions, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

- What are the challenges facing Rwandan French speaking postgraduate students in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand?
- How do these challenges affect their academic activities?
- What do these students do to address these challenges?
- What is the nature of the institutional support available for these students?

1.3 Rationale

English has become the only medium of instruction at all levels of education in Rwanda as recommended by the Rwandan Cabinet in October 2008.[3] It has replaced French which had been used during and after the colonial era. Thus, people who were used to studying in French are likely to face a number of challenges in their academic work. Equally, teachers and lecturers who were used to teaching in French might find it difficult to switch to English. The educational system itself might find it difficult to implement this policy at the beginning, for it is not easy to teach people who are not competent in the language of instruction. As revealed by the Rwandan Minister of Education, one of the main challenges in education in Rwanda today is the successful use of English as a medium of instruction.[4]

As a person who teaches at the undergraduate level at one of the Rwandan institutions of higher learning, I am interested in problems faced by French speaking students in higher institutions of learning in Rwanda, who now have to study in English. However, the time and means available to me could not allow me to go back to Rwanda to collect data about these students. But it is possible that the challenges faced by students in Rwanda are not very different from those faced by French speaking postgraduate students at other universities which teach in English. That is why I decided to focus my study on Rwandan French speaking students in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, hoping that my findings could inform educational language policy makers, teachers and students in Rwanda. In addition to that, all the student participants in this research are agents in the Rwandan education system. Fourteen of them are lecturers ad/or researchers in institutions of higher learning in Rwanda, three work in the Ministry of Education while the other five are directors of education in various districts.

[3] Available at http://www.primature.gov.rw/, accessed on 5 May 2009

[4] The Minister of Education, Dr. Charles Murigande told partners at the 9th Education Sector Review meeting that the challenges that the education sector is facing are high dropout rates and the successful implementation of English as a language of instruction. (*The New Times* of 21 October 2009)

It is clear that these people have a major role in the implementation of the policy of using English as a medium of instruction: some will be teaching and/or researching in this language after their studies, while others will be monitoring this implementation. Thus, the findings of this study can inform them about appropriate responses to the problems that are likely to arise due to the shift from French to English as a medium of instruction.
The other reason why I decided to undertake this research is that postgraduate studies in Rwanda are considered as an investment in the country's development since postgraduate students are supposed to play a key role in its economy. They will play this role by researching, creating and disseminating knowledge, through the medium of English. As Belcher (1994) and Todd (1997), quoted by Cadman (2000, p.482), put it, postgraduate students need to be contributing members of their disciplines. For these students to be able to effectively play this role, they need to be successful in their studies. Such success depends partly on the mastery of English as a language for research and for dissemination of knowledge in their careers as administrators, lecturers or researchers.

As Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002, p.4) put it,

> There is a concern with the English language skills of nonnative English speaking academics, especially those teaching and researching in non-English language countries where English is used as a medium of university instruction. Effective classroom delivery through English, presentation through good lecture notes and slides, the ability to carry out the administrative work of the institution in English, to attend meetings, to engage in email debates; and above all, to conduct research and publish the results and discussion of the research in English are demanded."

This description fits the situation of the Rwandan postgraduate students, particularly French speaking ones, who have the challenge of carrying out their professional duties in English. This research focused on this challenge and aimed to inform policy about how this challenge can be addressed, not only by those students at the University of the Witwatersrand, but also by those in Rwanda and elsewhere who might be facing similar challenges.

1.4 Chapter outline

This research report is divided into six chapters as follows:

Chapter one: General introduction

Chapter two: Literature review

Chapter three: Methodology

Chapter four: Challenges facing Rwandan French speaking postgraduate students at the wits school of education

Chapter five: Strategies adopted by students and by the University to address a range of challenges

Chapter six: General conclusion, recommendations, limitations of the study and avenues for further research

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

There is a strong relationship between language and learning at all levels of education (Gee, 1996). However, while there is an extensive theoretical and empirical literature in the area of learning, the focus of this project is postgraduate students' use of a foreign language (see section 2.2.2) for learning and research. This chapter provides an overview of language use in learning and research in general, and of using a second/additional language for learning and for research at the postgraduate level, in particular.

2.2 Language and its role in the learning process

As has been mentioned above, there is a strong correlation between language and learning. This section gives brief definitions of the two concepts and addresses the role that language plays in the process of learning.

2.2.1 Learning

Ranson et al. (1996, p.12) state that "learning is a process of discovery that generates new understanding about ourselves and the world around us. Learning provides a sense of discovery. Something new enters our experience through learning so as to alter what we know or can do." This general definition implies that as human beings we are involved in learning throughout our lives. Hence, we keep on discovering things around us and acquiring a number of experiences both consciously and unconsciously. For Wenger (1998, p.215), "because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an expression of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a

process of becoming – to become a certain person or, conversely, to avoid becoming a certain person." In other words, we keep on changing and acquiring new identities as we are engaged in learning. Thus, learning cannot be separated from identity.

According to Cliff (1998, p.211), "[L]earning is the acquisition of knowledge and the reproduction of this knowledge for utilitarian purposes." Here, Cliff is narrowing the scope of learning, by introducing the idea of purpose, which makes learning conscious and purposeful. It is this purposeful learning that is central to the activities of teachers and learners in educational institutions, especially universities. In these institutions, learning is facilitated by teachers but it is mainly the responsibility of learners. For example, Biggs (2003, p.2) argues that "learning is the result of students' learning–focused activities which are engaged in by students as a result of both their own perceptions and inputs, and of the total teaching context." Therefore, students are not passive, but active participants in the teaching/learning process. Similarly, Cowan (1998), quoted by Biggs (2003, p.27), describes the role of teaching as "a purposeful creating of situations from which motivated learners should not be able to escape without learning or developing. This is deep learning by definition." For Cowan and Biggs the teacher is an organizer of the learning context in which learners learn.

2.2.2 Second/additional language and foreign language

According to Saussure (1972), in Garmadi (1982), language is a system of vocal signs owned by human society, to enable its members to communicate. This definition implies that language is a possession of a given society and its members acquire it as their mother tongue. Richards et al. (1992) define a mother tongue as the language that a person acquires in early childhood, because it is spoken in the family and/or it is the language of the country where he or she is living. In addition to the mother tongue, many people acquire other languages, a situation which gives rise to bilingualism or multilingualism (the situation whereby a person speaks two or more languages fluently). As noted by Wardhaugh (2002, p.98), "bilingualism and multilingualism are normal in many parts of

the world and people in those parts would view any other situation as strange and limiting."

Apart from cases where children are exposed to more than one language from their birth, and thus grow up bilingual or multilingual, people acquire one language in their childhood and others later. These other languages are referred to variously as second, additional, or foreign languages. Fasold and Connor-Linton (2006, p.434) suggest that "broadly speaking, a second language refers to any language learned after one's first language, no matter how many others have been learned." However, some linguists and language educators distinguish between second and foreign languages. According to Richards et al. (1992, p.142), a foreign language is "a language which is not a native language in a country. A foreign language is usually studied either for communication with foreigners who speak the language, or for reading printed materials in the language". In some regions, such as in North America, 'foreign language' and 'second language' are often used interchangeably. However, Richards et al. (1992) point out that in British usage, a distinction is made between the two terms. These scholars note that "a foreign language is a language which is taught as a school subject but which is not used as a medium of instruction in schools nor as a language of communication within a country" (p.143). The Rwandan students who completed the questionnaire for this research studied English in the above circumstances and this language is foreign to them. Despite the fact that English is now used as a medium of instruction in Rwandan education, this language is still a foreign language because it is not used in daily communication.

According to Richards et al. (1992, p.143), "a second language is a language which is not a native language in a country but which is widely used as a medium of communication alongside another language or languages". It is important to note that some scholars use the term 'additional language' instead of second language. For instance, all South African curriculum documents use the term 'additional language'.

The acquisition process of the first language differs from the second language acquisition process in many respects, one of which is that the first language is acquired during childhood while in many cases the second is acquired at an older age. According to nativists such as Chomsky, there is an innate linguistic knowledge called Universal Grammar (UG), which is believed to guide all language learning (Fasold and Connor-Linton, 2006). Nativists claim that this UG facilitates first language acquisition, but is no longer available at a certain age. According to Fasold and Connor-Linton (2006, p.442) "such researchers [nativists] argue that once a learner has passed a critical (or sensitive) period for language acquisition (typically placed around the age of puberty), the Language Acquisition Device atrophies and the knowledge it contains (i.e. UG) is no longer available to help guide the second language acquisition." Many authors have discussed this issue (e.g.Yule, 1985; Ellis, 1986; Lightbown and Spada, 1996), without determining exactly at what age the critical period ends, and in which aspects of language young learners are better than old ones.

Findings from research studies suggest that learners who are acquiring the same language might achieve different levels of proficiency depending on their individual differences and the context in which they are acquiring the language. Fasold and Connor-Linton (2006) divide context in second language learning into two categories: the environment context and the linguistic context in which learning occurs. The latter category is concerned with issues such as the topic of the conversation, the meanings that can be gleaned from surrounding discourse and (more socially) the person whom the learner is interacting with. Fasold and Connor-Linton (2006, p.449) state that "there is increasing evidence that both sorts of contextual factors may affect the second language learning process." It is from the linguistic context that the learner is to find the input that he or she needs to be exposed to in the second language acquisition process. According to Krashen (1985), language is picked up or acquired when learners are exposed to input which is slightly above their existing understanding and from which they can infer meaning.

Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis suggests that the more the language is used in the environment surrounding the learner, the better he or she is likely to master the language.

For instance, Rwandans who grew up in English speaking countries speak English more fluently and accurately than many of those who acquired/learned it in Rwanda. One of the reasons for this difference is that the latter have not been exposed to enough English language input, since this language was and is still not widely spoken in the country. This limited access to input applies even to academic milieus in Rwanda where English is supposed to be widely spoken. For instance, in research conducted by Sibomana in 2006 about the use of English at Kigali Institute of Education (KIE), it was found that English use was still limited. Sibomana's findings indicate that English accounted for only 40% of the language used in senate meetings and for only 1% of the language used in administrative council meetings of this institution. Bearing in mind that these meetings are formal and official in nature, one can imagine the minimal extent to which English is used in daily communication. This lack of opportunity to access English is a problem especially for students and other Rwandans who are required to know English for success in their careers.

2.2.3 Language and learning

As has been noted, one of the definitions of learning focuses on the acquisition and reproduction of knowledge (Cliff, 1998). I have also mentioned that learning (as the term is used in this research) presupposes the presence of two types of people who communicate with each other: the learner and the teacher. It is through this communication that learning takes place by teachers introducing learners to knowledge and helping them internalize it, while learners can ask for clarification about or clarify certain concepts as well. Thus, the teaching/learning process is basically communicative.

Communication is the primary function of language and without the latter, the former is hardly possible. In fact, language and communication are two interrelated concepts, as underscored in the following assertion: "the definition of each (language and communication) implies the other; that is, any definition of language must include a communication function, and it is equally impossible to define communication without

reference to a linguistic component."[5] In short, language is a tool for communication. Therefore, bearing in mind that learning is principally a communication based event (including 'communication' between a text and a reader), there is no doubt that language plays a central role in learning. Rollnick (2000, p.95) suggests that "language is the link between the learner and the teacher." For Shuy, "language is the foundation for education because so many activities in life are conducted in language" (1984, p. 167). Stressing the importance of language (particularly English) in education, Gee (1996, p. 68), argues that "like it or not, the English teacher stands at the very heart of the most crucial educational, cultural and political issues of our time."

2.2.4 Learning in a second/additional language

It follows from the statements in the above section that language proficiency is one of the main factors in educational success. Thus, learners who are not competent in the language used as a medium of instruction are likely to face a number of challenges in their studies.

It has been noted by a number of scholars (Burke and Wyatt-Smith, 1996; Cummins, 1996; Cadman, 2000; Deem and Brehony, 2000 and Evans and Green, 2007) that second language speakers of the medium of instruction are likely to experience difficulties in using this language. For instance, Rollnick in her discussion of language in the science classroom points out that "second language learners in formal schooling situations are doubly challenged, in their need to learn both the social practice of the language and its place in the new practice they are attempting to join" (2000, p.98). This situation is likely to disadvantage students in the sense that it makes learning a heavier burden. In fact, "even first language English [or any other language] speakers recognize scientific discourse as a type of English, but not like the one they commonly use, and are alienated by it" (Halliday and Martin, 1993 in Rollnick, 2000, p.96).

5 Available online at http://books.google.com/books, accessed on 4 May 2009

If the above is the case for native speakers of the language used as a medium of instruction, the challenge must be more serious for non native speakers of that language. In such a situation, first language speakers need to learn to speak the language of science, while the second language learners have to talk the language of science through the medium of a second language, for example, English (Rollnick, 2000). This must be why Rollnick, (2000, p.100) states that "expecting students to learn a new and difficult subject through the medium of second language is unreasonable, giving them a double task of mastering both science content and language." As she goes on to argue, "the learning of a new language is itself part of another social practice. So, a learner learning science through a second language is trying to become initiated into two social practices at once" (2000, p.100).

Cummins (1996) argues that a task in which a first language student succeeds with little contextual support might be more challenging for a second language student because of limitations in her current English language abilities. This means that second language learners might be intelligent enough to handle the material, but the language in which they are not competent becomes an obstacle to understanding or to expressing what they know. For instance, in a study conducted by Burke and Wyatt-Smith on difficulties faced by non English speaking background students, one student expressed his problems in the following terms: "it is not that I don't understand the content. I know what I want to write, but I sometimes find it difficult to put into words so the writing [in English] flows" (1996, p.8). By the same token, the findings of Evans and Green's (2007) study suggest that subjects experienced greater difficulty with language, rather than content or structure of the academic texts. In the same vein, Turner (2004, p.104) argues that "students need to be able to manipulate language in order to show their understanding of, or be able to negotiate with/argue over content, and therefore, language proficiency is as important as content knowledge." Language related difficulties are likely to be greater if university students have to use a language that they have not used as a medium of instruction in their previous studies (Burke and Wyatt-Smith, 1996).

However, studying through a second language also has advantages in some respects. For instance, Leki and Carson (1994, p.104) argue that "living and studying in the second language (L2) environment provides learners with exposure to rich and authentic language input and with opportunities to produce extensive and meaningful language outputs. In theories of SLA[6], exposure to such input and practices in producing language are generally accepted as essential conditions for successful SLA". Given that the learner is living in an environment where the target language is used, his/her mastery of the language is likely to be enhanced. These learners are also more likely to use the target language since they have to interact with its native speakers. This output practice is now regarded as more important than input, particularly for the development of productive skills such as writing (Leki and Carson, 1994). That is why some Rwandan parents are now sending their children to study in the East African English speaking countries: they want them to be able to communicate in this language through their everyday exposure to and use of it.

To return to the use of language in learning, it is recognized that all the four language skills traditionally associated with additional or foreign language learning are involved in academic work to different degrees; but writing seems to be the most important skill, as far as evaluation of students is concerned "because students' grades are largely determined by their performance in written assignments, tests and examinations" (Leki and Carson, 1994, p.82). Therefore, being able to write an academic text is a key to success in the academic field. In fact, "university requirements implicitly support the notion that the ability to write well is integral to academic success. The ability to write well is necessary both to achieve academic success and to demonstrate that achievement" (Leki and Carson, 1994, p.83). For Cummins (1996, p.85), "writing on a daily basis is especially important for second language learners because it requires them to engage with the most sophisticated aspects of academic language." Thus, writing is not only a way of expressing oneself; it is also a way of becoming familiar with the language.

[6] Second Language Acquisition

While writing skills are very important, they are also very demanding in an academic context. Indeed, "academic writing generally involves cognitive activities such as reading and synthesizing information from a variety of sources, and producing a text which shows evidence of features associated with good academic writing" (Storch, 2009, p.105). These activities become more complicated when one has to write in a second language which he/she is not competent in. Lee (2005, p.492) confirms this, noting that "ELLs[7] frequently confront the demands of academic learning through a yet-unmastered language." For Rollnick, (2000) the verbal facility comes far more easily for ESL learners, and the struggle is usually to improve academic writing, especially at the tertiary level.

As for reading skills, Cummins (1996, p.80) argues that reading is "crucial as a source of comprehensible input to accelerate students' academic growth. Reading is essential for students to get access to the language of the text. This language is different from the language of interpersonal conversation." Concerning the reading demands of university courses, one student in Abasi and Graves' study said: "for ESL students, materials are difficult to read. It is even challenging for students for whom English is a first language. For students for whom English is a second language, they have difficulty dealing with subject matter and the language and with construction of ideas" (2008, p.225).

In their study, Evans and Green (2007, p.13) found out that "listening is of rather less concern since students had abilities to understand lectures delivered in English. However, it was also revealed that students rely far more on written texts than spoken texts in acquiring discipline related knowledge." This makes reading also important for students, since they get a large amount of knowledge from written documents such as books, journals, etc. One can speculate that one of the reasons for this reliance on the written texts is that students have time to read and re-read them for understanding. They can seek their colleagues' help and/or use dictionaries to understand the material. This kind of time is not available for spoken texts. It follows from the above that students with limited

[7] English Language Learners

proficiency in English need to work doubly hard when reading in English, as they have to both overcome language difficulties and understand the subject matter of the material.

With reference to the use of English (or any language) in an academic context, it is important to note that knowing 'everyday' language is not enough for one to be successful in academic activities. For example, Kutz et al. (1993, p.78) point out that "students who do not adequately represent their ideas in the language expected in the academic world are seen as not having any ideas, as being incapable of doing academic work, and they are encouraged in subtle (and not so subtle) ways to leave it." In a study conducted by Cadman, one student said: "in exams, lecturers did not understand what I wanted to say. Although I wrote what the lecturer wanted, I couldn't get the results expected. This was because of my English and because of the fact that I couldn't express myself clearly" (2000, p.482). In fact, "less knowledge of language itself is usually required to function appropriately in interpersonal communicative situations, than is required in academic situations" (Cummins, 1996, p.62).

Gibbons (1991), in Cummins (1996, p.57), argues that "everyday language is not associated with the higher order thinking skills such as hypothesizing, evaluating, inferring, generalizing, predicting or classifying. Yet these are the language functions which are related to learning and development of cognition." In a university, disciplinary studies require mastery of academic discourses. Bartholomae (1986), in Zamel (1993, p.1), defines academic discourse as "a specialized form of reading and thinking used in the 'academy' or other schooling situations." Academic discourse has been referred to as the "peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (Cummins, 1996, p.80). Thus, the language used on academy is different from and more demanding than the everyday language.

Students are required to acquire this discourse if they are to be successful in their academic life. Bartholomae (1986), quoted by Zamel, challenges students by stating: "they must learn to speak our language" (1993, p.1) while Rose states: "[T]hey have to speak as we do, to try peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting,

concluding and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (1985, p.134). At the same time, Gee (1990), quoted by Leibowitz and Mohamed (2000, p.22), states that "academic discourse is more acquired than learned; it is likely to be difficult and take time to induct students into it." In addition to this, Leibowitz and Mohamed argue that "for students unfamiliar with the conventions of academic writing and its practices, the need to learn these conventions may provide a triple burden, in conjunction with the burdens imposed by language difference" (2000, p.22). Interestingly, in addition to learning a language, such students have also to learn new social practices of the community they are joining. Gee's view, is that "learning a new discourse involves learning a combination of language and ways of behaving and believing" (Gee, 1990, in Burke and Wyatt-Smith, 1996, p.2). Thus, the challenge becomes even greater in the sense that they have to learn so many things at the same time.

Despite these challenges, additional language students have no choice but to acquire this discourse. As Heaton (1975, p.103) puts it, "they (students) require different language skills. The ability to follow lectures in English and to take notes, the ability to write reports and to make valuable contributions in seminars and tutorials and the ability to use appropriate and effective strategies for reading books and papers – all these are new abilities that students must strive to possess." These challenges seem to be weightier for postgraduate students in the sense that more is expected from them in terms of knowledge. They have to read and write more than undergraduate students, for they are supposed to contribute to knowledge production.

2.3 Challenges for postgraduate students learning and researching in a second/additional language

As has been mentioned previously, postgraduate students are expected to make a significant contribution in their respective disciplines (Cadman, 2000) and to disseminate knowledge through research and publications. In addition to that, Eley and Jennings (2005) argue the days of acquiring knowledge by sitting at the feet of a great researcher

are long gone. This means that students have to rely far more on their own search for knowledge, than on their lecturers' support.

A postgraduate degree involves not just the preparation and presentation of a thesis that contains some original material, but also in many instances a programme of study in which a student learns a wide variety of skills. These skills are not only necessary for him or her to carry out research, but also useful in the employment they may take up after their degree (Potter, 2006). It is clear that achieving the above is not easy, especially if one has to do it in a language he or she is not comfortable with. The situation is worse for international postgraduate students since they find themselves in new education systems. It is in this context that Deem and Brehony (2000, p.153) state that "there is often a difficult period of transition into becoming a research student, and this may take much longer for international students, who need to absorb a new education system and a new way of life, often separated from their families and away from their friends."

According to Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002, p.2), "the growth of English as the leading language for dissemination of academic knowledge has had a major impact around the world, binding the careers of thousands of scholars to their competence in a foreign language and elevating this competence to a professional imperative." For many people, including postgraduate Rwandan French speaking students at the University of the Witwatersrand, English is an additional language studied as a subject and/or acquired outside the school system. Thus, they may not be very comfortable using this language, which is likely to be a source of problems in their studies. Burke and Wyatt-Smith (1996) found that postgraduate students who had not used English as a medium of instruction at undergraduate level had difficulties in writing their assignments, while those who had English as a medium of instruction at the same level were confident about their ability to successfully complete postgraduate academic tasks. This suggests that using a language as a medium of instruction at the undergraduate level is an advantage for postgraduate studies in the same language.

Postgraduate research in the humanities is mainly about reading, observing and writing. According to Johns, "there is an increasing agreement in upper division/graduate levels that writing is the most important. This is attributed to the graduate thesis requirement" (1981, p.54). Thus, if students who speak English as a second language experience difficulties in writing assignments, it is likely to be even more difficult for them to write a research report or thesis. Almost all of the participants in Burke and Wyatt-Smith's (1996) study reported that writing was their greatest difficulty since there were differences between their first language and English. It is very difficult to make other people understand one's idea if one cannot express it clearly in the language. That is why Turner (2004, p.108) posits that "accurate language use, especially in written language, is part of the academic message."

Postgraduate students are also expected to read widely and discuss new concepts (Heaton, 1975). Thus it can be argued that reading is equally important in postgraduate research. In their study, Burke and Wyatt-Smith (1996) found that for some students from countries where English is not the main medium of instruction, unfamiliar terminology caused them to read slowly and waste time using bilingual dictionaries and rereading, which reduces the time devoted to actual studies. These scholars also point out that these students reported difficulties in listening to the English used by the lecturers and the students. These findings suggest that the challenges facing postgraduate students who have not used English as a medium of instruction at undergraduate level are likely to be enormous.

With regards to research outside the school context by English second language speakers or speakers of other languages, language problems have been found to be a serious limitation to their contribution to the world of knowledge. In fact, "English has become the language through which access to global academic communities is possible; publishing in English has become the only way scholars' work can be disseminated" (Uzuner, 2008, p.253). Thus, multilingual scholars face the challenge of writing and publishing in English so as to have influence on the world of knowledge. After all, "writing according to the conventions specified by a discourse community is a complex

endeavour. It becomes even more complex if the same task is undertaken in a second language" (Duszak and Lewkowicz, 2008 in Uzuner, 2008, p.255).

For instance, empirical evidence shows that failure to fulfil the requirements of core academic communities decreases multilingual scholars' academic writing in genres such as journal articles, as it leads to editorial rejections (Duszak and Lewkowicz, 2008 in Uzuner, 2008). Apparently, most of these rejections are done on the basis of language correctness rather than on the subject matter of the articles. Flowerdew (2001), quoted by Uzuner (2008, p.251), writes that limited participation of multilingual scholars in global scholarship will impoverish knowledge production, given that multilingual scholars are a main pillar of global scholarship. Therefore, these scholars should be helped to overcome their language difficulties so that they can use their knowledge for the benefit of the larger scholarly world.

Another challenge faced by international students is that of adapting to literacy practices of their institutions. Jones et al. (1999, p.111) point out that "literacy practices are at the heart of study and learning in higher education; these are central ways in which students learn new subjects and develop their knowledge about new areas of study." Given this importance of literacy in higher education and the fact that each community has its own literacy practices (Gee, 1996), students need to familiarize themselves with the literacy practices of their institutions for them to be successful in their studies.

While different institutions of higher learning have different literacy practices, "students [also] come to their studies with other more familiar practices of literacy and attempt to adapt these to their studies with varying degrees of success" (Jones et al., 1999, p.111). The degree of success of these students in adapting these practices to their studies depends on the degree of similarity between the two types of practices, among other factors. In effect, the more similar the two types of practices are, the more successful the students are likely to be in adapting to the new ones. For instance, in her research on students' interim literacies as a dynamic resource for teaching and transformation, Paxton (2007, p.47) noted that "some students had been exposed to middle class literacy

practices both at home and at school and these coincided quite closely with those taught at university. Therefore, the acquisition of the new academic language was probably a lot less challenging for these students." On the other hand, this scholar points out that EAL (English Additional Language) students from different discourses and traditions faced real challenges of gaining access to academic discourses (2007, p.52). It is true that the acquisition of academic discourses is easier for some students, but all students need to learn it because "academic language is ... no one's mother tongue, not even that of children of the cultivated class" (Bourdieu, Passeron and Saint Martin, 1994 quoted in Paxton, 2007, p.47).

According to Sheridan et al. (2000, p.3), "literacy means the ways that people use written language in their daily lives." Narrowing literacy (or discourse) to academic settings, Clark and Ivanic (1997) state that academic discourse refers to the way people talk and write in higher education. Even though talking is also part of the academic discourse, writing seems to be the most important skill in university studies because, as stated by Jones et al. (1999), it (writing) is entirely integrated with all aspects of a student's academic life given that mastery of academic writing is the hallmark of success for any student at university. That is why the discussion of students' adaptation to institutional literacy practices in this section will focus mainly on writing. Since writing cannot be separated from the writer's identity (Clark and Ivanic, 1997), the issue of identity in writing will also be addressed.

According to Clark and Ivanic (1997), some students find it difficult to write academically as a result of conflicts between their former selves and their becoming-selves. It has been noted above that students come to the university with other familiar literacy practices and values which might be in conflict with those of the institution (Gee, 1996). On the other hand, "the social institution within which a literacy event is taking place influences how it is done" (Sheridan et al., 2000, p.3). This implies that the way institutions of higher learning shape literacy practices of their students can facilitate or complicate the acquisition of these practices by the students.

2.4 Responding to the challenges of learning and researching in a second/additional language

Postgraduate students and the institutions of higher learning which they attend should be aware of and concerned about these challenges. They should feel responsible for addressing these challenges since it is beneficial for both sides, and especially for students who are directly affected by such challenges. In the following two sections, the kinds of responses of students and institutions that have been reported from a range of studies are briefly reviewed.

2.4.1 Postgraduate students' response

Most of the students who go to study at the postgraduate level in foreign countries find themselves in a new and unfamiliar environment. Some of them are not comfortable with the language of instruction; others are not familiar with the academic culture of their new institutions. Despite the responsibility of the institutions to respond to the needs of students, for the most part the latter have little choice but to adapt to the system of the new environment if they want to succeed. One of the student participants in Cadman's study (2000, p. 488) meant this when stating: "what we should do if we study in a culture which is different from ours, we have to learn a lot and become adjusted. And so do they who are from a different culture when they study in ours." While this might not be the ideal situation, it is the reality in most institutional spaces. Thus a key question becomes what should students should do to maximize the likelihood of success.

2.4.1.1 Learning strategies

Given that academic activities are the main concern for these students, one aspect of adjustment has to do with learning strategies. Cummins (1996, p.87) describes learning strategies as "purposeful behaviours or thoughts that the learner uses to acquire or retain new information or skills. They may be observable (e.g. note taking, outlining,

summarizing, asking clarification questions) or non observable (activating prior knowledge, scanning key words, etc.)." Different students use different learning strategies (or styles) in different circumstances. For instance, Ramburuth and McCormick (2001, p.337) point out that "there will be students who prefer to study alone but in close proximity with friends, or those who will prefer to use a variety of learning styles, at times studying alone and at other times preferring to study in a group." Some students' learning styles change with the context. According to Ramburuth and McCormick (2001, p.334), "an approach to learning is not simply a stable trait that a student possesses, but an interaction of both personal characteristics and the teaching/learning context."

Notwithstanding the point above, there are strategies which seem to work for many students. Some of these are social adjustment, cooperative learning and peer learning.

Social adjustment

It was mentioned earlier that international students find themselves in a new sociocultural environment. Thus, "NNES[8] international students must adapt to a sociocultural system that is different from their own when they pursue their academic studies in an English medium university" (Myles and Cheng, 2003, p.249). When it comes to how these students achieve this, "there is much literature which suggests that international students who spend most of their leisure time with host nationals have fewer problems with cultural, academic and social adjustments at the university" (Myles and Cheng, 2003, p.258).

For the interaction with native speakers of English to be possible, international students need to have interactional competence in English. Otherwise, they will withdraw from such groups and prefer to interact with their colleagues from similar linguistic and social backgrounds or with other outsiders (Myles and Cheng, 2003). However, "if cultural mixing does not take place students will miss out on critical learning opportunities that can ease the process of adaptation" (Myles and Cheng, 2003, p.259). In fact, as Ivanic

[8] Non –Native English Speakers

(1997, p.12) notes, "the only possible way of participating in the activities of a community is by taking on its values and practices: it is by becoming one of those 'like minded-peers." In addition, Zimmerman (1995), in Myles and Cheng (2003), posits that talking to native speakers is a prime factor in international students' perceptions of communicative competence. Therefore, for international students to become socially adjusted to their learning community they have necessarily to be active members in its activities. As Jones et al. (1999) put it, all students have 'an integrated need' to establish and assert their identity within the institution as a community. They need to engage with that community to improve their chances of fulfilling their academic potential.

Cooperative learning

According to Abrami et al. (1995), in Cummins (1996, p.82), "cooperative learning involves small groups of students working together to attain a common learning objective through activities based on interdependent cooperation." All members of such small groups have the same status, which eases their discussions and makes them more fruitful. In fact, students can challenge each other's opinions and exchange views more than they can do with lecturers. Again, through such groups, students are likely to seek and obtain assistance from one another. Cooperative learning not only helps in academic activities, but it also facilitates socialization especially for students who are new to the learning community. These are likely to be some of the reasons why Cummins (1996, p.82) notes that "cooperative learning is currently recognized as an extremely valuable instructional strategy for promoting participation and academic growth in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms."

In cooperative learning, students of different levels of ability use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping team-mates learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement. Students work on the assignments given by

lecturers until all group members successfully understand and complete it.[9] It is obvious that in cooperative learning, each member has something to contribute to the learning of his or her team-mates. In short, "there is no solitary learning: we can only create our worlds together. The unfolding agency of the self always grows out of the interaction with others" (Ranson et al., 1996, p.14). Leki (2006, p.150) argues that "in a postmodern intellectual climate, it is difficult to think of individuals as separate, autonomously functioning subjectivities."

As has been mentioned above, these groups also foster social relationships between their members and, as Cummins (1996, p.73) put it, "human relationships are central to effective instruction. This is true for all the students, but particularly so in the case of second language learners who may be trying to find their way into the borderlands between cultures." However, such relationships might be limited due to the fact that such cooperative learning groups tend to be formed based on previous acquaintances. Furnham and Alibhai (1985), in Zhao et al. (2005, p.210), point out that "international students indicate a stronger preference for making friends from the same country or students from other nations over students from the host country." In such cases, their experiences tend to be limited and their challenges are likely not to be overcome since members of such teams are likely to experience similar problems.

Peer learning

In peer learning, students learn with and from each other, normally within the same class or cohort. Interaction with peers can result in the development of cognitive or intellectual skills and increase in knowledge and understanding. The peer group is widely regarded as an important influence on individuals (Falchicov, 2002). In a peer learning situation, a more knowledgeable student explains the material to others who can also contribute to this process. "Documentation on peer tutoring projects demonstrates that both tutor and tutee benefit academically from this form of collaboration" (Cummins, 1996, p.83), because the more you explain something to others, the more you get more insights into it.

[9] Available at http://edtech.kennesaw.edu/intech/cooperativelearning.htm, accessed on May 4th, 2009

On the side of tutees, they feel more comfortable when the person explaining the material is of their status. They can ask questions and express their views more freely.

Individual strategies

Apart from these three broad strategies, students can adopt different behaviours and take different measures to adapt to the system and deal with their academic activities. For instance, in Burke and Wyatt-Smith's (1996) study, a student reported recording each three hour lecture session during the first week of the semester, and taking notes as she replayed the whole recording at home. This was due to the fact that she had difficulties in listening to the lecturer in class, as English was not her first language. Others had their assignments edited by colleagues who knew English better, before submission. In his study, Ferenz (2005) noted that some of his research participants read English disciplinary texts, cognitively stored the information in Hebrew (their first language), translating the concepts from English to Hebrew. Uzuner (2008) also points out that some researchers writing journal articles in English would write in their first languages first, and then translate into English with the help of people who knew English.

2.4.2 Institutional responses

Learning institutions are responsible for providing a conducive learning environment for students so that they can achieve optimally. One can say that these institutions are called learning institutions because they are the places where learning should take place. They are places where students' learning needs are supposed to be catered for, and these needs are becoming more and more diverse as institutions receive students from a wide variety of backgrounds and countries, especially at postgraduate level (Cadman, 2000). Some of these students are second or foreign language speakers of media of instruction. Thus, they might have problems in using the language (English in many cases), which is central to academic success as mentioned previously. They might also find it difficult to identify with the community they are entering and identification is also important for their

academic success. However, this identity crisis "is not because of inadequacy within themselves, but because of a mismatch between the social contexts which have constructed their identities in the past and the new social contexts they are entering" (Ivanic, 1997, p.12). Thus, there is a need for these institutions to address the difficulties that these multilingual students have in order to facilitate their learning as they make unique contributions to the knowledge base of core disciplinary communities (Uzuner, 2008).

2.4.2.1 Familiarizing students with institutional literacy practices

The tendency for many universities is to have a deficit view of English second language writers (Paxton, 2007) and to introduce them to the conventions and forms of so-called academic style, in the expectation that they will then be able to produce appropriate written texts (Jones et al., 1999). In this way, students are considered as ignorant of the academic discourse and their previous experiences are ignored in the process of socializing them academically. However, it was noted by Paxton (2007, p.45) that "students make meaning by reworking past discourses, appropriating and adapting new discourses to make them their own." Thus whether the universities recognize this or not, students will always use the literacy experiences that they already have to integrate into the new academic communities. In the same vein, Gee (1996) indicate that when people have not mastered a secondary discourse (the one acquired in social institutions such as schools), they may fall back on their primary discourse or they can use another related secondary discourse. This is likely to be the case for student participants in this research because they are academically literate in (an) other language(s), usually French.

Given that literacy practices are constitutive of identity and personhood (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005), rejecting students' past literacy experiences is rejecting the students' identity and making them feel unfit for their academic institutions. For Jones et al. (1999, p.14), "when students have their experience and their questions not taken up, when institutional knowledge is being privileged over students' knowledge, students may have

a sense of being deprofessionalized." This is likely to have a negative impact on students' acquisition of the new academic literacies. That is why Paxton (2007) suggests working with students "interim literacies". She uses this term to refer to a transitional process moving from school and home to academic literacy, in approaching students' written work and developing their literacy practices. In the case of the Rwandan postgraduate students, the transition is from one kind of academic literacy in French, to another kind in English.

According to Paxton (2007, p.46), "The concept of interim literacy seems useful in a context of increasing cultural and linguistic diversity where students draw on a range of other discourses and they learn to make meaning in a new discourse." As she goes on to explain, interim literacies are about meaning making, which is a dynamic resource, constantly being adapted and transformed by its users. In other words, the experiences that students bring to the university should be taken as resources that students (and tutors) should use to move from their actual literacy practices to the ones required by the institution. In this process, these students' written work will have features of their prior discourses and those of the new ones. Paxton (2007) calls this phenomenon "hybridity". For her, "interim literacies are particularly important because of the insights they give us about the connection students are making to previous encounters, other people, ideas, texts, institutions and discourses beyond the confines of the academic institution" (p.48). This scholar wonders whether the students' diverse language and literacy practices can be recognized as legitimate ways of making meaning in academia. Jones et al. (1999) seem to give a positive answer to this question by stating that there is a need for students not simply to "know" the conventions, but rather to begin to understand how these styles and conventions can be used to represent and construct their meanings. In short, when acquiring new discourses (hence new identities), students should not be forced to abandon the identities (and discourses) they already have. After all, having multiple identities is an advantage for socialization (Gee, 1996): it means having multiple sources from which one draws in adapting to new discourses.

2.4.2.2 Learning context and environment

Learning context and environment are important factors in education in general, and at postgraduate level in particular, where there are many international students. That is why universities "need to invest intellectually as well as financially in creating contexts of reciprocal dialogue for international postgraduate education" (Cadman 2000, p.488). In fact, "knowledge is not transmitted but constructed through students' interactions with specific learning contexts" (Jones et al. (1999, p. 105).

The educational environment should enable students to feel at ease in carrying out their learning activities. This applies to all levels of the whole institution, from the top management to the classroom. In fact, as Cummins (1996, p.74) emphasizes, "[teaching/learning] techniques and strategies will be effective only when teachers and students forge a relationship: when students feel that they are welcome in the learning community of the classroom and are supported in the immense challenges they face in catching up academically." Indeed, "in sociocultural theory, learning is not viewed as solely a cognitive activity but rather as crucially a social process dependent on face-to-face dialogic interaction between a learner and a more experienced other" (Leki, 2006, p.138). This "other" might be the teacher or any other person such as a colleague who is more experienced in a given learning area. Therefore, relationships between students are important as well. Since "each community has different purposes and ways of seeing the world which are associated with distinct practices, genres and communicative conventions" (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002, p.5), these more experienced colleagues and teachers should help the students who are new to the community to integrate easily. Unfortunately, as Deem and Brehony (2000, p.154) point out "home based students might not be fully aware of the cultural adjustments required of international students."

In the framework of helping new students to adapt to the new environment, some institutions of higher learning have put in place orientation sessions in which students are introduced to the new institutional system. Students are briefed about what is expected of them, what their responsibilities and rights are, and the kind of support and facilities

available to them. In many cases, these sessions have proved relevant (Cadman, 2000; Abasi and Graves, 2008).

Another important aspect of environment is the identity made of new or international students by the institution and/or local students. In his study, Haugh (2008) noted that international students were referred to as "the other" as opposed to local students. This means that irrespective of their differences, these students were put in the same basket, which would prevent the institution from adequately responding to these students' individual needs. Lee (2002), quoted in Lee (2005), argues that teachers need to be aware of students' differing needs when deciding how to help them in their learning. Koehne (2006), quoted by Haugh (2008, p.209), points out that "international students cannot simply be defined as 'the other' in opposition to local students, but need to be examined more carefully in their own right as agents who both reconstruct their own multiple subjectivities, as well as challenge the discursive positionings attributed to them by others."

In addition, international students might be regarded as a source of problems for universities and lecturers. For instance, Haugh (2008) reports that in a careful examination of the manner in which the 'international student' was constructed in media discourse in Australia, Devos (2003) found out that international students were invariably constructed negatively for their perceived lack of adequate English language skills. Moreover, Haugh (2008, p.207) quotes a number of authors (Morris, 2004; Fullerton, 2005; Hills, 2005) who reveal that "the theme that international students do not have adequate English skills and thus are contributing to falling standards in Australian universities remains prominent." Such a belief is likely to lead to a loss of interest in international students and to their humiliation. On their side, students might also feel uncomfortable and frustrated in such a situation, especially when they have changed status by becoming students. In fact, some postgraduate students come to the university after spending some years in different offices. This is often the case for those who, after spending a long time in a range of occupations, find themselves in the shoes of students again.

2.4.2.3 Pedagogical support

In addition to postgraduate international students' social and cultural needs to adapt to the new learning environment, they also have pedagogical needs which can lead to pedagogical problems if they are not addressed. These include unfamiliarity with the educational system and language-associated problems. To be aware of these needs, some universities administer language entrance tests and/or placement tests after students are admitted. Such tests are given with the aim of finding out what students know and what they need to learn in order to decide on measures to help them (Cadman, 2000).

As an example of such measures, Cargill (1996), in Cadman (2000), describes how the University of Adelaide implemented a semester-long Integrated Bridging Programme for international postgraduates and their supervisors. Its objective was "appropriate provision of access to the existing academic, linguistic and cultural conventions of postgraduate study in the relevant disciplines" (p.477). Other universities have adopted the teaching of compulsory English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses in parallel with specialization courses or voluntary non-credit-bearing modules focusing on remediation and general English (Evans and Green, 2007). Some university faculties have accommodated students with difficulties in using the language of instruction, by overlooking language issues in submitted coursework. A number of lecturers have reported adjusting their own language in lectures and exams, homework assignments and course requirements in response to perceived second language students' needs. Some would even alter their normal procedures when alerted to specific problems that second language students exhibited or complained about. For instance, the time reserved for exams (not for other assignments) has been lengthened or exams shortened for English second language students (Leki, 2006).

Concerning English language as a medium of instruction, Cummins (1996, p.71) argues that students for whom English is a second or foreign language "will run out of time to attain graduation requirements in English and academic content, unless their progress can be accelerated." This suggests the urgency of providing support to students who are

facing English language related problems in institutions teaching in English. This might be why Cummins (1996) suggests that all teachers should see themselves as teachers of academic language in addition to their specific content areas. Otherwise, students' chances of catching up will be drastically diminished. These teachers can do this by providing positive corrective feedback to students concerning their use of English, especially in its written form. In fact, as stated above, writing is a particularly important aspect of one's development as a student (Leibowitz and Mohamed, 2000). Generally speaking, lecturers should be welcoming to students in general and to those who are new in the community in particular. Students are likely to feel more comfortable if they note that their lecturers understand them and are concerned about their problems.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This research is a qualitative case study of challenges experienced by Rwandan French-speaking postgraduate students at one South African university, the University of the Witwatersrand.

The notion of case study has been defined by a number of scholars such as Gillham (2000) and Hancock and Algozzine (2006). According to Gillham (2000, p.1) a case study is one which investigates a case in order to "answer specific research questions and which seeks a range of different kinds of evidence, evidence which is there in the case setting and which has to be abstracted and collated to get the best possible answers to the research questions." The same scholar states that the case to be studied can be a unit of human activity embedded in the real world, something that can be studied and understood in the real context, which is here and now or which emerges in its context so that precise boundaries are difficult to draw. My concern in this study is to describe a human activity in the real world: the learning and research experiences of a group of postgraduate students at a particular university.

Given that the evidence sought is in the case setting, it is important to study the case in its natural environment as advised by Yin (2003), quoted by Hancock and Algozzine (2006, p.15), in the following terms: "case study research means conducting empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its natural context using multiple sources of evidence." The multiple sources of evidence in the case of my research include questionnaires, interviews and document analysis, which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. Since case study research deals with a specific case, and specificity is important for human behaviour (Gillham, 2000), findings from one case study such as

this cannot be generalized to others, although it may be possible to offer some 'fuzzy generalizations' (Bassey, 1999).

3.2 Population of the study

The population of this study is divided into two categories. The first category is made up of 22 Rwandan French-speaking postgraduate students studying in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, in the academic year 2009, the researcher excluded. The second category is made up of some lecturers and supervisors of these students in the School of Education at the university. The researcher's membership of the population that is the focus of the study could have influenced both the participants' responses and the researcher's analysis and interpretation of data. The use of multiple sources of data was an attempt to minimize possible limitations in regard to responses and the use of a range of literature to frame the analysis was an attempt to address the latter constraint.

The choice of these students was motivated by a number of reasons. First and foremost, English is an additional language for these students, and thus might be a source of challenges as they undertake academic activities (Burke and Wyatt-Smith, 1996). In addition to that, these students are supposed to research and publish findings in English to contribute to knowledge in their areas of specialization (Hyland and Hamp-Lyons, 2002). Yet, for most of them, French and not English, was the language used as a medium of instruction in the universities where they completed their undergraduate and/or postgraduate courses. Since the French system that they are familiar with is different from the English one in a number of respects, the strategies that these students use to adapt to this new system are of interest to me and led me to choose these French speaking students as the population of my study.

As for lecturers, I interviewed them to obtain their views about the academic language and literacy challenges faced by the students and the support they were providing for them to cope with these challenges.

3.3 Sampling procedures

Given the small number of these students, questionnaires were administered to all of them. This means that the sample is all the 22 Rwandan French-speaking students referred to above. For Ghiglione and Matalon (1985), the quality and the validity of the results of any enquiry depend on the size of the research sample. It is evident that when a sample is equal to the whole population there will be no error of sampling. Here, the representativeness that is advocated by Ghiglione and Matalon (1985) was guaranteed since every member of the population of my study participated in the study.

The nature of information obtained from the questionnaires was used to determine which and how many students to interview and helped me to frame the questions I asked them, to complement the questionnaire information. In fact, as Hancock and Algozzine (2006, p.56) point out, "unlike some forms of research in which data are examined only at the end of information collection period, case study research involves ongoing examination and interpretation of data in order to reach tentative conclusions and to refine the research questions." Basing on the information that students provided when completing the questionnaire, four of them (around 20% of the participants) were chosen for interviews. One of these students reported not having studied English in his previous studies and I found this case interesting and special. I wanted to know how he had acquired the little English he knows and how he was coping with studying and researching in English at a postgraduate level. However, when I interviewed him he actually said that he studied English in his secondary education but in poor learning conditions and he, as a student, was not motivated to learn it. This is an example of the advantages of using many sources of data in a case study.

The second student studied and wrote his Master's research report in another European language other than English and French. For the purposes of anonymity and confidentiality, the name of this language is withheld as this may disclose the identity of the participant. I wanted to know how he managed to study in the medium of this totally new language, and yet he was facing many difficulties researching in English which, however, he studied in secondary school. The third student studied English as a secondary school subject twenty years before coming to Wits. During these twenty years this student never used English in the workplace and was now faced with studies and research in it at Wits. According to the information supplied on the questionnaire, this student was worried about her English oral expression and particularly with reference to presenting a research proposal orally. In this respect, this student is representative of many of the participants.

The last student was also experiencing very serious problems in using English, despite having studied it as a school subject at secondary school. In informal conversations we had as colleagues at Wits, this student explained that difficulties being experienced were unexpected. I also found this case interesting.

It should be noted that due to the different experiences on the basis of which these students were selected, some of the questions that I asked them in the interviews varied from one participant to another, depending on the information that was needed. In order to protect interviewees' identities, pseudonyms were used in discussing interview data. They were identified as John, Moses, Isabel and Frank. Concerning the three lecturers whom I interviewed, they were chosen because they all teach and supervise the research of the Rwandan postgraduate students. To disclose further information about them would be to risk identifying them. They are also referred to by pseudonyms in the analysis of the information that they provided. They were named Maria, Jennifer and Denise.

3.4 Data collection

In this qualitative study, data collection was done through questionnaires and interviews. Examples of texts such as assignments and course materials were also collected to be compared with what students had claimed about their writing when completing the questionnaires. Equally, the informal conversations that I had with participants were used as a source of data. This "use of multiple sources of evidence, each with its strengths and weaknesses, is a key characteristic of case study research" (Gillham, 2000, p. 2). The reason for this is that no single type or source of evidence is sufficient on its own. Gillham (2002, p. 2) states that "the multi-method approach to real life questions is important, because one approach is rarely adequate, and if the results of different methods converge (agree or fit together), then we can have greater confidence in findings."

The questionnaires for this study were administered to individuals. With reference to the conceptualisation of a questionnaire, Ghiglione and Matalon (1985, p.93) mention that, "[P]our construire un questionnaire, il faut évidemment savoir de façon précise ce qu'on cherche, s'assurer que les questions ont un sens pour chacun, que tous les aspects de la question ont été abordés, etc." (In order to conceive a questionnaire, it is obviously necessary to know precisely what one wants, to make sure that the questions make sense to each informant, that all the aspects of the question have been dealt with, etc.) In response to this advice, the questionnaire for this study was designed in relation to the aims and research questions outlined in Chapter One. Thus, the questions on the questionnaire fall into four categories: the respondent's background as regards English language, challenges faced in using English as a medium of instruction and research, their strategies in dealing with challenges and the support they get from the university. Both closed and open ended questions have been included in this questionnaire, with open questions being useful for gathering of more extensive information (Gillham, 2002). To enhance the reliability of my questionnaire, I piloted it with some of the Rwandan French speaking students in the Wits School of Law before using it in the actual collection of data.

However, Gillham (2002, p. 1) points out that "the quality of data emerging from even an adequately developed questionnaire is not wonderful. Questionnaires have their place as one method of most value when used in tandem with other methods." The weakness of questionnaires results from a number of factors including the fact that other people can answer for the targeted respondents, respondents might misunderstand questions or can deliberately give false information since there is nobody to challenge them about it. Even when respondents are sincere in responding, "you do not know what lies behind the responses selected or, more importantly answers the respondents might have given had they been free to respond as they wished" (Gillham, 2002, p.2). That is why I decided to use interviews in conjunction with the questionnaire.

With reference to the value of interviews, Mason (2000), in Hancock and Algozzine (2006, p.39), states that "interviews are a very common form of data collection in case study research. Interviews of individuals or groups allow the researcher to attain rich, personalized information." Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 645) claim that "interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings." In this study, I interviewed individuals since each of my subjects has a different experience as regards the research focus. Despite the fact that group interviews provide more ideas, they run the risk of not fully capturing all participants' view points (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006). These individual interviews were semi-structured due to a number of advantages this type has over the structured and the unstructured types. As posited by Hancock and Algozzine (2006, p.40), "semi-structured interviews are particularly well suited for case study research. In addition to posing predetermined questions, researchers using semi-structured interviews ask follow-up questions designed to probe more deeply issues of interest to interviewees."

In order to facilitate these students full expression of their responses, I had intended to interview them in French. However, I told them that they were free to choose the language they wanted me to interview them in when I met them for this interview. Moses and Isabel preferred Kinyarwanda while John and Frank preferred French. However, those who initially preferred Kinyarwanda also code-switched and code-mixed among

three languages during the interviews: Kinyarwanda mainly, then French and English. The fact that everybody chose the language they wanted made them more comfortable and this helped them give more information as well. These interviews were transcribed, translated, analyzed and then interpreted. I am aware that some nuances in the responses may have been lost in translation, but in my view there was more to be gained than lost by permitting the interviewees to speak in the language of their choice.

3.4 Scope of data analysis

This study is a form of qualitative research in which the goal is to understand the situation under investigation primarily from the participants' and not the researcher's perspective (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006, p.315), "qualitative research is inquiry in which researchers collect data in face-to-face interaction by interacting with selected persons in their settings (e.g. field research). Qualitative research describes and analyses people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions. The researcher interprets phenomena in terms of meanings that people assign to them."

In line with the above statements, the data for this study which are in the form of respondents' answers to the questions asked of them and in the form of texts, were interpreted in the light of the aims and research questions of the study. I adopted a "grounded theory" (Abramson and Mizrahi, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) approach to the analysis of questionnaire and interview data. The phrase "grounded theory" refers to a theory that is developed inductively from a corpus of data. If done well, this means that the resulting theory at least fits one dataset perfectly. This contrasts with theory derived deductively from grand theory, without the help of data, and which could therefore turn out to fit no data at all.[10] It is in this framework that Strauss and Corbin (1997, pvii) posit that "grounded theory methodology or methods

[10] Available at http://www.analytictech.com/mb870/introtoGT.htm, accessed on 21 June 2009

(procedures) are now among the most influential and widely used modes of carrying out qualitative research when generating theory is the researcher's principal aim." The grounded theory approach is defined as a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In my study, this involved open coding to identify provisional concepts and "axial coding", to seek connections between the categories identified. These categories were then analyzed in relation to the concepts addressed in the literature review chapter. A Likert scale[11] was used for questions 6 and 7 of the questionnaire to measure students' perceptions of their level of difficulty with regards to academic reading and writing.

It should be noted that out of the twenty-two questionnaires that were distributed, nineteen were filled and returned. In addition, findings from other studies of international postgraduate students' academic language experiences (discussed in Chapter Two) informed the analysis. Texts such as assignment tasks and course readings were looked at using categories from the South African and international literature in the field of academic literacy. This was done in order to compare these tasks to what students claimed about their academic writing when completing the questionnaire.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Before conducting this research, ethics clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Wits School of Education. Hancock and Algozzine (2006, p.40) stipulate that "the researcher must adhere to legal and ethical requirements, for all research involving people. Interviewees [or research subjects] should not be deceived and are protected from any form of mental, physical or emotional injury." Before distributing the questionnaires and conducting interviews, I made my respondents fully aware of the nature of my research, of its objectives and purpose and of their role within it.

[11] Available at http://www.answers.com/topic/likert-scale, accessed on 7 May 2008

Anonymity is another issue that I considered as far as ethical issues in this case study are concerned. As stated by Oliver (2004, p.136), "respondents would also probably want reassuring that they would not be named in connection with the research, and that there would be no way in which the opinions they expressed could be associated with them personally." Thus, I assured my respondents that the information they would provide would be treated with utmost confidentiality, that only the researcher and his supervisor would have access to it and that I would destroy the voice recordings after the completion of research. I also reassured them that I would not disclose their identity in my research report. After giving them all this information, I asked them to sign consent forms.

During the interview sessions, I provided sufficient privacy and a pleasant and relaxing atmosphere to make respondents feel comfortable about responding to questions. For instance, I allowed them to use the language or languages of their choice. It is should be noted that participation in the study was voluntary and participants were allowed to refuse to answer any questions they preferred not to respond to. They were also allowed to withdraw from the study at any time if they so wished.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHALLENGES FACING RWANDAN FRENCH SPEAKING POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AT THE WITS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses data from the questionnaires completed and returned by nineteen students and from interviews with four students and three lecturers.

4.2 The students' previous experiences of learning and using English

Before tackling the issue of their backgrounds concerning English, it should be noted that these students are divided into three categories, as far as their levels of studies at Wits are concerned. The questionnaire was completed by two Honours, thirteen Masters and four PhD students in different departments of the Wits School of Education. Concerning their English backgrounds, out of the nineteen respondents, nine had studied English as a subject at secondary and university levels while six studied it only at the secondary level. In addition to studying English as a school subject at school or university, four respondents studied it in private language schools or had individual coaches. This information is summarized in the following table[12]:

Where English was studied / Levels at Wits	Univ. only	Sec. and univ.	Sec. only	Sec. and informally	Univ. and informally
PhD	0	1	3	0	0
MA	1	5	3	2	1
Hons	0	2	0	0	0
Total	1	8	6	2	1

Table 3: Where respondents studied English

[12] It would have been interesting to know how long these respondents studied English, but this question was not on the questionnaire.

From the data above, it is evident that the respondents have studied English in different contexts. Those who studied it only in secondary schools as a subject did this before 1994 when this language was not viewed as very important. It was neither used by the national radio and television (the only stations at the time, the television having started in early 1990s) nor by the print media, nor in any official setting. It was taught for two periods a week mainly by inexperienced teachers and without adequate teaching/learning aids. The lack of instrumental motivation to study and master this language paired with the above challenges led to limited abilities in using it. This was confirmed by Moses (Interview, 6 August 2009) when giving the reason why he was facing difficulties in English in spite of having studied it at secondary school. Referring to his English lessons, he said: "[T]wabuze ibintu bibiri. Icya mbere twabuze motivation kuko umuntu yaravugaga ati icyongereza ndacyigira iki ko mfite igifaransa cyanjye? Icya kabiri, habuze pratique kuko iyo tugipratica twari kukimenya." (We lacked two things: the first thing is motivation since we had French and didn't find any reason to study English. The second is practice; had we practised it we should have mastered it.) John considered his limited knowledge of English to be due to the limited time that was allocated to it on the school timetable, while Isabel said that the English she was taught in her secondary education was substandard.

In addition to all the above shortcomings in the learning of English by these students, it should be noted that "language learned in a formal class setting does not necessarily lead to cross-cultural understanding and communicative competence" (McMeniman and Evans, 1997 cited in Myles and Cheng, 2003, p.250). Thus there is need to engage in communicative activities to develop communicative competence, which many of the respondents did not do, as will become evident in the following sections. Now, in 2009, many years (more than twenty for some) after studying English, these postgraduate students have encountered this language again, not as a subject, but as a medium of instruction for study and for their research.

Three of those who studied English in universities were specializing in it and the researcher is in this category. Others studied it as a subject in the framework of the

bilingual policy initiated in Rwanda after 1994. In fact, given that both English and French were official languages, university students from French medium secondary schools used to have a one year training programme in English before studying degree courses, while those from English medium schools were trained in French. These programmes were aimed at enabling students to use these languages in their daily life and in their academic activities. However, these programmes did not bear many fruits as university graduates continued to experience difficulties in whichever was the new language for them.[13] One of the reasons for this was the lack of qualified teachers and teaching/learning aids. Those who studied English in private language schools or had private coaches were encouraged to do this by the fact that they would need this language in their workplaces, given that it had acquired an official status. This suggests that the level of the English that they had acquired in schools was low.

In all the above instances, the respondents studied English but they rarely used it in their daily communication as shown in the following table:

Levels of studies at Wits	**Used English outside school settings**	**Did not use English outside school settings**
PhD	1	3
Masters	7	6
Hons	0	2
Total	8	11

Table 4: The use of English by participants outside school settings

The table above indicates that eleven of the respondents reported not having used this language outside the school settings before coming to Wits. However, even for the remaining eight who said that they had used it outside the academic setting, this use was

[13] It was revealed by *Izuba Rirashe* Newspapers (issue 304) that graduates from institutions of higher learning in Rwanda lack proficiency in both French and English which are, however, media of instruction and official languages. Available at http://www.izuba.org.rw/index.php?issue=304&article=9855, accessed on 18 October 2009.

occasional. Only one of them reported having used it in his work, while others report having used it when speaking to foreigners, during very important meetings, in training workshops offered by foreigners, at a consultancy company, in some official communication events and when dealing with documents written in English. On such occasions, one is not likely to improve his or her language skills significantly mainly because there are few listening, reading, writing and speaking opportunities. Thus, using a language in these circumstances does not greatly assist the development of language abilities, given that the output practice which is very important for developing productive language skills (Ellis, 2003) is so limited. Reasons for not using English outside school settings include the fact that respondents were always in settings that required (or at least allowed) the use of other languages such as French and Kinyarwanda. One respondent said that her English from secondary education was too limited to be used for communication.

More than half of the respondents (ten) revealed that they had not used English as a medium of instruction at university while nine had. This means that although they have studied general English, just over half of the respondents did not have access to the academic English which is central to all areas of tertiary curriculum (Cummins, 1996). It should be noted that even those who used English as a medium of instruction at university (apart from the three who had specialized in English) did not use it in all their courses. In effect, English was used as a medium of instruction alongside French in Rwandan public tertiary teaching institutions: if a lecturer was an Anglophone he/she would teach in English, and if he or she was a Francophone he/she would teach in French. Given that the majority of lecturers in the Rwandan universities were and still are Francophone, many courses were delivered in French. Thus, these students have studied predominantly in French given that French had also been the only medium of instruction in their secondary education. Therefore, they are likely to face major challenges in using English as a medium of instruction for the first time at a postgraduate level, which level is very demanding in terms of language and literacy knowledge and skills. This is due to the fact that their postgraduate studies involve researching and reporting in an academic discourse or discourses.

4.3 Challenges of studying and researching in English

When asked whether it is easy or difficult for them to study in English at Wits University (Question 4 on the questionnaire), thirteen respondents pointed out that it is difficult. All of these reported not having the language knowledge and skills that Wits requires, hence the need to make extra efforts to communicate with lecturers and students who speak very fast and to become familiar with academic English which, they claim, is different from and more difficult than general English. One respondent pointed out that he needs to struggle with the language first, before accessing the content of what he is reading. Others explained that they were not sufficiently prepared for studying and researching in English before coming to Wits. They reported being ashamed to be Masters or PhD students, learning and researching in a language they do not understand. One of them noted: "[W]e know what to say and write, but we do not know how to say or write it. I wonder how I will present my research proposal if I manage to write it!" It is clear that these students are "fighting two enemies" (the language and the subject content) as pointed out by Brock-Utne (2000a). In the interview with Moses (6 August 2009), he said that the burden of studying and researching in English for some students is so heavy that they may even give up their studies.

The nine respondents who stated that studying in English at Wits is not difficult have either used this language as a medium of instruction in their previous studies, or had specialized in it and were teaching it in universities in Rwanda. This shows, unsurprisingly, that having used English as a medium of instruction at lower levels of tertiary education is a factor that contributes to success in postgraduate studies in English.

While I am aware that linguistic competence in general and competence in academic literacy in particular are not reducible to a set of skills, I nevertheless argue that it is useful to find out how students perceive their ability to listen, speak, read and write in English. When it comes to which academic English language skills are most difficult for the respondents to the questionnaire (Question 5), they generally ranked these skills from

the most to the least difficult in the following order: listening, speaking, writing and reading. The following table gives more details.

Place / Skills	First (most difficult)	Second	Third	Fourth (least difficult)
Speaking	2	**11**	1	2
Listening	**10**	3	4	0
Writing	3	3	**6**	3
Reading	0	2	3	**11**

Table 5: The order of the four language skills according to level of difficulty

Concerning the reason why listening is difficult for most of them, these students reported that the pronunciation of English by people at Wits is different from what they were used to, and these people speak very fast. One of them said that he had to figure out the meaning of each word to understand a sentence. Because of this, he loses much of what is spoken. In addition, they pointed out that the way in which English is pronounced is different from the ways in which French is pronounced. Students reported observing that that English has various pronunciations. According to several respondents, some words and sounds are swallowed and pronunciation does not match the spelling. However, a key explanation here is that they have not had enough exposure to spoken English, since this language is not widely spoken in Rwanda as has been mentioned in the first chapter.

The respondents also gave reasons why speaking is difficult. They reported that they have not had enough opportunities to speak this language in Rwanda. They pointed out that they have to conceive ideas in French or in Kinyarwanda and then translate into English whenever they want to speak. They also mentioned that they do not have enough English vocabulary, which prevents them from expressing their ideas as they wish. They are like one student in Leki and Carson's (1994, p.91) study who said: "I wish I had learned more words and had increased my vocabulary significantly. Sometimes I simply run out of words necessary to express what I am actually thinking." One of the participants in my

study acknowledged that his stay at Wits was his first opportunity to speak English, and suggested that people should not expect much from him in terms of spoken English.

Concerning writing, the respondents noted that they had not had enough practice in writing in English since most of them did not specialize in languages. Three of them even said that they experienced writing in English for the first time when they came to Wits. As they do not have enough vocabulary, they find it difficult to find appropriate terms; this brings them to consult a bilingual (French-English) dictionary from time to time when writing. This is a hindrance to their academic achievement as consulting dictionaries slows down students' work (Leki and Carson, 1994). In addition, they are not sufficiently acquainted with English sentence structure; thus, as one of them said, there is a risk of their written English having a French style. That is why they spend much time revising and revisiting their written work so that their French does not intrude in it. Paxton (2007) refers to this process when she notes that in the process of transferring the traditional rhetorical form from an African language to English, students attempt to transform it so that it is appropriate to the new academic discourse.

Reading is also a source of difficulties for the respondents to different extents. Two of them identified it as the second most difficult skill while four identified it as the third. These students reported that it takes them a long time to understand an English text. The lack of familiarity with English sentence structure and limited vocabulary slows down their reading, as they need to consult a French-English dictionary many times to check word meanings. This is the case especially for those who did not use English as a medium of instruction at school or university. For instance, one of them acknowledged that he had not read an English text of more than three pages before coming to Wits. In addition, the written language is more challenging since "its vocabulary is less frequent and textual language is not supported by the immediacy of the context and interpersonal cues (gestures, intonation) that make conversational language easier to understand" (Cummins, 1996, p.80). Notwithstanding the difficulties reported in these answers, two respondents said that they do not have any problem with any of these language skills.

However, this is not surprising since they are two of the three students who had specialized in English and teach it at university.

The fact that most students classified writing as an easier skill compared to listening and speaking even though it (writing) is a multidimensional activity (Storch, 2009) is needs attention. It contrasts with the findings from a study conducted by Thesen (1997) at the University of Cape Town which revealed that most students who registered for EAP[14] were proficient in conversational English, but struggled with the nature of academic tasks which are often in the written form. The students in Thesen's study were undergraduates. In addition, Braine (2002), cited in Hasrati and Street (2009, p.15), argues that "the acquisition of academic literacy that is essential for graduate studies is more than the ability to read and write effectively." After analyzing closely the respondents' writing (on the questionnaire) closely, I noted that the way some of them wrote reveals that they still have a way to go in order to write well in terms of both general and academic English. This seems obvious, since "Second language (L2) advanced academic literacy is a prerequisite for producing appropriate second language academic writing" (Ferenz, 2005, p.339) while the respondents had not had access to this type of literacy. As an example, the following is an answer given by one respondent who indicated that writing skills were least difficult for her. She was giving the reason why she thought that studying at Wits would improve her English proficiency (Question 11).

> That help to use some of my english already I know and to acquire other new knowledge.

When asked to give her view about the English support training offered to the Rwandan students by Wits (Question 17) she wrote:

> That helps me to improve my english language, but the methodology which they used, it was not better for the beginners.

While these responses can be understood, neither is written in standard written English. In the interview, I wanted to know why so many of the respondents classified writing as easier than both speaking and listening. Moses said that the grammar he studied in his

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secondary education enables him to write better than he speaks. This implies that it is easier for him to write than to speak and listen. However, it does not necessarily mean that his writing is generally good. However, one of the interviewees (Frank) said that writing is the most difficult of the four skills. Explaining why this is the case he said:

> "L'expression écrite est l'expression où on doit mettre plus d'accent dans la mesure où on parle à des gens qui vous liront plus tard et qui ne connaissent pas vos problèmes au niveau de la langue. A l'oral on vous corrige ou alors on vous pose des questions et on sent le message que vous voulez donner à travers les gestes, le paraverbal, etc. Mais au niveau de l'écrit, personne ne vous interprète." (Interview, 6 August 2009). (Writing is a skill that needs more attention since you are addressing people who will read you later and who might not be aware of your problems as regards language. In speaking people can correct you or ask you questions, and they can get your message through gestures, intonations… But in writing, nobody interprets your gestures.)

Isabel does not share Frank's position on this issue. For her, speaking is a source of difficulties due to her lack of self-confidence. She said: "[I]yo mvuga, nta self-confidence mba mfite imbere ya communauté académique mba mvuga nti ese ibyo mvuga biri kuri level yabo? Rimwe na rimwe bituma ntagira iyo fluidité verbale." (Interview, 8 August 2009) (When I am speaking, I am not self-confident in front of the academic community since I wonder if my English is at the level of academics. Sometimes, this prevents me from expressing myself correctly.) She gave an example of a presentation she had made where she could not successfully present what she had prepared in writing. This resulted in her achieving lower marks in the oral part of the assignment than in the written. This was confirmed by her supervisor Maria who said that Isabel's spoken English is still poor. But she adds that she (Isabel) is also not performing at the required level in reading and writing. However, this lecturer pointed out that this has nothing to do with Isabel's intellectual capacity as a student. She bases this latter claim on the fact that this student had made a very original and good research proposal on her topic. It is on this basis that Maria affirms that the Rwandan students have potential to succeed in their studies despite language problems. The only problem with this research proposal was that it was two or three times the required length, and, due to her limited English, Isabel was not able to edit it down to the required size.

Given the background of these students concerning English and the demanding nature of postgraduate academic literacy, challenges such as the above, especially concerning writing, are not very surprising. After all, "for non-native English writers, second language (L2) advanced academic literacy encompasses knowledge of the rhetorical, linguistic, social and cultural features of academic discourse as well as knowledge of English as used by their academic disciplines" (Ferenz, 2005, p.339). As has been discussed in the previous pages, many of these students have not had access to these features. Thus, their academic achievement is likely to be negatively affected (Lee, 2005).

All the respondents whom I interviewed confirmed that studying and researching in English is an obstacle to their academic performance. Moses said: "Iyaba nakoraga research yanjye mu rurimi nzi mba ngeze kure. Ariko ubu igihe kinini ngita mu kureba amagambo muri dictionnaires, uko yandikwa, uko bayavuga, …" (Interview: 6 August 2009). (if I were doing my research in a language which I know better I would have gone further. But now I spend most of my time checking words in dictionaries, their spelling, their pronunciation…) For Frank, the level of academic performance that they are achieving would be higher if they were using a language that they could understand better or if they had English as their mother tongue. John said that if he were using French, he would not need "to turn his head twice" to understand his readings (Interview: 10 August 2009).

As has been mentioned above, the majority of respondents put writing and reading at the bottom of the order of difficulty, implying that these skills are easier than listening and speaking. Given that academic writing and reading are very important areas of knowledge and skills in academic life, respondents were asked to rate the aspects related to these skills according to the level of difficulty (Question 6). The following table adapted from the one developed by Evans and Green (2007) shows the way they have ranked the aspects of academic reading.

Item	Very easy	Easy	Neutral	Difficult	Very difficult	Total
Identifying supporting ideas/examples	1	9	4	3	0	17
Reading carefully to understand a text	2	10	2	3	0	17
Identifying key ideas	0	7	6	4	0	17
Understanding organization of a text	1	8	5	2	0	16
Taking brief, relevant notes	2	6	6	3	0	17
Using own words in note taking	0	4	3	8	2	17
Reading quickly to get overall meaning	0	6	3	5	3	17
Reading quickly to find information	0	5	4	6	2	17
Working out meaning of difficult words	0	5	5	5	2	17
Understanding specialist vocabulary	0	3	4	7	2	16

Table 6: Rating of aspects of academic reading according to level of difficulty

Seventeen participants answered this question while another five pointed out that this question is non applicable since they did not experience any difficulty as regards these aspects. The data presented in the above table show that the first five aspects are considered to be easier that the rest. This is evidenced by the fact that six students identified four of the first five aspects as very easy while none of the five remaining aspects were identified as easy. By contrast, between seven and ten students identified the last four aspects as difficult or very difficult whereas none of the first five were identified as very difficult and only between two and four students identified these as difficult. This correlates with the information that these students provided regarding the difficulties they are facing. Given that they have a problem of shortage of vocabulary and they are not familiar with English texts, then using their own words, reading quickly, understanding the meaning of difficult words and specialist vocabulary are likely to be difficult.

Concerning the first four aspects, one of the possible reasons why students are likely to find these easier is that ability to use them in one language can facilitate their use in another. Here, it should be noted that the participants in this study are multilingual

educated people who have degrees in their respective areas of specialization. Therefore, even though they are not familiar with English texts, they have reading skills in other languages that they speak, especially French. Besides, they used French as a medium of instruction and as a language in their work place, which implies that they dealt with the first four aspects (except aspect two) in French to a certain extent. If they are given enough time to read an English text, they are likely to cope with these aspects easily.

Despite the above factors that are likely to make the first five aspects of academic reading easier, copies of the assignments and reading responses of some of these students reveal that some of them are still struggling with these aspects. To illustrate this, I will use John's response to an assignment which consisted of identifying the main arguments of different authors about the "State and Education" (Appendix J). The student dealt with Dale's arguments, but the lecturer's comments show that what the student gave was "*not a key argument of Dale himself*". In the same assignment, the same student also identified Mkandawire's main arguments and he was told that what he gave was *"not a key point"*. In another part of the same assignment, this student was given the following comments: "*good, but you started with the unimportant points and finished with the key points of Dale's article*". Even though this student pointed out that 'identifying key ideas' is in the neutral category for him, the above comments show that he still has difficulties with this aspect.

As has been mentioned earlier, writing requires a range of knowledge and skills in the academic context (Leibowitz and Mohamed, 2000; Evans and Green, 2007). I asked participants to what extent aspects of academic writing are easy/difficult for them (Question 7 on the questionnaire). Their answers are presented in the following table:

Item	Very easy	Easy	Neutral	Difficult	Very difficult	Total
Writing introductions	0	9	4	3	1	17
Referring to sources	1	14	0	1	1	17
Revising written work	0	8	5	3	0	16
Writing references/bibliography	2	10	3	0	1	16
Writing conclusions	0	10	3	4	0	17
Writing body sections	0	8	6	3	0	17
Summarizing/paraphrasing	0	3	7	6	1	17
Planning written assignments	0	5	7	5	0	17
Expressing ideas clearly/logically	0	4	7	5	1	17
Synthesizing information	0	5	6	6	0	17
Writing coherent paragraphs	0	7	4	3	1	15
Proof-reading written assignments	0	5	7	3	1	16
Linking sentences smoothly	0	4	5	7	1	17
Expressing ideas in correct English	0	2	5	5	4	16
Using appropriate academic style	0	0	5	9	3	17

Table 7: Rating of aspects of academic writing according to level of difficulty

Like the previous question, this one was also answered by seventeen participants. A detailed analysis of these responses shows that writing introductions, referring to sources, revising written work, writing references/bibliography, writing conclusions and writing body sections are considered to be easier than the remaining aspects. On the other hand, linking sentences smoothly, expressing ideas in correct English, using appropriate academic style and summarizing/paraphrasing are the most difficult aspects of the academic writing for the participants. Again, this is likely to result from the fact that the first set of skills applies to all languages and that respondents had written academic papers before (BA/BSc or Masters Dissertations) mainly in French. As for the second set of skills, they necessarily require knowledge of English, while many of the participants still have problems in using this language.

It should be noted, however, that even those aspects that were said by the respondents to be easy or neutral for them are still a source of difficulties for some. For instance, Frank,

who pointed out that 'expressing ideas clearly' is easy for him, wrote the following paragraph in one of his reading responses to Flinders and Thornton's (2004) article (Appendix K):

> Flinders and Thornton (2004) refer to Goodlad's critic of national curriculum reform in his book; *School curriculum in the United States* where he is questioning about how curriculum content is determined and the way it should be teaching. Draws on Dewey (1938) views he argues that curriculum content should be designed according to children-centered and society-oriented.

About the above paragraph, the lecturer's comments were actually a question asking what it means, implying that the meaning was not clear. The subject of 'draws' is not indicated, and the phrase 'according to' which should be followed by a noun is actually followed by adjectives which do not qualify anything. Thus, this makes it difficult to understand the argument that seems to be drawing on Dewey. This paragraph also shows that the student is influenced by French in his writing. When completing the questionnaire, he himself recognized that French helps him in his academic activities at Wits because "there are great similarities between (*sic*) two languages." However, these students should make use of these similarities with caution because the latter can sometimes be misleading. For instance, this student has used the word "critic" for "criticism" because the French "critique" can mean both "a person who does not approve of someone or something (a critic)" and "disapproval (a criticism)".

Again, while this student says that writing introductions is easy for him, the first paragraph of the same reading response is as long as a half of the whole text. It is difficult to work out whether the whole of it is an introduction or where the introduction starts and ends. In addition, all the three reading responses that I analysed from this student start with the phrase "In his article", which made me sceptical of his ability to write introductions (Appendices K, L, M). Moreover, while he points out that 'referring to sources' is easy, there was no reference for some arguments in the first and second reading responses (Appendices K, L) as shown by the lecturer's critical comments in this regard.

Other examples are drawn from John's assignment that has been previously mentioned (Appendix J). When completing the questionnaire, he pointed out that 'referring to sources' is easy for him. However, an examination of his assignment reveals the opposite. Three times, within his text, he wrote almost the entire reference of an article as follows: *Mkandawire T: Thinking about developmental states in Africa. Cambridge journal of Economics, 2001, p.289.* He also mentioned the following reference within the text: *Edigheji O (2005): A democratic State in Africa? www.aps.org.za*. Apart from such a reference to sources not being appropriate inside the text, the way Mkandawire's article is referenced is incorrect: the year of publication should come before the title of the article, among other changes. Furthermore, in spite of the use of a number of scholarly works, this assignment does not have a reference list (bibliography), yet this student claims that writing a reference list/bibliography is easy for him. Another aspect of his assignment that needs attention is that it does not have a conclusion at all, while the student points out that 'writing conclusions' is easy. I cannot confirm that he did not write it because he is not able to do so, but the fact that it is missing may suggest that the student has difficulties in this aspect of his writing.

If one were to understand these students' challenges only from their point of view, one would conclude that the main (if not the only) challenge for them is the lack of skills in using English. However, Jennifer, who is a lecturer and a supervisor of some of these students, does not see it this way. For her, the main problem that these students (especially MEd students) are facing is not limited academic English, but the inability to think critically. She gave two justifications for this claim: the first is that, as she is bilingual in both English and French, she asks the students whom she is supervising to rephrase their research questions in French and still they have not done this correctly. For the second justification, she said: "[W]e have some amazing students who have never been taught English properly because of the South African background, but you can see they are quick to think when you give them something to read" (Interview: 29 September 2009).

One of the consequences of this lack of critical thinking is the tendency for many of these students to reproduce what they read in the prescribed (and other) readings for their assignments, while their lecturers expect them to use these readings to construct an argument in which their own voice is evident. The voice here means the expression of the writer's ideas and beliefs (Clark and Ivanic, 1997). Since this voice was missing and students sometimes did not acknowledge the sources when they quoted directly from their reading, many of them have been accused of plagiarism. Denise considers that the main challenges for the students in her class have been to express their own ideas clearly, to give their own position and to support it with ideas from their readings. In fact, as she points out, these students experience difficulties with academic English, especially in writing. This is evidenced in part by lack of proper acknowledgement of other people's ideas in their work. This lecturer indirectly implies that this is due to these students' limited English: she states that a native speaker of English would find it easier to demarcate his/her own ideas and those he/she borrows from others. However, this is likely not to be always true since all students, irrespective of their status, have to acquire new discourses when they are apprenticed (Gee, 1996) into the academic community (Jones et al., 1999). Thus, being a native speaker of English does not necessarily mean that one is proficient in academic English. Nevertheless, a native speaker of English is likely to have an advantage over a non native speaker in acquiring academic literacy, all other things being equal.

The above lecturers' comments corroborate the information given by students when describing the differences between their previous educational experiences and those at Wits. In their previous university studies they used to rely mainly on and reproduce lecturers' notes to succeed in examinations. Their experiences are similar to those referred to by Freire (1968) as a banking approach to education. In such an approach, "the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits" (p.58) and, eventually, reproducing them in exams. Respondents noted that they had to rely mainly on their personal reading and research to write their assignments and exams successfully at Wits. They said that lecturers at Wits provide guidance only, which means that students have to read a great deal and put their own

ideas into their assignments. Freire describes this approach as a problem posing approach to education where "the teacher is no longer the-one-who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They [the teacher and the students] become jointly responsible for a process in which they all grow" (1968, p.67). For this scholar, "in problem posing education, men develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire, 1968, p.70). This is an approach that is frequently adopted by lecturers at the Wits School of Education and one with which many of the Rwandan students are unfamiliar.

Concerning the challenges faced by these students in their research, Jennifer said that many of her students from Rwanda would come with research topics which were totally unresearchable. She said that the topics "were descriptions of something going on somewhere" (Interview: 29 September 2009). This descriptive approach adopted by these students is in line with their previous learning experiences (banking concept of education). At Wits, they are required to adopt a problem posing approach to their studies, which is based on "creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality" (Freire, 1968, p.71). Thus, instead of describing the object of their study, they were required to analyse it critically especially for betterment. However, given these students' past academic experiences, the fact that they adopted a descriptive approach is not surprising; they had not previously been expected to critically analyse or challenge a scholar's views. In addition, Sheridan et al. argue that "many writers approach writing without a sense that they have anything worth saying. They do not see it as a place to have a position to argue or an experience or an idea worth communicating to others" (2000, p.152). Most of the time students feel that they are in an inferior position in the academic world, which makes them restrain their voice when writing. In fact, as Sheridan et al. (2000, p.152) note, "viewing oneself as an 'author' – feeling authoritative and feeling the right to exert a presence in the text – is often related to the sense of power and status writers bring with them from their life history."

As a supervisor, Jennifer explained that she helps students to reformulate their research topics and to devise relevant research questions. The next thing that has been extremely difficult for them, according to Jennifer, has been to build a conceptual framework for their research, so as to let the reader know how they intended to undertake the research. She said: "I think these students were never told about different conceptual frameworks, different perspectives" (Interview: 29 September 2009). This challenge is not so much linked to literacy per se, but rather to a lack of research skills.

Concerning the way these students formulated their research questions, Jennifer noted that these tended to be too broad. She pointed out that this is an influence of French "because the French are very broad in their understanding of any problem in their writing about everything, while the English tradition is much more pointed." (Interview: 29 September 2009). The influence of French in these students' work seems inevitable because students use the discourses at their disposal in writing (Gee, 1996). In addition, Paxton (2007) argues that the traces of prior discourses and discourse strategies are very distinctive features of interim literacies, which are particularly evident in the first academic essays that students write, especially when they are written in an additional or foreign language. What is needed here is for lecturers to understand how these discourses can be used to acquire the new institutional discourse, which is a requirement for these students to successfully complete their studies. For instance, instead of being told that their approach is wrong because it is too broad, these students should be helped to develop skills in moving from a broad to a narrower focus, without compromising the content of their work. This can also apply to other resources and values that these students might be using to adapt to the academic literacy requirements of the Wits School of Education. In fact, the hybridity that characterises these students' written work could provide lecturers with insights into how past discourses and discourse models assist in concept formulation (Paxton, 2007). Moreover, bilingualism itself is a resource that should be exploited to help these students to acquire new literacy practices. As Kearsey and Turner (1999), cited in Lee (2005, p.499) note, "[T]he possible effects of bilingualism suggest that it should be treated as a resource to foster an improved understanding of scientific language in bilingual students." In effect, being bilingual

implies being conversant with many discourses (those associated with the two languages) and having multiple identities and literacies, which, according to Gee (1996) is an advantage in adapting to new discourse communities.

Jennifer also divided the Rwandan students at the Wits School of Education in 2009 into two groups, as regards their professional and academic backgrounds. There is a group that is based in the academy and a group that is based in the Ministry of Education. The first group is made up of those who work as lecturers or researchers in the institutions of higher learning in Rwanda while the second is made up of people who work in the Ministry of Education or in districts as directors of education. The challenge of being critical in their assignments and research work has been greater for the second group than for the first. This seems to be a result of the fact that members of the first group were involved in academic work such as lecturing, marking students' exams and assignments, supervising students' dissertations, etc. while the latter were in administrative offices, rarely dealing with academic practices. Scribner and Cole (1981), quoted in Gee (1996), argue that skills related to categorization and abstract reasoning tasks are transient, unless they are practised in the years after school. In addition, we all belong to many communities of practice in which we participate in different ways and these forms of participation contribute to the production of our identities (Wenger, 1998). Therefore, the difference in identities of these two groups of Rwandan students is not very surprising since they belonged to two different communities of practice before coming to Wits, and these are likely to have shaped their identities differently.

Another reason for the challenges that these students are facing, according to Jennifer, is the poor selection procedures which resulted in the admission of some students to levels that were too demanding for them. She said: "I think that deep down some students should not even be accepted at the Masters level because what we are asking them to do assumes too much background that they don't have and that there is no time to acquire" (Interview: 29 September 2009). She stated that many of these students ought to have been given some basic academic foundation at the Honours level to start with. It should be noted that all these Rwandan students had applied only for Masters and PhD degrees,

but some were "downgraded" to Honours and Masters from Masters and PhD respectively, according to Jennifer. On this note, I question the criteria on which the selection was based which resulted in some of the Masters applicants being admitted to Masters while others were "downgraded" to Honours.

Notwithstanding the fact that Jennifer downplayed the role of English in the challenges faced by these students, she does not deny that it is one of the challenges. For instance she revealed that she had noted an improvement in essay writing by the end of the first semester and those who improved the most are those who are most competent in English. In addition, Denise noted that some concepts in her course were difficult to master for her students only because they were in English, which also confirms that English is actually one of the challenge they are facing.

Another important issue that was mentioned by Jennifer is a disagreement between her and the Rwandan students in her class over marks awarded for their assignments. These students often said that they deserved more marks than the ones awarded, a claim that was baseless for Jennifer. This disagreement has two possible sources. As Myles and Cheng (2003) point out, graduate students feel intense pressure to succeed because many of them have scholarships and/or jobs in their native countries to which they will return. This is the case for the student participants in this study given that they have come to Wits as a result of the Staff Development Policy of the Government of Rwanda. In addition, the scholarship funds they were given are a loan that they will have to repay. Thus they have necessarily to succeed to secure their jobs and to be able to pay back the loan. Therefore, they have great anxiety about obtaining high marks, which may bring them to claim that they deserve more. According to Wenger (1998), our identities, as trajectories, incorporate the past and the future in the very process of negotiating the present. In this way, the fact that they signed contracts with the government of Rwanda (past) to return to their jobs and pay back the loan (the future) is influencing these students' negotiation of the present identity: that of successful students.

Another reason for the disagreement over marks may be differing expectations of lecturers and students in regard to assessment. According to Jones et al. (1999, p.xxiii), " the culturally embedded nature of assessment and evaluation criteria can be so taken-for-granted that terms such as 'clarity', 'structure' and 'argument' which are used to signal them are left unexplicated." In this case, students are not aware of lecturers' expectations, and hence fail to conform to them. In such cases, "students' own values may contradict those of the faculty and the department and they experience confusion and uncertainty as they are inducted into the social practices, values and positions of the University" (Paxton, 2007, p.47).

In brief, the main findings in response to the first two research questions stated in chapter one are the following:

- The students who responded to the research questions had studied English in different contexts, but most of them claimed that they did so in less than ideal circumstances. In addition, many of them were unable to put their knowledge of the language into practice because there were few opportunities to communicate in English on a regular basis.
- Therefore, they found it difficult to engage in study and research for which a high level of competence in English is a prerequisite. For some of them their postgraduate studies at the University of the Witwatersrand have been their first opportunities to read and write extended texts in English.
- The length of time it has taken them to read course materials and research literature and to write their assignments and research proposals has had a negative impact on their academic performance.
- However time is not the only issue. Analysis of some examples of students' assignments indicates that they lack knowledge of some of the generic features of academic writing.
- Furthermore, lecturers and/or research supervisors of these students pointed out that they appear to have had few opportunities to learn how to think critically. This has resulted in them tending to reproduce what they had read for their assignments, instead of offering a critical analysis in their own voice.

CHAPTER FIVE

STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY STUDENTS AND BY THE UNIVERSITY TO ADDRESS A RANGE OF CHALLENGES

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on identification and analysis of the strategies that postgraduate student participants in this research are adopting to deal with the challenges described and analysed in the previous chapter. Indeed, despite the existence of these challenges, these students have to move forward with their academic activities in order to achieve their aims. Thus, there must necessarily be a way forward. This chapter also identifies and analyses the institutional support provided by lecturers and/or research supervisors and the University of the Witwatersrand.

The challenges described and analysed in the previous chapter include reading to understand, writing appropriately, listening to lecturers, expressing themselves orally and adapting to a new learning system. The nature of the strategies adopted depends on the nature of the challenges experienced. What is common for many of these students is that they feel under pressure to learn English not only for their studies but also as a result of the new language policy in Rwanda, because they will be expected to use it in their work back in their country. As has been mentioned earlier, English has become the only medium of instruction from upper primary to tertiary education in Rwanda and all these students work in the education sector in this country.

Before tackling the issue of the strategies that students are adopting, it should be noted that most of these students expected to face difficulties in their studies at Wits before registering at this institution. All the four students whom I interviewed said that they knew that their knowledge of English was too limited for what would be required in postgraduate studies. However, the challenges which they have faced since their arrival must have been greater than expected. This is because two of them said that they were

very shocked at the beginning. Isabel said that had it not been for her supervisor's help, she would have packed her things and gone back to Rwanda to do some other work. John reported that: "[P]our la première fois c'était difficile. Je me disais : 'finalement je risque de ne pas faire ce qui m'a amené ici; si je suis venu étudier et que le milieu qui m'accueille semble hostile à ma présence, alors il m'est difficile de m'épanouir" (Interview : 10 August 2009). (For the first time it was difficult. I said to myself: 'finally, I run the risk of not doing what I have come for. If I have come to study, but the environment that is supposed to welcome me is hostile to my presence, it is difficult for me to blossom.') However, as time has passed they have become more used to the system and all of them reported becoming more comfortable with their studies.

On this note, lecturers also acknowledge some improvement on the part of these students. Maria noted the tremendous progress made by Isabel: "[F]rom the day of her arrival, where she hardly understood anything that was going on, until now where she can participate in a conversation, it's just an incredible difference in less than six months!" (Interview: 15 September 2009) She also noted that Isabel's ability to search on the internet for relevant documents had improved. Denise also confirmed this by pointing out that the ability of her students to pick up points from lectures and to interact in sessions had improved. By the time I interviewed her, these students were able to debate in classroom sessions more confidently compared to when they arrived, and their writing skills had also improved. She attributes this improvement to the fact that they had been hardworking, which suggests that one of these students' strategies (to work hard) to adapt to the new system has been productive.

From the interview that I had with Jennifer, I also noted that some of these students might have overestimated their abilities as regards their studies at Wits. In fact, one month after the beginning of their studies they were asked to evaluate themselves and see if the demands of the course were appropriate for them. Some were advised to de-register from one of the two courses for which they had registered in the first semester. The rationale for this, according to Jennifer, was that if these students were struggling with English and academic thinking they needed more time. As Flowerdew (2008) puts it, in addition to

the difficulty of the actual writing, extra time and effort is needed for reading and conducting the research in an additional language. Thus, instead of doing their Masters degree in one year some students were advised to take two years. Jennifer said that women were more realistic about their capacity and de-registered from some courses, but men insisted that they should go on with two courses. Eventually at the end of the semester, the performance of those who did two courses was generally low.

5.2 Students' strategies

5.2.1 Strategies to solve reading difficulties

It has been noted in previous pages that reading is a very important part of learning and researching, especially at postgraduate level. Some instructors even considered it as the most essential of the four language skills (Johns, 1981). Therefore, difficulties in reading are likely to be a hindrance to learning and researching.

When the respondents were asked what they do when they cannot understand aspects of the prescribed readings (Question 8 on the questionnaire), they gave a range of answers. The most commonly used strategy is to consult English-French dictionaries. In addition to being time consuming, this strategy is likely not to solve all their problems in regard to reading for meaning. In fact, knowing what all the words in a sentence mean does not necessarily lead to the understanding of the sentence. Freebody and Luke (1990) emphasize this in their Four Roles/Resources Model. They have identified the following four roles of a successful reader: code breaker (decoding the codes and conventions of written, spoken and visual text), text user (understanding the purpose of different texts for different cultural and social functions), text participant (comprehending written, spoken and visual texts) and text analyst (understanding how texts position readers and listeners). A reader who keeps on consulting a dictionary is likely not to play these four roles effectively, which might lead to inefficient reading. Rwandan students who rely on this strategy are at the level of code breaker, while their studies and research work requires

them to be text analysts, implying that successful reading is a serious challenge for them. In addition, the equivalent term in French might also not be understood given that this language is also an additional language for all the respondents.

The other strategies include asking a colleague or a lecturer for help and reading the prescribed readings as many times as possible. One respondent reported searching for French versions of the prescribed readings. If he finds these, then he reads the two versions: the French one to understand and the English one to become familiar with the academic English and its technical terms, and eventually to do the assignments. Another one pointed out that he sometimes uses software to translate the prescribed reading into French. All this takes time and requires extra effort.

5.2.2 Strategies to solve writing difficulties

As has been mentioned earlier, writing is very important for academic success. Lillis and Turner (2001) point out that in recent times student writing in higher education has increasingly been seen as a problem. In official public and pedagogic discourse there are complaints about students' inability to write in the ways the academy requires. If this is a general case in higher education, students who are studying in a second or foreign language must find the academic writing even more difficult. Again, difficulties with writing are likely to affect these students' academic activities negatively.

Being aware of the above, participants in this study reported adopting various strategies to address these difficulties. Some of these strategies include discussing the assignments or tasks to write about with colleagues, firstly to understand them and secondly to revise what they have written. Though some mentioned the existence of a free service at the University's Writing Centre for consultation about draft work, few of them use or know about it since only three respondents reported making use of it. Seven respondents pointed out that they write in their limited English and then give their work to more knowledgeable colleagues for revision and/or editing. If such colleagues are not available, these students read and re-read their work many times to make sure it is correct

to the best of their knowledge. Others stated that they have decided to read a lot of scholarly work in their areas of specialization, and to work day and night using the available facilities so as to be acquainted with English academic discourse. These strategies seem not sufficient because, as Warschauer (1997) states, for people to become literate in another language they must successfully gain entry into the discourse communities of users of that language. As Warschauer (1997, p.94) goes on to say, "that entry can only be realized through dialogic communication and interaction, not through the decontextualized acquisition of vocabulary or skills". Gee (2001), cited in Klaus (2001), confirms this by positing that one acquires a discourse by enculturation (apprenticeship) into social practices through supported interaction with people who have already mastered the discourse. In short, Warschauer (1997) and Gee (2001) argue that the students need to interact with academically proficient students.

Interestingly, one respondent reported writing in French first, using the Alta Vista software to translate his work into English and then giving it to a colleague to correct the language. In addition to this being a very laborious process, it is likely to misrepresent the content of the work. In fact, machine translation is not reliable in the sense that it is based on formal and systematic rules. So sometimes it cannot use a context to disambiguate ambiguous structures. Equally, it cannot use experience or mental outlook as a human translator.[15] Moreover, since the editor is not dealing with the original text, he/she might have an erroneous understanding of it. Furthermore, colleagues might not always be available to give assistance since they themselves are students who must concentrate on their studies as well. In such a case, a student's written work is likely to have a number of shortcomings.

It should be noted that this student is not the only one who uses French in writing his assignments. Others also do so to different extents as ten of them recognized that French helped them in their academic activities at Wits. I have witnessed this, as some of these students sometimes come to me to ask how a given French structure is expressed in English. This is often the case for logical connectors such as *according to, however*,

[15] Available at http://www.dilmanc.az/en/technology/mtadvantages, accessed on 9 July 2009

moreover, thus, in addition to, besides, indeed, after all, etc. The main reason for this is that most of them are used to writing in French. Fourteen of them indicated that they wrote their previous research reports in French, four in English and one in another European language. For all the respondents, French is the language that introduced them to the academic world and it is mainly through this language that they have acquired the knowledge they have. Given that the language in which knowledge was acquired and mentally stored is important in the process of writing (Eley and Jennings, 2005), this recourse to French is understandable.

5.2.3 Strategies to improve listening and speaking skills

Though listening and speaking skills are sometimes considered less important than writing and reading in learning and researching at the postgraduate level, they have an important place which cannot be filled by anything else. For instance, students are sometimes required to present their work orally and listen to other people presenting. They need to attend conferences which might be of a great importance in their studies and in their daily life. Thus, these skills are needed as well as literacy skills.

In regard to listening and speaking, student participants in this research have taken several measures to improve these skills. Concerning listening, these measures include increasing occasions of listening to fluent and/or native speakers of English. They watch movies and listen to radio and TV broadcasts in English. One of them reported spending all his evenings listening to the radio and watching television. He bought a radio and a TV set mainly for the purpose of learning English. Another one said that she tries to maximally exploit all the occasions in which English is spoken to the extent that even in the bus she tries to pick up words. However, this strategy is likely to be helpful to a limited extent since these students are only listening to conversations and not interacting with speakers. As emphasized by Myles and Cheng (2003, p. 249), “for communication to take place, these students must have the desire to participate appropriately in various

social situations with NES[16] students and faculty, and with other international students." This does not only help in improving listening, but speaking as well. Of course they must also have the opportunity. It should be noted that at the time of data collection for this research, all the Rwandan postgraduate students who study in the Wits School of Education were living in the same building and shared rooms between themselves. When they are at this place they behave as if they are in Rwanda as far as their language use is concerned: they speak Kinyarwanda all the time. Even in the postgraduate computer laboratory where they spend most of their day, they exchange in Kinyarwanda when they are talking among themselves. This limits the opportunities to practice orally the little English they know.

As a lecturer and supervisor, Maria also pointed out that this social isolation is a serious challenge for these Rwandan students' development not only in language, but in the whole of their academic life at Wits. As mentioned in the second chapter, literacy practices are very important for success in university studies and "the shaping of our literacy practices takes place in a number of different domains, for example, home, school and workplace" (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005, p.23). Given that literacy is bound up with our identity and our practices (Pahl and Rowsell, 2005), we "multiply" our identities by extending our social and academic network, and the more we do this, the more we multiply discourses and enrich our literacy practices. In effect, whenever people engage in a literacy event they do so from a social position.

The social positions that people take up depend upon the various social positions available within the particular literacy practices and event (Sheridan and Street, 2000). This implies that the more social positions one can take, the richer his/her literacy practices will be. This is because, as Clark and Ivanic (1997, p.140) put it, "individuals are introduced or exposed to only a restricted range of conventions and are to a large extent positioned by the social opportunities that have been available to them." Referring to these social opportunities, Gee (1996, p.93) notes that "any speaker who did not have variability in his or her language, variability with which to indicate different social

[16]Native English Speakers

identities, would be a social isolate, not part of any community." For Swales (1990), individuals may belong to several discourse communities and individuals will vary in the number of discourse communities they belong to and hence in the number of genres they command. Given that these social opportunities and opportunities for discourse variability are very few for the Rwandan student participants in this research, this is likely to impoverish their literacy practices, and, eventually, their academic success. They will continue to have very few positions to take and very few discourses to draw on in their writing.

With reference to the above, I asked the respondents if they try to find occasions to regularly interact with native speakers of English or other people who speak it fluently. According to the information that they provided, these interactions are very limited. Moses reported using English with lecturers only given that he does not have any other friend in South Africa apart from his fellow countrymen. Isabel reported trying to create these opportunities but she acknowledged that they were not frequent. In fact, she speaks English to other students in buses and in the computer laboratory at the Wits School of Education as she is with other Rwandans most of her other time. John and Frank said that they spent much of their time speaking with foreign students. However, when asked where they always use English, they pointed out that they use it when doing their assignments, during class breaks with friends and in the market. For most of the rest of their time, they reported using Kinyarwanda. All the four interviewees said that the fact that all the 31 Rwandan students were living together was a hindrance to the improvement of their English skills, as it prevents them from practising the language.

In the interviews, I asked participants how they feel when they are interacting with people who speak English fluently. Moses said that he feels frustrated because he wants to achieve a certain level of proficiency but he fails to. Isabel feels that these people have achieved a level of proficiency that is very difficult for her to achieve. John said that he would normally be afraid or shy, but being aware of his weakness in using English and longing for improvement, he has developed the courage to enable him to speak however badly he might do this.

The questionnaire also asked students if they contribute and/or ask questions in classroom sessions and why or why not (Question 10). Their answers to this question reveal a lack of self-confidence on their part. Three of them said that they never ask questions or contribute in class. The reasons they gave for this include the fact that they do not understand what the lecturer or other students say and the fear of making mistakes due to their poor English. This also applies to the majority of other students to some extent. In fact, even though eleven respondents stated that they ask questions in class, five of them recognize that they do it to a limited extent due to language problems. They stated that they do it with reserve and sometimes choose not to, fearing to seem ridiculous if they make mistakes. Only three students reported contributing to classroom discussions. This lack of participation inhibits their practice in speaking and is likely to make the challenge even greater. Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis suggests that low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can create a 'mental block' that prevents comprehensible input from being taken up and used for language acquisition.

When asked to state the extent to which they believe that studying at the University of the Witwatersrand will improve their English proficiency (Question 11), nine of the respondents said that their English will be improved greatly, eight to a moderate extent and one to a very limited extent. The majority base their hopes on the fact that English is the only common medium of communication with lecturers and fellow students and, above all, the medium of instruction at this university. Thus, they hope to find more opportunities to practice this language and to be acquainted with the discourses that are dominant at this university. They say that since they are reading and writing a great deal in English they hope to become better readers and writers of this language. In addition, since they are now exposed to native spoken English in their classroom and in the media their speaking and listening skills are likely to improve as well. However, this hope is likely to vanish if they continue to shy away from speaking English.

Furthermore, the information provided by Moses during the interview seems to contradict the above participants' reasons for hope. His argument refers back to limited

opportunities of practising English. He said: "Hari umuntu ejobundi twavuganye aravuga ati: 'because of (sic) you are in an environment of English you will not have more, much (*sic*) problems.' Ariko nsanga yaribeshye. En fait, nous avons été défavorisés because out of school usanga twivugira ikinyarwanda ni cyo kibazo. Burya ururimi rwose rugira ingorane ariko environment ishobora kuzongera cyangwa ikazigabanya"(Interview: 6 August 2009). ("I was talking with somebody recently and he said: 'since you are in an English environment you will not have many problems.' But I have noted that he was wrong. In fact, we are underprivileged because outside the classroom we always speak Kinyarwanda. In effect, there are challenges in learning any language, but the environment can increase or reduce them.") It should be noted that Moses did his Masters degree in another European language (not English or French), which was totally new for him, with fewer difficulties than he is facing at Wits. The main differences he has noted between Wits and the institution in which he did his Masters include the fact that in Europe he was in an environment where he practised that language daily, which is not the case for him and other participants in this study at Wits. The other difference is that before he commenced his Masters studies he had initial training in that language for eight months. This was an expectation for many of the participants before beginning their studies and research at Wits as pointed out by John and Frank. These two respondents partly attributed the challenges which they are facing to the lack of this training.

While these students expected this English training support, lecturers also expected these students to be competent in English, assuming that they would not have applied for acceptance at Wits without such competence. Maria said that she expects students to write a research report with some assistance from her around both the content and the presentation and style of the report, but not with the writing of the standard academic English. For Denise, postgraduate students should have a high degree of competence in written English. The School of Education had not anticipated that the Rwandan postgraduate students would need significant English language literacy support.

5.2.4 Strategies used in adapting to a new approach to learning

The students who participated in this research did their previous studies in institutions that are different from Wits in many respects. Thus, strategies that might have proved successful in their previous studies might not work well in the new academic environment. That is why the students necessarily need to become familiar, identify with and take part in this new environment to successfully study and research according to its requirements. Ferenz (2005) quotes Deem and Brehony (2000) who point out that strong identification by second language research students with their academic environment enhances students' identities as researchers and as members of their academic community. For Kutz et al. (1993, p.81), "to become participants in an academic community requires engagement in the life of that community."

Respondents identified a number of differences between their previous and current learning experiences in terms of learning and researching. Apart from the media of instruction being different (English versus French), all the respondents pointed out that their previous educational institutions used a banking approach to education while Wits uses a problem posing approach as explained earlier. Moreover, each assignment in their current studies has to be written in the form of an essay, which many of them are not familiar with. That is why they pointed out that studying at Wits requires them to work harder, in addition to the challenges of learning and researching in a language they have not fully mastered. This difference seems obvious especially for Masters students, given that the postgraduate studies include much greater emphasis on research, than undergraduate studies.

Another difference they have identified is that the use of internet is a requirement for postgraduate studies at Wits. They stated that one cannot manage to successfully study at Wits unless one is able to use the internet for reference searches. The internet is needed at Wits to access almost all the material that students need in their studies and research, including books that are available in hard copies at the university library. It also mediates communication between students and lecturers to a large extent. In their previous studies

the internet was hardly needed because, as has been mentioned above, these students would rely on lecturers' notes and use books in the library for research. Two respondents reported having never used the internet in their previous studies, as it did not exist (at least in their institutions) when they last studied. These particular respondents revealed that they were struggling a great deal to become familiar with researching on the internet and that this was hampering their activities. One of the two said that typing assignments itself was a problem because of lack of computer skills.

Concerning research, these students pointed out that the research proposal at Wits requires much more reading and is given much more emphasis than in their previous institutions. Given that they had to begin preparing their research proposals from the day they arrived, this increased their difficulties in adapting to the new academic institution. At the time of writing this report (seven months after their arrival), many of them were still struggling with writing these proposals. In addition, the Wits School of Education places more emphasis on qualitative than quantitative research while most students with previous research experience had undertaken the latter. Given that the former requires extensive explanations, it is likely to be a challenge, given the limited writing skills of many of these students. To overcome the above challenges, respondents said that they had to work even harder and read more extensively to cope with the requirements of the university. Those who do not have computer skills (including internet) spend much time acquiring these skills with the help of their colleagues.

However, the difference between these students' previous academic experiences and what is expected of them in the Wits School of Education is not only a source of difficulties, but also offers some advantages. For instance, respondents pointed out that the classroom environment is friendly in that course delivery is discussion-based: lecturers and students contribute equally and students can sometimes challenge the views of the lecturer. In their previous learning experiences, lecturers were the sole sources of knowledge, course delivery was transmission-based and students were considered inferior to lecturers. The respondents prefer the Wits approach because discussion fosters understanding. Respondents also acknowledged the availability of facilities such as

books, internet connection and the cooperative and understanding nature of lecturers and/or research supervisors, which facilitates their learning and research.

Moreover, respondents mentioned that their lecturers provide extensive, corrective and encouraging feedback on their assignments, which helps in improving their writing and researching skills. When asked about the way they respond to their lecturers' comments on their work, three interviewees said that they are not offended by them, given that they themselves know that they are experiencing language difficulties. However, John said that at the beginning lecturers' comments were shocking and made him feel unwelcome in the institution. But he noted that "[A]u fil du temps, ils ont compris que les études sont déjà engagées et qu'il faut peut-être résoudre le problème d'une autre manière sans pour autant nous châtier, ou nous forcer à un régime qui nous soit difficile à gérer" (Interview : 10 August 2009). (As time went by, lecturers understood that our studies had already started and that there was need to solve the problem in another way without chastising us or forcing us into a situation that is difficult for us to handle.) It is good that this situation did not last for a long time; otherwise it would have had dire consequences for the students' academic performance. In fact, "if, in the mainstream education, misunderstandings concerning staff/student expectations are allowed to fester for too long, the outcome for students can be very damaging" (Jones et al., 1999).

John also mentioned that there are lecturers who complain of the fact that these Rwandan students were admitted into the university without fulfilling the usual language requirements (having an acceptable score on the TOEFL or IELTS test). Students pointed out that some lecturers even complain about this publicly in class. This view is likely to influence the way these lecturers judge and treat these students, but it is not the object of this study.

When asked whether they study in groups (question 16), thirteen of the respondents answered "yes" and six answered "no". For the former, the reasons for studying in groups include the need to interact with other students to improve their English proficiency, to better understand the readings and to do assignment tasks especially when they are

difficult. Others said that they discuss course materials in groups when their lecturers demand it. If these groups are to be successful in terms of helping these students improve their English language skills, the group relationships need to go beyond the discussion of course material to turn into friendship networks. In fact, forming and maintaining friendships, taking initiatives in conversations and willingness to converse with native or any other proficient English speaking students are all important to social adjustment (Myles and Cheng, 2003). Friendship networks facilitate regular interactions and are likely to create a habit of speaking English in daily communication.

In addition, "there is much in the literature which suggests that international students who spend most of their leisure time with host nationals have fewer problems with cultural, academic and social adjustments at the university" (Myles and Cheng, 2003, p.258). The information that I got from interviews shows that these friendship networks are missing, as none of the four students whom I interviewed reported having friends with whom he or she interacts regularly, apart from other Rwandans. With reference to the creation of such friendships, Isabel indicated that it is easier to socialize with students from countries other than South Africa such as Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland, etc. According to her, students from South Africa are not welcoming enough and seem reluctant to interact with students experiencing language difficulties. This seems to confirm Myles and Cheng's (2003) finding mentioned earlier, that many NNES prefer to socialize with other 'outsiders' than with local students or at least find it easier to do so.

Those who said that they do not study in groups advance such reasons as the difficulty of organizing different people around the same activity at the same time and, also, that they do not expect much from groups. Interestingly, these respondents are people who used English as a medium of instruction at university and wrote their last research reports in English. This shows that they do not feel the pressing need to study in groups, as they are not facing many difficulties in understanding the prescribed readings. Some are PhD students whose research does not directly involve working with other people.

5.3 Institutional support

According to Myles and Cheng (2003), NNES international students' adaptation is influenced by environmental conditions, among other factors, such as how active the university is in welcoming new comers. Concerning students who are learning through the medium of a second or third language, Angélil-Carter (1998, p.87) suggests that "they may require additional opportunities to absorb and produce the language and the meaning of the discipline." Thus, it could be argued that universities which enrol international students have a duty of supporting these students if they are to achieve their goals. The following is a brief discussion of the support given by the University of the Witwatersrand to the student participants in this research.

5.3.1 English support course

Before tackling the issue of an English support course, it should be noted that the admission policy of the University of the Witwatersrand stipulates that if candidates are not from a country where English is a dominant language, they have to successfully pass a TOEFL or IELTS test to demonstrate their ability to use English. If the performance on one of these tests is not satisfactory, candidates are not admitted. However, some scholars such as Seelen have questioned the relevance of these tests. He states that "low performance on language tests (such as TOEFL) can point simply to insufficient exposure of the student to the English language at that point in time. But a student's otherwise adequate verbal skills might make up for this deficiency, once he or she is exposed to the English language" (2002, p.23). Therefore, instead of being used to exclude the student from the system, such tests could be used diagnostically for a remedial action. For the 31 Rwandan postgraduate students admitted in the Wits School of Education in 2009, the requirement of sitting the TOEFL or IELTS test was waived. The reason for waiving this requirement is that the agreement to bring this group of students to Wits was signed between the Government of Rwanda and the Wits School of Education, without all of the university's usual international office procedures being followed.

What the Wits School of Education did was to give its own test to these students to diagnose their needs so as to see how they could be helped. According to Jennifer, the test which was given was not specifically a language test (though language difficulties could be identified through it), but was designed to assess students' abilities to read an academic argument in English and to respond critically, in writing, to it. The results indicated that many students were struggling not with English per se, but with academic English and with understanding an argument. Based on the results of this test, some students were told that they did not need any support (but some of these reported facing difficulties in using English), others were firstly offered a course designed to assist them with listening and speaking because this was what was requested by the students who had found the test most difficult. A short oral English course financed by the Wits School of Education was offered by a teacher from the Wits Language School. The four students who were identified as needing extensive help with writing were referred to a self-financed course at the Wits Language School. Only one student managed to pay for this course and confirmed that it was beneficial.

Eleven of the respondents reported having participated in the oral English course while eight reported not having done so. When asked whether this course was helpful or not (question 17 of the questionnaire), eight said that it was helpful and three said it was not. Those who said that it was helpful pointed out that their writing and listening skills had improved a bit but they found it regrettable that it was short (three weeks with four hours a week) and that the methodology was not suited to beginners. Those who found this course not helpful said that the level of the course was very low and thus irrelevant for postgraduate 'level' students. The varied responses are a further indication of the range of proficiency in English of the Rwandan students. Others said that they were taught rules for writing which are almost the same in many languages (including French) such as avoid long sentences, use linking words between paragraphs, etc. They said that they already knew this; that they wanted a course which introduced them to the practices in the new language, that is, to discipline-specific discourse use.

One of them went even further to say: "those who taught us considered us as children who are learning to speak a language." This statement suggests that this student felt that his identity was threatened, as he implies that his status (adulthood) was not respected. One can speculate that this feeling is partly due to the failure to assume the new identity as a student, after serving as a director of education in a certain district in Rwanda. In fact, as Gee (1996) put it, we are different people in different settings; in other words, we have multiple identities. Gee (1996) goes on to suggest that there are conflicts between these identities and each of us lives and breathes these conflicts as we act out our various discourses. For some, these conflicts are more dramatic than for others. Therefore, switching from an official's position to that of a student who has problems of language in learning might have been difficult for this student. As Wenger (1998, p.159) notes, "[B]eing one person requires some work to reconcile our different forms of membership [to different communities of practice]. Different practices can make competing demands that are difficult to combine into an experience that corresponds to a single identity." This is also likely to be the case for other student participants in this study, especially those who are university lecturers in Rwanda and who, while studying and researching at Wits, are also supervising students' research dissertations in Rwanda, switching between these identities from time to time.

It is should be noted that as time went by, some students dropped out of the support courses. I asked them why and they told me that the courses were not helpful. It is evident that there are different views among those who took part in these courses. This is likely to be a result of different levels of knowledge of this language among these students leading to different needs and expectations. This seems to be confirmed by Denise who noted a marked discrepancy in the written language skills of the students in her class, implying that the levels of knowledge of English for these students are different.

When asked whether they received any other support from the university as an institution (question 18), fourteen reported not having any while two said that they had. The latter respondents mentioned a writing workshop where they were trained in writing techniques

by people from the Wits Writing Centre. By the time of collecting data for this research, this course had already come to the end after four sessions of two hours each. It is not known why there were so few sessions and their impact was not assessed. At least one thing is true: many of the students who took part in either the oral communication course or the sessions offered by the Writing Centre continued to experience difficulties in writing exams and assignments as revealed by Jennifer's comments on the results of the first semester. Respondents also mentioned university newspapers, workshops and conferences as types of institutional support. However, this last set of facilities, however helpful it might be for these students, was not designed specifically for these students but for the whole Wits student community.

5.3.2 Lecturers and supervisors' support

Lecturers are important partners in learning and contribute a great deal to the shaping of the quality of teaching/learning in institutions. They are organizers of the learning experiences and environment (Biggs, 2003). Thus, students' adaptation to the learning and researching environment is influenced by their lecturers and/or supervisors' input, among other factors.

Among the eleven respondents who answered the question of whether their lecturers and/or research supervisors understand and help them to overcome English language problems (Question 19), nine responded positively. Such help includes listening more attentively and speaking to the students more slowly, using many examples for them to understand, encouraging and appreciating their efforts, extending deadlines for the submission of assignments and overlooking grammatical mistakes by focusing on the content. One of them said that his supervisor would make some language corrections to his work, which helped him to improve his writing abilities. Respondents also mentioned that the School of Education had given them an extension for the submission of their research proposals. As has been mentioned earlier, research proposals at Wits are longer and are given more weight than the ones in these students' previous academic institutions, which, according to them, made it impossible for them to meet the deadline.

However, some students pointed out that some lecturers treat them as weak in their respective areas of specialization because of limitations in their use of English. On this issue, John said that at the beginning the assessment system was very 'tough', particularly for French speaking students, due to their limited skills in using English. Such treatment recalls Lee's statement according to which "assessment practices are differently biased since ELLs are not often assessed in their home languages. The assessment practices may result in major underestimation of ELLs' science knowledge, in that such practices conflates science knowledge with other linguistic and cultural knowledge" (2005, p.511). However, the difficulty of this assessment system might not always be inherent in the system itself, but might be a result of students not being familiar with it. In effect, as Wenger (1998, p.153) notes, "[W]hen we come into contact with new practices, we venture into unfamiliar territory. Our non-membership shapes our identities through our confrontation with the unfamiliar." This confrontation that students go through in the process of adapting to the new learning environment is likely to frustrate some and bring them to blame the system itself.

Concerning their evaluation of the relationships between lecturers and/or supervisors and students, five of the respondents stated that these relationships are very good, eleven of them stated that they are good while two said that they are fair. This suggests that students perceive these relationships as generally favourable for their work. Some of the evidence includes the fact that lecturers show that they are concerned with students' problems, take time to listen to these and help in finding solutions whenever possible. They also respond positively to students' weaknesses and take care of each and every student. Notwithstanding the above claims, some students pointed out that some lecturers ridicule publicly the students with language difficulties and this discourages them especially from voicing their ideas in English.

On the issue of support offered to these students from the perspectives of lecturers and research supervisors, Maria said that she encouraged and monitored her research student's efforts to improve her English and provided her with moral support. This lecturer seems very concerned about her student as I noted that she is even aware of her

health problems and helps her overcome them. When Jennifer's students scored under 60% in assignments, she would give them an opportunity to rewrite them basing on her comments, for improvement. She would also provide more time for these students to reformulate their research topics and questions. It should be noted that a time extension for research proposal submission was provided for all the Rwandan postgraduate students in the Wits School of Education in 2009, as pointed out earlier by students themselves.

As for Denise, she offered additional sessions to Rwandan students in her class and talked to each individually to provide them with opportunities to discuss in more detail, to ask questions about things they have found more difficult to understand in the bigger classroom session. She also said that she gave more sessions for the students she was supervising, than she gave to English speaking South African students. However, she pointed out that this was not easy for her because this time was not provided for in her workload. That is why she suggested that the University should have provided additional workshops to these students about academic writing in English.

5.3.3 The university environment

According to Wenger (1998), "to support learning is not only to support the process of acquiring knowledge but also to offer a place where new ways of knowing can be realised." This scholar argues that the transformative practice of a learning community offers an ideal context for developing new understandings. That is why I was interested in understanding what the participants thought of the general learning environment at the University of the Witwatersrand, and their suggestions for the improvement of this environment. Most of them said that the environment is conducive for learning, despite the challenges that they are facing due to their limited abilities in using English. However, they pointed to the insufficient number of computers in the computer laboratories since more than one student shares one computer. This means that they do not have access to computers whenever they need them, which hampers their academic progress, given the importance of computers in their studies. As a solution to this problem, they suggested that Masters and PhD students should normally have their own

offices. However, such an arrangement is not possible in the Wits School of Education given that even staff members sometimes share offices. Nevertheless, at the time of writing this research report most Rwandan PhD students had already been given offices.

Participants also gave their suggestions for the improvement of the university's support to students in general, and to those with language difficulties in particular. They suggested that new students should be trained in the use of internet resources. They also suggested richer orientation sessions to new students so that they know the circumstances they are to work in, their rights and duties, university regulations and policy, etc. For instance, MEd (Master of Education) students pointed out that they were informed that the Board of Examiners had decided that students who did not achieve 60% in coursework were likely not to be allowed to write their Masters Research reports. In such a case, they are awarded a Postgraduate Diploma of Education (PGDE) after completing an additional course module. However, this information came after the end of the first semester. "Had this information been given at the outset, we should have worked accordingly", some of them indicated.

Concerning orientation sessions, I came to learn that they had taken place before the arrival of the Rwandan students, who came three weeks after the start of the academic year. Given that Masters degrees at the School of Education last for one year of full time study, these students said that this time is not sufficient, that it should be increased to two years: one year for coursework and another for research. While it is possible for students to take more than a year to complete their Master's degree, they have to formally apply for an extension and they have to pay extra fees. Alternatively, they can be registered as part time students who are expected to complete their degree in two years. This information was not conveyed to the students when they registered.

Finally, the students suggested a more organized and longer initial English course for students with language difficulties before they begin their postgraduate studies. They suggested a six month course as is the case for their counterparts in the School of Law of the same University. Denise shares this view with these students. She suggests two or

three month bridging sessions based on an assessment of the students' language skills, before they begin academic courses. In her view the cost of these sessions should also be included in the whole cost of the programme.

To sum this chapter up, it should be noted that at the time of collecting data for this study, both students and their lecturers/research supervisors reported some improvement in students' work. This suggests that the efforts made and strategies adopted by these students had already been successful to some extent. These strategies include using an English-French dictionary when reading and writing, discussing prescribed reading materials with friends, asking more knowledgeable colleagues to edit their written work, finding opportunities to listen to and to practise spoken English, and reading extensively in order to find models for academic writing. However, what still needs to be addressed is integration with both home and additional language users of English who can assist Rwandan students to gain entry into the discourse community of postgraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Despite these difficulties, students acknowledge the generally favourable learning environment at the University of the Witwatersrand and the availability of facilities such as internet and books. They continue regret the lack of a structured English support course, something that their lecturers had not expected them to need. For the most part, their lecturers/research supervisors also support them in various ways: by taking time to listen to them, by helping them solve their problems, by giving them the opportunity to re-write their assignments when their marks are low, by offering them additional sessions for a more detailed discussion of reading materials and class work, etc.

CHAPTER SIX

GENERAL CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

6.1 General conclusion

This research aimed to investigate the challenges faced by Rwandan French-speaking postgraduate students in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. More specifically, the aims of this case study were to identify, describe and analyse these challenges, to investigate how they affect these students' academic activities, and to investigate how they were being addressed by these students and the University.

The literature review addressed the issues of language and learning and the crucial role language plays in the learning process, which role is crucial. In effect, being able to use the language of instruction is an important factor in academic success. A number of researchers (Burke and Wyatt-Smith, 1996; Rollnick, 2000; Evans and Green, 2007) suggest that additional language speakers of the medium of instruction are likely to face difficulties in using this language for learning and research. That is why challenges of learning and researching in a second or foreign language, especially English, were also addressed in the literature review. Equally, learning strategies and institutional support provided for these students by the learning institutions to overcome these challenges were investigated.

Findings from the case study suggest that these postgraduate students' previous 'ways with words' (Heath, 1983) differ from those of the institution in which they are now studying. The main difference is that their previous educational institutions adopted mainly a 'banking approach to education', while Wits adopts mainly a 'problem posing approach' (Freire, 1968). Thus, critical thinking was a big challenge for many of these students, especially those in the MEd programme. Most of these students were used to

reproducing what they had read for their exams, while Wits requires them to think critically and to include their own "voice" in their assignments and exams. In their research they tend to describe the objects of their research while the Wits' research approach requires them to critically analyse them. In this regard, designing conceptual frameworks for research proposals was a very serious challenge for many of them.

In addition, ten of the nineteen students who completed the questionnaire reported not having used English as a medium of instruction in their previous studies and eleven reported not having used English outside school settings. This suggests that students had had limited knowledge of and experience in using this language to the extent that using it as a medium of instruction at Wits is a great challenge. The challenge is mainly related to producing academic written work and reading to understand the materials in their different areas of specialization. This is because writing and reading skills are required on a daily basis, especially at the postgraduate level where research constitutes a major part of the programme. Speaking and listening skills were also found to be a problem for these students and they are likely to remain so since these students have found very few opportunities to practise communicating in English.

Findings also show some of the strategies that are adopted by these students to address these challenges. They include reading a wide range of texts, finding opportunities to be exposed to and speak English, and using English-French dictionaries in reading and writing.

These students hope to overcome these challenges and to succeed in their studies because the learning environment is conducive and their lecturers/research supervisors generally help them in their work. For instance, some students indicated that their lecturers overlook their language mistakes and focus on the content of their assignments and exams. This strategy seems to be in line with Angélil-Crater's remarks. This scholar notes that "as they [students learning through the medium of the second or third language] take new risks, they may make 'errors' and educators may need to increasingly try to identify instances of student texts which demonstrate conceptual achievement in

spite of language problems" (1998, p.87). However, this strategy should be adopted with care so as not to discourage students from making efforts to improve their English proficiency, which would worsen the situation for postgraduate students given that they are supposed to be knowledge disseminators through the medium of English. Instead of lowering university standards to meet students' needs, universities should help students climb up the ladder and meet these standards. After all, "if the instruction is undemanding, students will learn very little and quickly become bored in the process" (Cummins, 1996, p.72). Moreover, there are studies which have pointed out that some students are dissatisfied with such an approach. For instance, a student in Leki and Carson's (1994) study expressed her dissatisfaction with the fact that her teacher did not correct her mistakes. In fact, her teacher did not want students to be too disappointed by getting many corrections from him. In response, the student told the teacher that if he had done that, she would have known whether she was right or wrong.

While there has been support from lecturers/supervisors, the university has not offered relevant and systematic support based on the respective needs of these students. Only a short oral English course financed by the Wits School of Education was offered to them by a teacher from the Wits Language School, together with a four session writing workshop where they were trained in writing techniques by people from the Wits Writing Centre. Attendance was voluntary, and those who underwent these courses were not tested at the end to establish their effects. Thus these courses were stopped without checking if the problems that they aimed to resolve had been addressed. Therefore, it is difficult to establish their value in helping these students to address language related challenges. Furthermore, some students found these courses unhelpful and many of those who participated in them continued to experience difficulties in using academic English.

6.2 Recommendations

It is true that students have a major role to play in addressing the challenges that they are facing in using English as a medium of instruction and in adapting to the university system. However, these efforts are likely not to be fully productive if they are not

supported by lecturers and/or research supervisors and the university as an institution and even by the Government of Rwanda. Thus, recommendations are addressed to each of these categories.

6.2.1 To lecturers/supervisors in the Wits School of Education

Lecturers and/or research supervisors are important participants in the academic success of the students they teach and/or supervise. Their role is likely to be even more important when their students experience learning difficulties due to various reasons such as unfamiliarity with the language of instruction and the institutional educational system as is the case for participants in this case study. It was noted that most students consider that lecturers are doing well in helping these students, but the following are further recommendations to help these students even further:

- Given that language issues in the academic area need to be addressed by all disciplines (Angélil-Carter, 1998), all lecturers should help these students to improve their language skills irrespective of their disciplines;

- It is true that these students are not conversant with the English and literacy practices of the Wits School of Education. However, they are proficient in other languages (such as French) and discourses. Lecturers and/or supervisors should understand and use these discourses as a starting point for familiarizing students with the institutional literacy practices;

- If students are experiencing language difficulties, it does not necessarily mean that they are weak in the subject matter of their areas of specialization. Therefore, lecturers should not classify them as weak and should assess the content of their work without prejudice;

- If Rwandan students in the Wits School of Education were admitted without fulfilling all the usual language requirements, it is not their fault and it is a fact

that lecturers have to accept. Therefore, lecturers should not treat these students in any unfavourable way. If their weakness in the language that is the medium of instruction poses any problem, it should be solved in ways that assist students to make progress.

6.3.2 To the University of the Witwatersrand

The institutions of higher learning that enrol international students with various experiences, needs and expectations must do their best to respond to them. In a particular way, the University of the Witwatersrand should cater to students with language difficulties by doing the following among other measures:

- As stipulated in the Language Policy of this institution (2003), the medium of instruction should not serve as a barrier to access and success. Therefore, instead of TOEFL and IELTS or any other language tests being selective, they should be diagnostic as regards the needs of the students in English language skills;

- There should be measures to help students who do not have enough English competence before beginning their degree courses at Wits, especially those from countries where English is not a dominant language. These measures can include initial English training courses in the Wits Language School. Empowering these students in terms of English can contribute indirectly to knowledge creation since it has been noted that multilingual scholars play an important role in global scholarship (Uzuner, 2008);

- The University should accommodate international students who experience difficulties in using English in residences in which students speak a range of home languages and where English serve as a lingua franca. This would increase the opportunities for these students to speak and be exposed to spoken English, which is likely to speed up their mastery of this variety of English. As they

become more confident in listening to and speaking English, they are likely to become less anxious in the lecture room and in tutorial discussions.

6.2.3 To Rwandan postgraduate French speaking students in the Wits School of Education

The students who participated in this study have adopted a number of strategies to address the challenges related to their limited ability in English academic discourse, and to unfamiliarity with the new academic environment. However, some opportunities have been either underexploited or are still to be created. They include the following:

- Given that these students had not previously been immersed in English speaking community, they should take advantage of their stay at Wits to participate in communication (especially verbal) using English to a greater extent;

- They should extend their friendship networks to other students, including foreign and local ones. Even though it was noted that local students are not welcoming, this cannot be generalized to all of them. Rwanda students should stop being satisfied with always being with other Rwandans as a group all the time, as it is likely to hinder the improvement of their proficiency in English and their socialization process;

- They should try to study in groups made up of people from different countries as much as possible; this will expose them to specialist discourse in English and various pronunciations and improve their academic literacy for they will be discussing academic matters;

- It was noted that these students always speak Kinyarwanda even when discussing academic matters among themselves and this is a hindrance to the improvement of their proficiency in English. Thus, they should try to use English among themselves given that all of them speak it to a certain extent.

- They need to accept that as English is not their mother tongue making errors in using it is part of the learning process. Therefore, they should not shy away from speaking this language due to fear of making mistakes. After all, making mistakes in language learning is a sign that learning is taking place (Lightbown and Spada, 1996).

- They should immerse themselves in the new language: reading books, newspapers and any other reading material, using cassette recorders for listening, and even registering for English training courses in the Wits Language School if they can afford them.

6.2.4 To the Government of Rwanda

- The Government of Rwanda, which is a sponsor for these students, should also help these students to address the challenges that they are facing. The scholarship package for these students should also include the fees for initial English courses because these courses are expensive and students cannot afford them.

6.3 Limitations of the study

This study was conducted in 2009 which was the first year of study at the University of the Witwatersrand for the research subjects, in programmes of two, three or even four years duration. The research is thus a 'snapshot' rather than a longitudinal study. As indicated in Chapter Three the fact that the researcher was an insider to the group that was being studied might also have affected aspects of the data collection and analysis.

6.4 Avenues for further research

Given the unanticipated mismatch between the expectation of the majority of the Rwandan post graduate students that an 'academic English course' would be provided for them, and the expectation of the lecturers that the students would already be competent users of English for academic purposes, one possible avenue for research is in the area of such course provision – either in Rwanda or in the universities outside Rwanda to which the Ministry of Education is sending postgraduate students. For example, if students will be studying in different disciplines (even within the field of education), what should be the content of such a course? Is it likely to be more useful to students if offered in tandem with disciplinary courses or if offered prior to the commencement of disciplinary studies and research?

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Self information sheet, letter to students

Dear student,

My name is Emmanuel Sibomana, and I am a student at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. For the completion of the degree of Masters of Arts for which I am registered for the academic year 2009, I am required to conduct research and write a research report. My research is about challenges faced by French-speaking postgraduate students who are learning in English. More specifically, I aim to investigate Rwandan students' academic literacy experiences in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. I will attempt to answer the following questions:

- What are the challenges facing Rwandan French-speaking postgraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand?
- How do these challenges affect their academic activities?
- What do these students do to address these challenges?
- What is the nature of the institutional support available for these students?

To achieve this, I would like to distribute questionnaires to all Rwandan French-speaking postgraduate students in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, and have a thirty-minute interview with some of them. I will also analyze some of their assignment tasks and course readings and lectures' feedback on their assignments and research writing. Participation is voluntary and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. No information that could identify you will be included in the research report. Questionnaires, interview materials (tapes and transcripts) and copies of assignment will not be seen or heard by any person other than my research supervisor and myself. In the interview and in the process of answering the questionnaire, you may refuse to answer any questions you would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. Please complete the enclosed consent form if you are willing to assist me with this research:

- by completing a questionnaire;
- by participating in an individual interview with me at a time that is convenient to you;
- By allowing the interview to be tape-recorded for later transcription and use in research report with total anonymity;
- By allowing me to use your marked assignments and feedback on your research writing for document analysis.

Your participation in this study will be highly appreciated. It is anticipated that this research will inform policy about accommodating students with language problems and about the use of English as a medium of instruction in Rwanda.

Yours sincerely,

Emmanuel Sibomana

Appendix B: Questionnaire for students

Area of specialization : ……

Level of studies : Honours Masters PhD

1. Did you study English in your previous studies? Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes, at which level?

a) Primary ☐
b) Secondary ☐
c) University ☐
d) Informal centres ☐
e) I had a private coach ☐

2. Did you use English as a medium of instruction in your previous studies?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes, at which level?

a) Primary ☐
b) Secondary ☐
c) University ☐

3. Did you use English outside school settings before coming to the University of the Witwatersrand?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes, where?

_____

If No, why not?

_____

_____

_____

4. Do you find it easy to study in English at the University of the Witwatersrand?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

5. With reference to your use of English for academic purposes at Wits, rank the four language skills according to the order of difficulty in the following table (start from the most difficult for you). These skills are **speaking, listening, writing** and **reading.**

Skills	**The reason why it is difficult**
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

6. Rate each of the following aspects of academic reading according to the level of difficulty which you are experiencing:

Item	Very easy	Easy	Neutral	Difficult	Very difficult
Identifying supporting ideas/examples					
Reading carefully to understand a text					
Identifying key ideas					
Understanding organization of a text					
Taking brief, relevant notes					
Using own words in note taking					
Reading quickly to get overall meaning					
Reading quickly to find information					
Working out meaning of difficult words					
Understanding specialist vocabulary					

7. Rate each of the following aspects of academic writing according to the level of difficulty which you are experiencing:

Item	Very easy	Easy	Neutral	Difficult	Very difficult
Writing introductions					
Referring to sources					
Revising written work					
Writing references/bibliography					
Writing conclusions					
Writing body sections					
Summarizing/paraphrasing					
Planning written assignments					
Expressing ideas clearly/logically					
Synthesizing information					
Writing coherent paragraphs					
Proof-reading written assignments					
Linking sentences smoothly					
Expressing ideas in correct English					
Using appropriate academic style					

8. What do you do if you cannot understand aspects of prescribed readings?
    a) I ask a colleague to help me ☐
    b) I ask a lecturer/supervisor to help me ☐
    c) I consult a dictionary ☐
    d) Other strategies (specify)_____

9. What do you do if you have difficulty in writing assignments? Describe your strategies_____

_____

_____

_____

10. Do you often contribute and/or ask questions in class? Yes☐ No ☐

Why or why not? _____

_____

_____

11. To what extent do you think studying at the Wits will improve your English language proficiency?

    a) Greatly ☐
    b) Moderately ☐
    c) To a very limited extent ☐
    d) Not at all ☐

    Give a reason for your response_____

    _____

    _____

    _____

12. Describe the main similarities and differences between your undergraduate/postgraduate educational 'system' and the Wits 'system'_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

13. In which language did you write your last research report?

_____

14. Describe the main similarities and differences between the approach(es) to research in your undergraduate/postgraduate studies and the approach(es) to research at Wits?

_____

_____

_____

_____

15. Does French help you in your academic activities at the Wits? Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes, how? _____

_____

_____

_____

16. Do you study in groups? Yes No ☐

Why or why not?_____

_____

_____

17. Have you had (or do you still have) English training offered to you by the University of the Witwatersrand? Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes, do you find it helpful? Yes ☐ No ☐

Why or why not?_____

_____

_____

_____

18. Have you had any other support from the university as regards your English related problems (if you have any)? Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes, please describe this support

_____

_____

_____

_____

Do you find this support sufficient? Yes ☐ No ☐

Why or why not? _____

_____

_____

_____

19. Do your lecturers/supervisors understand you and help you overcome English related challenges? Yes ☐ No ☐

If Yes, how?_____

_____

_____

_____

20. Generally speaking, how do you view the relationships between students and lecturers at Wits?

    a) Very good ☐
    b) Good ☐
    c) Fair ☐
    d) Bad ☐

Explain your answer _____

_____

_____

_____

21. Describe how you find the general learning environment at the Wits as far as your studies are concerned _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

22. Is there anything you would like to suggest to the Wits for the improvement of your learning and researching experiences? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thanks for your cooperation

Appendix C: Interview consent form (for students)

I hereby agree to participate in an interview with Emmanuel Sibomana. I understand that:

- He will be inquiring about challenges faced by Rwanda French-speaking postgraduate students who are learning in English in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.
- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Tape recording consent form (for students)

I _____ consent to my interview with Emmanuel Sibomana for his study on *Challenges faced by postgraduate French-speaking students who are learning in English: a case study of Rwandan students in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand* being recorded. I understand that:

- The tapes and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person other than his supervisor at any time, and will only be processed by the researcher.
- All tape recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete.
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.

Signed: _____

Appendix D: Guide to interview questions for interview with students

Questions common to all student interviewees

1. Before coming to Wits, did you expect to experience the difficulties you have faced since your arrival? Please explain.
2. Do you regularly interact with other students for whom English is the first language or those who speak it fluently? Why or why not?
3. How do you feel when interacting with local or other international students?
4. In which settings do you always use English here at Wits? Please explain.
5. Do you think that studying and researching in English is an advantage or an obstacle to your academic performance? Please explain.
6. Which strategies have you adopted to solve any language related problems and improve your English proficiency?
7. How do you feel about the way you are treated by different people at Wits such as lecturers and students?
8. How do you feel when you receive your lecturer's or supervisor's comments on your assignments or research writing?
9. What do you do with these comments?
10. If you have any further comments or any questions that you would like to ask me, I would be pleased to hear these.

Additional questions for John

1. When completing the questionnaire you said that you did not study English. How did you come to speak and write English to a certain extent? Has this knowledge of English been sufficient for you to make progress in your study at Wits?

Additional questions for Frank

1. When completing the questionnaire you said that writing is difficult since it is the first time you have been required to write in English but again you said that ten out the fifteen aspects of academic writing are easy for you. Can you please explain to me what you find difficult?

Additional questions for Isabel

1. When completing the questionnaire you said that writing is easier than listening and speaking for you. Can you tell me why?

Additional questions for Moses

1. How did you manage to study in another European language which was totally new to you? In the questionnaire you stated that you adapted more easily to this language medium system than the Wits system. Why do you find it difficult to adapt to the English medium system at Wits?
2. In completing the questionnaire you said that writing is easier than listening and speaking for you. Can you tell me why?

Appendix E: Consent form for the use of assignment tasks (for students)

I hereby agree to have my marked assignments and lectures' feedback on my assessment and research writing used by Emmanuel Sibomana for his research. I understand that:

- He will be inquiring about challenges faced by Rwanda French-speaking postgraduate students who are learning in English in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.
- Participation in this research is voluntary.
- I may withdraw from the study any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and the information in these documents will be kept confidential.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix F: Self information sheet, letter to lecturers

Dear lecturer,

My name is Emmanuel Sibomana, and I am a student at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. For the completion of the degree of Masters of Arts for which I am registered for the academic year 2009, I am required to conduct research and write a research report. My research is about challenges faced by French-speaking postgraduate students who are learning in English. More specifically, I aim to investigate Rwandan students' academic literacy experiences in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. I will attempt to answer the following questions:

- What are the challenges facing Rwandan French-speaking postgraduate students at the University of the Witwatersrand?
- How do these challenges affect their academic activities?
- What do these students do to address these challenges?
- What is the nature of the institutional support available for these students?

To achieve this, I would like to have a thirty-minute interview with some lecturers in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. I will also analyze some of these students' assignment tasks and course readings. Participation is voluntary and no person will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate or not participate in the study. All of your responses will be kept confidential, and no information that could identify you will be included in the research report. The interview materials (tapes and transcripts), assignment tasks and students' marked assignments will not be seen or heard by any person other than my research supervisor and myself. In the interview, you may refuse to answer any questions you would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point. Please complete the enclosed consent form if you are willing to assist me with this research:

- by participating in an individual interview with me at a time that is convenient to you;
- by allowing the interview to be tape-recorded for later transcription and use in research report with total anonymity;
- by allowing me to analyze your assignment tasks;
- by allowing me to use your assignment tasks and your feedback to students on these tasks and on their research (if you are their supervisor) for document analysis.

Your participation in this study would be highly appreciated. It is anticipated that this research will inform policy about accommodating students with language problems and about the use of English as a medium of instruction in Rwanda.

Yours sincerely,

Emmanuel Sibomana

Appendix G: Interview consent form (for lecturers)

I hereby agree to participate in an interview with Emmanuel Sibomana. I understand that:

- He will be inquiring about challenges faced by Rwanda French-speaking postgraduate students who are learning in English in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.
- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Tape recording consent form (for lecturers)

I _____ consent to my interview with Emmanuel Sibomana for his study on *Challenges faced by postgraduate French-speaking students who are learning in English: a case study of Rwandan students in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand* being recorded. I understand that:

- The tapes and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person other than his supervisor at any time, and will only be processed by the researcher.
- All tape recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete.
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.

Signed: _____

Appendix H: Guide to interview questions for interview with lecturers

1. Please describe the level and kinds of proficiency in English that you expect from postgraduate students.

2. Do the Rwandan French speaking students in your class or the ones you are supervising have the level and kinds of proficiency that you expect? (Please explain your response.)

3. If they do not, what is the effect of such a situation on their academic work?

4. Do you personally provide any support to students facing English language related problems? If yes, what kind?
5. Have you referred any students to other support services in the University? If so, please describe these.

6. If not, do you know about such services and what they offer?

7. If you supervise any research being undertaken by a Rwandan French speaking student, what do you think are the main challenges that the student is experiencing in regard to his/her research?

8. How are you assisting the student to address any challenges that he/she is experiencing in regard to research?

9. Have you noted any improvement as regard to the way they are addressing these challenges? Please explain.

10. What can you recommend that these students and the university do in order to address these challenges more effectively?

11. If you have any further comments or any questions that you would like to ask me, I would be pleased to hear these.

Appendix I: Consent forms for the use of assignment tasks (for lecturers)

I hereby agree to have my assignment tasks and feedback to students on these tasks and on their research writing used by Emmanuel Sibomana for his research. I understand that:

- He will be inquiring about challenges faced by Rwanda French-speaking postgraduate students who are learning in English in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand.
- Participation in this research is voluntary.
- I may withdraw from the study any time.
- No information that may identify me or the student will be included in the research report, and the information in these documents will be kept confidential.

Signed: _____ Date: _____