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Bridging the Gap: Student perceptions of Academic Literacy at Boston Media House.

Thamashni Bux

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Education, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Curriculum: Tertiary Teaching)

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Abstract

In South African Higher Education, the consensus is that students' abilities to write clear and coherent English are diminishing. The emergence of private higher education colleges offering smaller classes, specialised tuition and individual attention aspires to bridge the gap between the poor schooling system in South Africa and a demanding tertiary education system. Many colleges and universities offer courses or modules that deal with academic literacies and improving the English writing skills of students. Boston Media House offers Academic Literacy 1 to first-year media students to help transition students from a basic understanding of education expectations to a more context-specific academic discourse. However, students perform poorly in Academic Literacy and cannot assimilate the knowledge processes and practices to navigate their higher education qualifications successfully. The purpose of this study is to investigate students' perceptions of the Academic Literacy 1 course at BMH. The findings of the research will be used to inform future decisions in designing an Academic Literacy 1 curriculum that is fit-for-purpose and addresses the challenges faced by BMH students. The study found that students find the course useful in terms of academic referencing techniques and avoiding plagiarism; and improving basic English language skills such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation. No other topic areas of the course had any impact on the students, nor were they seen as relevant to their studies or to the world-of-work. The study further revealed that the institution's media-specific contextualization of the subject is not evident in the students' experience or engagement. Therefore, it is necessary for the course to be revised and areas of concern addressed. This would allow the institution to align the outcomes of the course with the teaching and learning practices to achieve the objectives of the curriculum i.e., inducting students into a range of media-related fields and improving academic writing skills.

Keywords:

Academic Literacy; Higher Education; Boston Media House

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- I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
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List of Acronyms

ADL1	Academic Literacy 1
BMH	Boston Media House
HE	Higher Education
SCS	Subject Curriculum Statement
LMS	Learner Management System

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Problem statement

In South African Education, the consensus is that student abilities to write clear and coherent English are diminishing (Council on Higher Education, 2011; Pineteh, 2013; Van Dyk, Van de Poel, and Van der Slik, 2013). The emergence (in abundance) of private colleges offering smaller classes, specialised tuition and individual attention, aspires to bridge the gap between the poor schooling system in South Africa and the tertiary education system. Many colleges and universities offer courses or modules that deal with academic literacies and improve the English writing skills of students. At Boston Media House (BMH), first year students are required to complete a module called Academic Literacy 1 in the first semester of their first year of study. The course consists of two assessment types (Formative Assessment 1 and Summative Assessment 1) for the semester, with a supplementary assessment for each. 50% is the minimum requirement to pass the formative and summative assessments. Only students who achieve 30% or more may participate in the supplementary assessments. The course aims to teach students how to reference, structure an academic argument or essay and adhere to writing conventions for the various media subject specialisations within the degree or diploma.

At BMH, the current academic literacy course is largely based on teaching the content contained within two textbooks – '*Money Talks: Communication in Business Contexts*' by Dowling, du Plessis & Steinberg, (2009); and '*Academic Literacy 1'* by Smith, (2015). The use of the '*Academic Literacy 1'* textbook from the UK (developed by the Pearson Institute) and the *'Money Talks'* textbook presented their own challenges. '*Money Talks'* was designed to improve communication for accounting and auditing students, whilst 'Academic Literacy 1' was compiled from two other books (*English for Careers: Business, Professional, and technical* by Smith & Moore, 2013 and *Academic Research, Writing and Referencing* by Deane, 2010).

The use of the above resources at BMH meant that the prescribed books had to be supplemented with various local examples and additional reference material in order for students to relate to the content or see the relevance of the course content. It was evident that the blind adoption of foreign educational texts and syllabus requirements would do little

to solve the problems faced by South African students, particularly at tertiary level. Van Dyk, Van de Poel and Van der Slik, (2013) and Millin & Millin (2014), argue that South African educational institutions cannot simply adopt the education practices of other (first world) countries as the diversity and complex social issues in South Africa do not allow for such assimilation.

It is concerning that the Academic Literacy 1 course at BMH has not significantly improved students' academic abilities, as is evident in the lower grades and high failure rate of Academic Literacy 1, as explained in the literature review; despite the assessment modalities and supplementary collateral being consistently revised over the past 4 years. If anything, the only improvement has been that students' inadequate attempts at referencing mean that many are penalised for incorrect referencing technique rather than full-on plagiarism (ADL1 Internal Moderation Report, 2018: 12). As the course is not as successful as BMH hoped it would be, it is necessary to investigate possible reasons why students' academic literacy needs have not been met. An approach to investigating the problem and to improving the situation would be to ask senior students who undertook the module what they would like to be taught and to test the theory of 'student-directed learning' by incorporating students' ideas into the curriculum and the assessment processes while still maintaining the integrity of the subject.

To date, very few comparative studies have been published on academic literacy in the context of private higher education institutions in South Africa. This study will focus on students' perceptions of academic literacy at Boston Media House by questioning students who have already been through the academic literacy course and determining if they believe the structure and content of the academic literacy course was helpful or not; exploring students' thoughts on what they believe was lacking in the course (if any) and including their suggestions in an attempt to improve the academic literacy curriculum in the future.

1.2. Purpose statement

The primary purpose of this research report is to investigate students' perceptions of the Academic Literacy course on offer at BMH. These perceptions will allow the researcher to reflect critically on the content and processes of the course and, thereafter, take steps to improve the academic literacy skills of students at BMH. The researcher will be able to utilise the feedback of this report to design an Academic Literacy 1 curriculum that is holistic (valid, relevant, fit-for-purpose, adequate) and addresses the challenges faced by BMH students.

1.3. Research questions

- How is Academic Literacy defined for students studying in tertiary institutions?
    - What are some of the debates or theories surrounding academic literacy?

- Why is academic literacy included in the curriculum for Boston Media House diploma and degree students?
    - What is the institution's rationale behind offering such a course?

- What difficulties or challenges does the academic literacy course intend/hope to address at Boston Media House?

- What are the guiding principles for the design of the academic literacy course at Boston Media House?
    - What is its purpose?

- To what extent does the academic literacy course address the concerns of the students at BMH?

- From student perceptions of the course, what are the implications for changing/improving the academic literacy course?

- What changes to the academic literacy curriculum would be necessary to improve the academic engagement of students at Boston Media House?

1.4. Scope & Limitations

The scope – The scope of this research report focused on students' perceptions of the academic literacy course at BMH. Only second, third, and fourth-year students who have already passed or failed the academic literacy course participated in the study. The scope does not include the institution's rationale for the creation and implementation of the academic literacy course, as this is beyond the scope of the study and would detract from the achievable outcomes of such a study. As such, research has not been conducted with the institution about how or why the ADL1 course was designed and offered in the format that it is presently offered in. The scope of the study is therefore not too broad and is extremely relevant to private higher education colleges in which the problem is based.

> *Limitations - "The limitations of the study are those characteristics of design or methodology that have impacted or influenced the interpretation of the findings from your research. They are the constraints on generalizability, applications to practice, and/or utility of findings that are the result of the ways in which you initially chose to design the study and/or the method used to establish internal and external validity" (Price and Murnan 2004: 66).*

As this study aims to determine how students perceive the academic literacy course at BMH and to analyse their perceptions of the course, the results obtained may only be relevant to other/similar private colleges with media specialisations/characteristics. Due to the onset of Covid-19, the sample size was smaller than anticipated. All surveys were conducted online as a result. Additionally, participants who could add value to the study may have declined to participate. As there are different lecturers for the subject, students' perceptions varied according to who their lecturer was. Also, student responses were particularly negative if they failed the subject; therefore, some bias was to be expected.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The literature review will examine existing notions surrounding academic literacy interventions at Higher Education institutions, and will explore the reasons for its inclusion, particularly at Boston Media House. Research in this area is important, because academic literacy could address the English language deficit that seems to be prevailing in education. Understanding the core function of such interventions and designing courses will indeed bridge the gap between school and university studies.

2.2. What is Academic Literacy?

Attempts have been made to define academic literacy, and these vary from one higher education institution to the other depending on the needs of the students within a particular faculty or discipline. It is evident that there are many debates and discussions surrounding academic literacy interventions, and all these debates and discussions reveal that academic literacy is not a concept that can be 'defined'.

- John Read (2015: 137) believes that "the construct of academic literacy has a large overlap with academic language proficiency". Additionally, he believes that academic literacy "developed from a range of other disciplinary areas, including general education, college composition, writing studies, discourse analysis, and social anthropology."

- Albert Weideman (2007: xi-xii) explains academic literacy in a South African context as (among other things), "the ability to understand a range of academic vocabulary in context, make meaning beyond the level of a sentence and basically interpret and develop academic texts." Weideman (2018) acknowledges that the definition of academic literacy is subject to change and differs from one institution to another.

- Pinheiro, Dionisio & Vasconcelos (2016) consider academic literacy to be "the mastery of written language in higher education and the specific reading and writing practices within fields and disciplines, involving various communicative practices, and textual genres."

- Chrissie Boughey (2013: 28) believes that the term "'academic literacy' is problematic as it becomes possible to identify multiple academic literacies related to disciplinary difference and the values which underpin these, rather than a single generic set of practices often conceptualised as skills" (see Lea & Street, 1998).

At BMH, the Academic Literacy 1 course is somewhat aligned to all four of the above characterisations of 'academic literacy' as the course is primarily concerned with academic language proficiency, improving vocabulary, interpreting writing tasks, and improving writing ability. However, BMH does not consider disciplinary literacies, discourse analysis or anthropological notions effectively, as the ADL1 course is quite generic and has no discerning 'media' features that one would expect from an institution named Boston 'Media' House.

According to the ADL1 Subject Curriculum Statement at BMH, "the programme is designed to induct students into a range of media-related field practices as media professionals or managers" (Boston Media House, 2019: 3). Therefore, the academic literacy course at BMH is only fit-for-purpose if it directly relates to those literacies that will facilitate students in media-related fields. This entails creating a curriculum that comprises discipline-based writing development in context-specific scenarios, rather than incorporating generic language, communication, or writing courses. As will be revealed later in the literature review, BMH is not achieving its outcomes because the course structure is not aligned to its aims.

2.3. Why do we need Academic Literacy Courses at Higher Education (HE) Institutions in South Africa?

Before we explore some of the debates or discussions surrounding the benefits of academic literacy or what its purpose really is, we need to understand the South African schooling system and the shortcomings of the system that necessitates the inclusion of academic literacy in higher education institutions. South Africa has an education system that has failed its learners and continues to produce students who are incapable of excelling at higher education (Foxcroft and Stumpf, 2005).

The quality of education in South Africa has been in decline for several decades. A global Unesco study of Grade 4 learners found that "more than 75% of South African learners are

performing well below international benchmarks" (Unesco, 2011). Thirty countries were tested globally by Unesco (2011) and South African grade 4 students had the highest percentage of scoring below 'low levels' in reading proficiency. Additionally, the "Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) reported that approximately 25% of Grade 6 learners in South Africa had not developed basic reading and writing skills" (Taylor, 2008). The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2016 report confirms this worrisome trend has persisted. "South Africa was placed last out of all 50 countries who participated in PIRLS 2016, with 78% of South African Grade 4 children were not able to reach the lowest benchmark compared to 4% internationally" (Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena, & McLeod Palane, 2017: 4). These studies indicate that the consistently low levels of reading and writing skills continue to be a problem for South African students' as they progress from primary to secondary to tertiary education.

The problem is that South African students do not only compare dismally with international benchmarks from first-world countries, they also perform poorly when compared to other African countries: "South African students are out performed in reading and writing skills by countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and Botswana. These countries are reported to have a gross domestic product (GDP) one tenth of South Africa's GDP" (Millin & Millin, 2014: 27 – 28). What we can concur from these findings is that the socio-economic complexities in South Africa cannot be 'blamed' for poor reading and writing ability. South African students continue to score lower than countries with similar political and economic conditions and demonstrate such inequality in educational objectives.

As a result of these challenges, many students who gain access to higher education institutions are seriously underprepared and require extensive mediation in order to cope and/or continue with their tertiary studies. Ellen Hurst (2014: 84) conducted research on "student perspectives on language support in a South African university". When Hurst asked students "if language had been a problem at any time during their university careers, a number of students pointed to reading and writing as specific issues, with particular tasks pointed to, for example, writing essays, writing technical reports and laboratory reports and specific readings which use 'high language' and complex phrases" (Hurst, 2014). The participants in Hurst's study mentioned specific academic tasks and academic language barriers. This confirms the

continued struggle for many South African students with regards to reading and writing ability at higher levels of English as more complex academic language is encountered.

For the most part, Academic Literacy courses in South Africa exist because schools have not adequately prepared students for the academic requirements in higher education (Maher, 2010: 8). The language barrier also presents problems (van Dyk, Zybrands, Cillie, & Coetzee, 2009) because the language of instruction at higher educational institutions is different from the students' home language. Higher education institutions expect students to be proficient in English and academic discourse when it is not easily attainable given the present South African context. There are multiple factors that influence students' ability to improve their academic writing skills and that prevent access to knowledge and skills. Research by Foxcroft and Stumpf (2005), Van Schalkwyk (2008) and Van Dyk and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2012) have all questioned how prepared first year students in South African Higher Education institutions are. Reasons for the lack of preparedness range from socio-political, economic and educational factors to the inequalities brought about by the apartheid regime (Cooper & Van Dyke 2003: 65 – 68).

The fact that the vast majority of South African students are second language English speakers further compounds the problem and has been reported as a contributor to their decline in academic ability at higher education institutions where the language of teaching and learning is predominantly English. However, the information by Millin & Millin (2014: 27 – 28) above, contradicts the second-language argument as "South African students are out performed in reading and writing skills by countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and Botswana". This shows that some of the 'excuses' provided for extremely low literacy levels are inadequate and the schooling system in South Africa must accept responsible for their shortcomings (and inability to devise a solution). Furthermore, it is recognised (Boughey, 2013) that academic literacies are not just about the 'language' problem that can be solved by language and study skills courses. The PIRLS 2016 report revealed that economic factors, classroom conditions and parents who are less positive about reading in general also contribute to the low literacy levels in South African schools (Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena, & McLeod Palane, 2017: 11).

According to the BMH Annual Report (2018), 96% of the students at the college are second language English speakers and many (particularly those who did not attend well-resourced schools) struggle to articulate or express themselves clearly in English. This led to the inclusion of a first-year course, Academic Literacy 1 (ADL1), which aimed to bridge the English language proficiency gap between secondary school and higher education.

The ADL1 course was first introduced in 2013 and comprises the following topic areas: The Reading Process; The Writing Process; Referencing & Plagiarism; The Grammar Toolkit; Persuasive Writing; and Non-verbal Communication (as documented in the ADL1 Curriculum Statement, 2013 – 2018). ADL1 is a compulsory first-year, first semester course and since its inception, the institution has noted a decrease in the rate of plagiarism in all subjects, but, student results and lecturer feedback indicate that English reading, writing, comprehension and verbal communication skills remain poor.

BMH is now working on a strategy to improve their Academic Literacy 1 course and seek innovative ways to transform the curriculum and enable students to improve their English communication skills. According to Van Dyk and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2012:7), "The education system at all levels needs well-planned and well-implemented interventions in order to improve". This is where the development and inclusion of courses such as Academic Literacy come in. Higher education institutions cannot simply blame the school's system for the shortcomings of their students. They also have a responsibility to help students and improve the educational landscape. As a result, many universities and colleges in South Africa have taken the necessary steps to help bridge the gap by offering academic literacy interventions, increasingly in the context of the disciplines.

It has been noted that first-year students struggle to integrate and succeed because they experience academic language problems and are deficient in one or many literacies that are valued in academia. This appears to be a problem, not just in South Africa, but in many countries around the world (Darlaston- Jones et al. 2003, Leki 2006, Brinkworth et al. 2009). Lea and Street indicated as far back as 1998, that standards of student literacy in higher education is decreasing. Although Lea and Street (1998) conducted their research in the UK and focussed on writing practices at degree level in universities, their findings and models can

be applied to the South African context on a macro and micro-level. Lea and Street (1998: 160) introduced the 'academic socialisation' approach which involves understanding the broader issues of the learning and social context and then inducting students into a new 'culture' or academic culture. They believed that students can be taught to improve their proficiency in a range of academic literacies if these literacies are conceptualised within disciplines and students are adequately orientated to learning and the interpretation of learning tasks.

At BMH, the academic literacy performance of students can be ascertained by looking at the ADL1 averages for degree and diploma students over the last five years (BMH Internal Moderation Reports 2015 – 2019):

BMH Academic Year	Academic Literacy 1 Summative Assessment Averages Degree and Diploma Students
2015	51%
2016	45%
2017	49%
2018	48%
2019	47%

The Academic Literacy 1 summative assessment averages have been consistently low over the past five years and have not met the institution's 55% benchmark (as indicated in BMH Internal Moderation Reports 2015 – 2019). As mentioned earlier, 96% of students at BMH are second language English speakers who struggle to articulate themselves in English. The cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that they carry does not assimilate well within the academic context they find themselves in when they gain access to higher education institutions. The language and learning practices from South African schools are often inappropriate for university requirements and as such the prior knowledge of these students are often ignored by higher education.

Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualisation of cultural capital provides further insight into the value of certain forms of cultural capital and the advantage they afford some students in higher education. Boughey (2013: 29) uses the example that "white students, admitted to South African institutions of higher education in 2000, consistently outperformed their black peers regardless of the programme or institution in which they were enrolled". Boughey's (2013) point is that white students' home-based literacies improved their chances of succeeding and gaining access to institutions of higher education regardless of the type of school they attended.

The poor performance by academic literacy students at BMH could be attributed to the inadequate readiness and lack of certain forms of cultural capital by the majority of students in relation to the prescribed curriculum; or the inability of the curriculum to cater to the needs of students from diverse educational backgrounds at BMH. As noted in the critique of the Academic Literacy 1 course resources, the use of textbooks that are not suited or not aligned to the outcomes of the course could have very little impact on student performance at BMH. Therefore (and in order to be successful), an academic literacy curriculum must form part of "a complex process involving socialising into a discourse, acquiring conventions and exposure to appropriate texts" (Parkinson, Jackson, Kirkwood & Padayachee 2008: 17). Analysis of the Subject Curriculum Statement at BMH brings to light many contradictions, particularly pertaining to the disconnect between the course content and the stated aims of the course. At present, there is no evidence of correlation between achievable outcomes and course materials/processes.

2.4. Critique of BMH Resources for Academic Literacy 1

As mentioned earlier, the academic literacy course at BMH was largely based on teaching the content contained within two textbooks – '*Money Talks: Communication in Business Contexts*' by Dowling, du Plessis & Steinberg, 2009; and 'Academic Literacy 1' by Smith, 2015. The description of the Money Talks textbook is as follows:

> *"Money talks is a purpose designed communication textbook for accounting and auditing students: The focus is on vital soft skills required in business environments, including report writing, conducting meetings, and oral and written communication.*

The communication-based chapters provide insight into the typical communication challenges of the corporate world" (Dowling, du Plessis & Steinberg, 2009).

From this description, one cannot see the relevance of utilising such a resource for a Media House with the sole purpose of preparing students for entry into media related specialisations.

The 'Academic Literacy 1' textbook by Smith was developed for/by the Pearson Institute and is UK based. The textbook is structured as a work-book, with the following sections: Parts of Speech; Sentence Fundamentals; Nouns; Pronouns; Verbs; Adjectives and Adverbs; Punctuation; Harvard Referencing. The Question & Answer styles of the textbook provides a useful technique for students to practice their technical English language skills, but does little to advance the forms of literacies that would build confidence and allow engagement with the course concepts in the discipline. There is also no media context in either textbook. This decontextualised method of teaching and learning is one of the hindrances to improving academic writing ability at BMH. Boughey and McKenna (2016) characterise these decontextualised 'academic literacy' courses as "neutral, a-social, a-cultural and a-political" (Boughey & McKenna, 2016: 5). Such approaches are divorced from meaning and context and do little to advance academic achievement or insight. Additionally, the lesson plans for ADL1 at BMH are based entirely on teaching the content contained within these books. Lecturers are encouraged to incorporate real-world examples during their classes, but if/how these are implemented is unknown. Additionally, lecturers are not given clear guidelines on how to do this. This opens up a plethora of inconsistencies in how the course is delivered and/or received by students at the various campuses.

2.5. The success of Academic Literacy courses at other South African Higher Education institutions

Millin and Millin (2014) conducted research on the effectiveness of the 'Read to Learn' (RtL) approach for improving academic literacy of students at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN). Their study "showed that some of the weaker (or weakest) students, who voluntarily enrolled in the academic writing programme, were able to make the greatest gains compared

to other students who started the intervention with a better base of written literacy skills" (Millin & Millin, 2014: 37). Therefore, the RtL approach can be effective in bridging the gap between those who are seen as 'prepared' versus those who are seen as 'unprepared' for the academic demands of higher education. The deficiencies that are evident in the diverse range of academic writing skills in South African education can remedied if universities or institutions or higher learning are willing to invest in interventions such as RtL (Millin & Millin, 2014: 37).

Nizonkiza and van Dyk (2015: 147) established via their research at North-West University, a direct correlation between "higher academic literacy proficiency and higher vocabulary size". Their results supported previous findings which established a relationship between vocabulary size and reading, and between vocabulary size and overall language proficiency". North-West University claims to have introduced their students to interrelated skills and knowledge to assist them in becoming academically literate for the purposes of higher education. The academic literacy intervention at North-West University has shown that success can be achieved by devising strategies to improve vocabulary sizes in relation to subject matter. This suggests that there are ways of addressing obstacles and that context specific curriculum does not always have to be a prerequisite for improving academic literacy levels.

Mhlongo (2014: 114) noted in his research at North-West University that "academic literacy intervention has a definite effect on the improvement of students' academic literacy levels." However, he concedes that there was no conclusive data to support the idea that the improvement was only as a result of the influence of the intervention. Various universities and colleges in South Africa offer academic literacy interventions because they have identified the gaps in students' reading, writing and comprehension abilities. According to Parkinson, Jackson, Kirkwood & Padayachee (2008: 24), academic literacy courses in higher education will remain indispensable until there is "a greater degree of fit between school and university in terms of academic literacy development". They believe that a time will come "when most South African schools are able to foster the development of written literacy to a much greater degree than is presently the case. Until this revolution in primary and secondary schooling occurs, academic literacy courses" will remain vitally important. As a result, academic literacy

courses, (for however long they are needed) must constantly strive to evolve and adapt in order to meet the specific needs of students in higher education.

There do not appear to be any arguments or theorists that are opposed to or discredit the principles and/or importance of academic literacy interventions. Debates rather focus on the content and teaching and learning requirements of Academic Literacy courses. It is interesting that Pinheiro, Dionisio & Vasconcelos (2016) from the University of Minho, Portugal, demonstrated that teaching one particular or standard variation of Academic Literacy can actually be a barrier to learning. This means that Academic Literacy practices must adapt or change according to the different subjects, contexts and societies in question. Methodologies and modalities used by better resourced schools may not necessarily work at a school that is under resourced for example. They believe that "having to deploy a repertoire of practices and genres different from those that students bring to a university" (Pinheiro, Dionisio & Vasconcelos 2016: 4) (or other higher education institution), present a new set of barriers which further hinders progress. The solution, they propose, is "to understand students' perceptions of academic literacies and to characterise academic literacies in particular contexts" (Pinheiro, Dionisio & Vasconcelos, 2016: 4). Therefore, Academic Literacy practices must first validate existing knowledge or cultural capital that students possess and build on said knowledge or knowledge structures to acclimate students to their 'new' academic world.

On the whole, research shows that subjects that are geared towards helping students to improve their academic English language proficiency cannot be taught in a decontextualized manner and must incorporate social and cultural practices according to specific contexts. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach will not advance the state of academic literacies at any higher education institution; as is evident in the low student averages of the Academic Literacy 1 course at BMH.

Additionally, and according to Mckenna (2004: 271 - 272), the success of students in Higher Education is also determined by motivation to some extent and not only by challenges posed by difficult experiences relating to background or socio-economic factors. This means that the best and most integrated academic literacy interventions could still fail or fail to adequately address deficiencies because of unmotivated students. At BMH, class attendance

is very low and rates of student motivation have been the source of many internal discussions. As a private higher education institution, BMH offers various intervention programmes for students including consultation with lecturers in the event of non-attendance if extra support is needed. Despite these additional support services, students do not capitalise on the opportunities and this can only be seen as lack of motivation (BMH Institutional Annual Report 2018). Student motivation also depends on context and is related to how alienated students feel in higher education and to what extent their identities are recognised. Therefore, the issue of motivation at BMH is one that needs to be explored further, but is not within the scope of this research project.

2.6. How can we improve Academic Literacy in practice?

Lea & Street (2006) offer three overlapping models that could be used to improve academic proficiency in higher education: A study skills model; an academic socialization model, and an academic literacies model. The first model "sees writing and literacy as primarily an individual and cognitive skill" (Lea & Street 2006: 227). This model is extremely basic and focuses on surface level understandings of writing and literacy and assumes that students are able to simply transfer their skills and knowledge from one context to another without encountering any problems. This model (if implemented in isolation of the other two models) may be problematic. At BMH, media students are exposed to a number of subjects and media contexts, each with their own specific writing and formatting conventions. Subjects such as Public Relations, Radio and Television Broadcasting, and Advertising (to name a few) have vastly different writing requirements and the study skills model assumes that their knowledge of writing could be transferred from one context to another (one subject to another) with relative ease.

At BMH, the key principle in the pedagogy of ADL1 is transferability of knowledge. This is what Lea & Street (2006) refer to as 'academic socialization'. This "method is concerned with students' acculturation into disciplinary and subject-based discourses and genres. Students acquire the ways of talking, writing, thinking, and using literacy that typified members of a disciplinary or subject area community. The academic socialization model presumes that the disciplinary discourses and genres are relatively stable and that once students have learnt and

understood the ground rules of a particular academic discourse, they are able to reproduce it" (Lea & Street, 2006: 227) without encountering any problems. At BMH, the academic socialization model is widely implemented at all levels as the institution believes that highlighting the transferability of knowledge is sufficient for students to actually reproduce the techniques they learn. For example, in Academic Literacy 1 (ADL1), students learn how to reference according to the Harvard referencing style. Students are then told to apply what they have learned in ADL1 to their other subjects. This works well with some subjects, but not others. Journalism is one such subject that presents a problem. The referencing conventions in Journalism are very different to that of academic essay conventions and students thus become confused.

Lea and Streets (2006) "third model, termed academic literacies; is concerned with meaning making, identity, power and authority and foregrounds the institutional nature of what 'counts' as knowledge in any particular academic context" (Lea & Street, 2006: 228). The academic literacies model, used in conjunction with the study skills model and the academic socialisation model presents a holistic dynamic that is able to account for changes in student perceptions and could indicate where (or in which areas) students experience difficulty in acclimatising to academic discourse and higher education conventions of reading, writing and communicating. Adopting the three models outlined by Lea & Street (2006) above would serve any institution (particularly BMH) quite well in developing a practical curriculum for Academic Literacy 1. However, Lea & Street (2006) do not consider motivation as explored by Mckenna (2004), nor do they offer any foregrounding based on socio-economic factors or teaching to second or third English language speakers. The three models that could improve academic proficiency pertain only to ideal situations where variables that are specific to South African Higher Education institutions do not exist.

2.7. Conclusion

Ultimately, finding a solution to bridge the gap between the South African schooling system and the requirements of higher education institutions will require considerable research in order to achieve these goals. Drawing on various models of academic development and situated learning that acknowledges cultural practices and influence are vitally important; as

well as the incorporation of relevant literary texts and context specific examples which can only advance the cause of academic literacy interventions in Higher Education.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The research methodology describes the techniques and procedures the researcher will utilise in order to identify, select and process information for a research report. Irny and Rose (2005) argue that "research methodology is the systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied to a field of study; it comprises the theoretical analysis of the body of methods and principles associated with a branch of knowledge." This chapter will describe the research methodology, research design and sampling methods that were used to conduct the research and analyse the data.

3.2 Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to capture students' views regarding the current Academic Literacy 1 curriculum at Boston Media House. As the focus of the study is primarily to analyse the students' perceptions of the course in question, the very nature of such analysis is qualitative. "Qualitative research is frequently concerned with processes of learning, adaptation, innovation or change" (Scott & Morrison, 2005:185), and therefore fits the scope and requirements of the study. According to Mason (2008: 22), "qualitative research is a data-generation and engagement process involving activities that are intellectual, analytical and interpretive." This study attempts to reveal the (possibly hidden) agenda of the academic literacy course at BMH by generating reflective discussions around the design and implementation of the course and offering interpretations of the meaning behind the perspectives that arise.

A questionnaire (see appendix ii) was designed to elicit maximum information regarding students' perceptions of the course. Additionally, the use of open-ended questions gave participants the opportunity to respond in their own words rather than force them to choose from fixed responses.

3.3 Sample and Sampling

Data from second, third, and fourth-year students at Boston Media House have been used in this study. After creating a questionnaire using Google-Forms, the link was emailed to all second, third and fourth-year students, and also uploaded on the learner-management system at BMH. As a lecturer at Boston Media House, the researcher only had access to the students via email and on the learner-management system due to the Coronavirus pandemic. This necessitated teaching and learning to move to online platforms during the lockdown. Thus, online or virtual platforms were the only data collection methods available. The onset of online education brought to the fore the various challenges that students faced, including access to data or devices with internet connectivity. Despite the challenges, there were 64 completed responses to the questionnaire (13 Degree students and 51 Diploma students). The sample, therefore, included all 64 participants (6% of the total number of eligible students i.e., 64 of 1130 students) which generated sufficient data for the study.

The researcher intended to conduct focus group interviews with students to discuss the pertinent issues that arose from the questionnaires, but the onset of the coronavirus pandemic meant that contact or face-to-face sessions with students were not allowed. Furthermore, none of the participants accepted the invite to a virtual focus group. These changed circumstances resulted in a different method of gathering the data.

The number of students currently enrolled at BMH Sandton in 2020 that a sample could be drawn from:

2nd-year diploma students – 660

3rd-year diploma students – 373

2nd-year degree students – 50

3rd-year degree students – 30

4th-year degree students - 17

Most second, third, and fourth-year students at BMH completed the Academic Literacy 1 course during their first year of study. There were some students who had not passed

Academic Literacy 1 during their first year of study and were repeating the course. The inclusion of such students in the sample did not hamper or affect the outcomes of the study, as these students had been through the subject processes and procedures and were still able to provide valuable feedback.

Faculty members were also asked to fill out a separate questionnaire. There are four lecturers for the subject, including the researcher. The faculty questionnaire was completed by three lecturers (excluding the researcher) who were able to provide feedback from an institutional point of view. Students and faculty were not permitted to participate in the study more than once.

3.4 Data Analysis

The following data analysis methods were identified as most appropriate. As this is a qualitative study, the following data analysis methods served the researcher well. These included data reduction and qualitative content analysis. Data reduction is a "process of selecting, focussing, abstracting, simplifying, and transforming the information/notes that appear and then making one's own analytic choices" (Miles & Huberman, 1994:10 – 11 cited in Scott & Morrison, 2005: 54) based on said information. Additionally, "data reduction is mostly associated with qualitative data analysis. The process will begin with the sorting and making sense of the data collection, and this involves some element of data reduction as data is coded and summarized" (Scott & Morrison, 2005: 53). During the data analysis process the researcher divided responses according to key words and was able to simplify responses based on these key words. For example: question one asked students if they thought that Academic Literacy 1 was a necessary course to undertake in their first year of study at BMH. Responses from participants were sorted according to 'yes' and 'no', and further sorted according to the reasoning provided. For example, if participants said "*the course of necessary because it taught me how to reference*"; all such responses were assigned the code 'reference' and grouped together as the following example shows: *92% of degree participants believe that the ADL1 course was necessary because it improved their academic referencing ability.*

Qualitative Content analysis has been defined as "a systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding" (Berelson, 1952; GAO, 1996; Krippendorff, 1980; and Weber, 1990). "Content analysis enables researchers to sift through large volumes of data with relative ease in a systematic fashion" (GAO, 1996). It can be a useful technique for allowing researchers to discover and describe the focus of individual, group, institutional, or social attention (Weber, 1990). "It also allows inferences to be made which can then be corroborated using other methods of data collection" (cited in Stemler, 2001). "Qualitative content analysis involves a process designed to condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009: 2). The main focus for the data analysis was to carefully note what each respondent said and effectively convert the qualitative responses into data that can be utilised to change or improve the ADL1 course at BMH. The researcher focussed solely on what students said and only made inferences based on concrete ideas presented by the participants. For example, one student noted that "*ADL1 is easy to fail and that plagiarism is a problem."* Based on the student's response the researcher inferred that students (and this student in particular) failed ADL1 after being penalised for plagiarism (-20%). Additionally, comments from the lecturers and information from the moderation reports revealed that large numbers of students fail each year because of plagiarism. Therefore, a conclusion (in line with qualitative content analysis) of such a consequence is to provide opportunities for plagiarism to be addressed in a more meaningful and practical way, for example.

3.5. Timeline

The data collection process was lengthy as the researcher was only able to request that students complete the online questionnaire by sending out email and sms notifications with a link to the Google Forms questionnaire. Student participation was low considering that there were 1130 second, third and fourth-year students enrolled at BMH in 2020. The researcher extended the data collection process for an additional month as a result.

Table illustrating projected timeline for collection and analysis of data and completion of research report

Phase	Process/Procedure	Dates
Phase 1	Submitted Research Proposal	November 2019
	Research Proposal Approved	10 March 2020
Phase 2	Applied for Ethical clearance	May 2020
	Received Ethical clearance	27 July 2020
Phase 3	Data Collection	August – October 2020
Phase 4	Collate Data	November 2020
Phase 5	Documenting Qualitative Analysis and Findings	December - January 2021
Phase 6	Complete write-up of all chapters (making changes where necessary)	February 2021
Phase 7	Editing and Formatting	1 – 7 March
Phase 8	Final Checks before submitting to supervisor for comments	8 – 15 March 2021
Phase 9	Final update of research report in line with supervisor's recommendations.	26 – 30 March 2021
Phase 10	Final Submission	31 March 2021

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Permission was requested from Ms Verbooy (Academic Head and Branch Manager at Boston Media House, Sandton) and Ms Badenhorst (Registrar of Boston Media House) to conduct the research by means of questionnaires and surveys. Ms Verbooy and Ms Badenhorst agreed (in writing) that second, third and fourth-year students, as well as faculty, could be used to collect the relevant data.

Only students who are over the age of 18 were asked to participate in the study and therefore, it was not be necessary to ask the permission of their parents or guardians.

All participants in the study were provided with detailed consent forms regarding the research and were reminded that their participation was voluntary. They would be able to discontinue filling out the questionnaire or survey at any point during the study if they so wished (See Appendix I for the full informed consent form).

Participants are not identified by name or student number thereby ensuring anonymity. Any information regarding the research has been kept privately and securely on completion of the research report. Access to the information will only be granted to the researcher and the researcher's supervisor.

3.7 Accountability

The researcher is a student at The University of the Witwatersrand and is therefore accountable to her supervisor, with whom she has had regular contact throughout the research process. As an employee of BMH, which is the institution in which the research was conducted, the researcher is also accountable to the institution; therefore, all communications, as well as the processes of the study, were direct and transparent. Additionally, an Ethical Clearance certificate was issued to the researcher by The University of the Witwatersrand after ascertaining that all ethical considerations were undertaken in the research process (See Appendix V). The researcher was granted permission to conduct the research at BMH with students and faculty by means of questionnaires or surveys.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The intention of the study was to establish a set of ideas or guidelines to integrate within a new and improved ADL1 curriculum. The premise is that the new curriculum would address both students' needs and the institution's concerns to achieve the outcomes for a successful academic progression of its students in higher education at BMH in the future. In order to this, the researcher sought to establish how students perceive the current ADL1 course. The research questions focus on what ADL1 is, how effective the dissemination of information pertaining to media literacy has been, and what changes students would suggest as necessary to improve the course. The data from the questionnaires were carefully analysed, and patterns in the responses were extrapolated. The findings of this research report has been separated according to Degree and Diploma students. The researcher then compared the responses by both groups. This separation of degree and Diploma students allowed the researcher to analyse the findings in terms of students' Academic Literacy needs as they progress through their respective qualifications. In addition, the students' responses were compared to faculty members' perceptions of the course and the institutions rationale for the course as detailed in the ADL1 Subject Curriculum Statement.

4.2. Summary of Findings of Diploma and Degree students

4.2.1 Value of Academic Literacy at BMH

The first question asked participants, '*Do you think that Academic Literacy 1 was a necessary course to undertake in your first year of study at BMH?'* The question aimed to assess if students thought that the course added value to their studies. From the analysis of the questions, 80% of the diploma participants believe that the value of the course lay in its ability to teach them about "*referencing/plagiarism; spelling/grammar/vocab/academic writing/communication skills*". 14% think the course was "*a waste of time and money because it is a repetition of what was learned in high school".* 6% of the diploma students found the course necessary but did not provide a reason.

92% of the degree participants believe that ADL1 was a necessary course to undertake in their first year of study because it helped with English/academic writing skills/referencing. One degree student thought the course was unnecessary because they "*already knew everything that was taught.*"

4.2.2 The Purpose of the Academic Literacy course

Most of the diploma participants (58%) think the purpose of ADL1 is to improve their "English vocabulary, written and verbal communication and comprehension". 20% think the purpose is to learn professionalism and its implications for the working world. 16% think the purpose is to learn how to reference. 6% of participants believed that the course served no purpose.

62% of degree students expressed their view that the purpose of ADL1 is "to teach students the importance of referencing". 38% of the degree students think the purpose of the course is "to assist with academic writing ability". 1 student said that the purpose of ADL1 is to "help students to understand exams and assignments."

4.2.3 How effective was the Academic Literacy course in improving academic writing skills?

When asked how effective the course was in improving academic writing skills, most of the diploma participants (74%) think the course was "*very effective*" in improving their academic writing skills whilst 26% of Diploma participants felt that the course was not effective in improving their academic writing skills.

62% of the Degree students think that ADL1 was very effective in improving their academic writing skills, while 37% think it was only slightly effective. One Degree student believes the course was not effective at all at improving academic skills.

The consensus between the Degree and Diploma students about the courses effectiveness in improving academic writing skills is quite even. The majority of the students think the course is very effective in improving academic writing skills, but the students believe that 'academic writing skill' entails good grammar, spelling and referencing. It is evident that the students have a surface level understanding of 'academic writing' and therefore believe that the course is effective at improving their writing.

4.2.4 The least helpful aspect of the Academic Literacy course

Students were asked: "*What did you find least helpful during the Academic Literacy course?"* 39% of the diploma students could not recall anything that was least helpful during the course. 16% said that everything was helpful. These responses did not answer the question, but one could reasonably assume that they did not recall what they found least helpful. This would mean that 55% of the diploma students were unable to identify what they found least helpful during the ADL1 course. 8% felt that most of the course was not helpful. 16% found the writing, grammar, punctuation; business writing aspects least helpful. 1 student said "analysing adverts" was least helpful. One student found that "going over assignments repeatedly" was least helpful. 4% of the diploma students found online learning least helpful. One student reported that: "ColCampus was my only complaint, it was extremely slow and sometimes would not load the course info properly"; another student said: "Online learning seems to be more stressful for the lectures thus making it hard for students to participate"

38% of the Degree students could not recall what they found least helpful. 31% said they found everything helpful. As with the Diploma students, these responses did not answer the question, and again, one could reasonably assume that they did not recall what they found least helpful. Therefore, we can conclude that 69% of the Degree student could not recall what they found least helpful. A few students mentioned that the "constant repetition of topics was not helpful because ADL1 teaches the same topics as other subjects." One student said that "the oral lessons where least helpful" and another student said that "lectures were over-rated compared to just reading the textbook".

4.2.5 What would you have liked to learn about that was not included in the Academic literacy course at BMH?

This question yielded a myriad of responses. 50% of the Diploma students either left this question blank or had "nothing" to add. 10% of the Diploma students said they would have liked to learn how to do "public speaking or speeches." 6% said they would have liked more "opportunities for creative writing" and "academic writing mediums". Two students said they would like the opportunity to talk about their psychological and emotional well-being during the course. One student said they "would have liked to learn how to write a proposal" (but

did not specify what type of proposal). Others would like to learn to: “practice interview skills”; “write an essay”; “communication skills”; “copywriting”, “write for a blog”; “writing scripts”; “Journalism writing and referencing”; “participate in voice overs in class”; “more practical work”; “learn how to write a CV”, “Learn about other referencing methods”; “learn about assignment formats and how to respond to assignment questions”.

31% of the Degree students did not respond to this question or did not have anything to add. 54% of degree students would like to know how to do in-depth research and learn more advanced referencing techniques. One student said they would like to learn how to write a CV and another said they would like to learn “basic elements of literacy”.

4.2.6 Transferability of Knowledge

Students were asked if *the Academic Literacy course allowed them to or had taught them to transfer knowledge and skills to other disciplines.* 78% of the Diploma students said yes; 8% said no; 8% said “a little bit” and 6% did not answer the question.

85% of the degree students claimed that they were able to transfer knowledge and skills from ADL1 to other subjects. These included transferring writing and referencing conventions. 15% of the degree students do not believe they were taught how to transfer knowledge and skills from ADL1 to other subjects. One student response was: *“Not really. We already know about plagiarism and how to reference”*

4.2.7 Strengths of the Academic Literacy course

68% of the Diploma students believe that the major strength of the course was its ability to teach referencing and academic writing skills. 18% did not know or did not respond to this question. 10% believe that the strength of the course was to instil professionalism for entry and success in the workplace. One student said that the strength of the course was the lecturer and other said the strength of the course was “instilling discipline through failure.”

77% of the degree students said that the major strength of the ADL1 course was the “structured academic writing and referencing skills that was taught. 15% of the students said

"nothing". One student said the strength of the course was that is "e*ncourages a sense of professionalism"*

4.2.8 Weaknesses of the Academic Literacy course

The Diploma students identified the following as weaknesses of the course:

6% of the Diploma participants said the "large class sizes were a major weakness". 8% said that ADL1 is "a repetition of high school English"; 4% said "the course could be a short online module; 4% said that a major weakness is the "Referencing and plagiarism penalties: enforcing unreasonable standards"; 6% said the course "can be overwhelming" ; 6% said it is "easy to fail; 2% of participants said the course was "too theoretical"; 6% said the course was "Outdated or irrelevant for our times"; 4% said the course was very repetitive; 6% of the participants felt that the lecturer was a major weakness of the course; 6% said the course "was unable to adequately improve their communication or grammatical skills; 39% did not know or did not respond to the question.

The degree students identified the following as weaknesses of the course:

Having class at 8:15am; not being taught how to conduct proper research or proofread; the course is dull and uninteresting; ADL1 is too short - only a semester course, too much information is crammed into one semester; it's more like a high school English course than a tertiary level course; too much focus on referencing and not enough on writing; not enough in-depth referencing lessons.

4.2.9 Student recommendations to improve ADL1

Diploma students suggested the following:

8% of participants suggested that ADL1 should be an online course; 4% said that BMH should combine Academic literacy 1 and Professional skills 1; 6% said that ADL1 should be year-long subject to make it a more comprehensive course; 6% said that BMH should not be teaching them basic English at tertiary level; 14% suggested that in order to improve student engagement the course needs to include more real life or relevant examples; 12% said that the course needs to include more practical components such as speeches/presentations; 8% suggested that BMH teach more 21 century skills in ADL1; 41% did not have any recommendations or did not answer this question; One participant suggested that students

should be provided memoranda or model answers for assessments so they can see where they went wrong.

The Degree students recommended the following:
23% of the Degree participants did not suggest any recommendations; One student suggested that ADL1 should be a year-long module in order to cover the large amount of work; 15% suggested that students should be taught how to conduct proper research and how to write abstracts; 15% suggested that the course include information about referencing of various sources and not just basic Harvard referencing; 15% of participants suggested that the course should be more practical; 23% of the Degree participants said that BMH needs to highlight the importance of the subject for the world of work/media industry.

4.3 Analysis of Findings in Relation to the Institutional Subject Curriculum Statement and Faculty Perceptions of ADL1

In this section (4.3.1 – 4.3.9), the researcher has analysed student responses in comparison to the responses from the lecturers with reference to the ADL1 Curriculum Statement at BMH. This comparison highlights the similarities and/or differences in perceptions of students' verses the institution and attempts to ascertain whether/if all stakeholders are 'on the same page'.

4.3.1. The Value of ADL1

The majority of Diploma and Degree students in the study think that ADL1 was necessary because it taught them how to reference and avoid being penalised for plagiarism, and ADL1 helped to improve their spelling, grammar, vocab, academic writing, and communication skills. At BMH, the penalty for plagiarism at first-year level is -20%. First-year students often fail their assessments because of the plagiarism penalty and are not able to participate in the supplementary event for that assessment if they achieve less than 30%. This means that the failure rate of first-year subjects is very high and thus plagiarism is a source of great frustration to the students who participated in this study.

Many Diploma and Degree students emphasised that ADL1 helped to improve their spelling, grammar, vocabulary and general academic writing and communications skills. However, a small number of students in both the Diploma and the Degree group mentioned that they already knew much of what was taught because it was a repetition of high school English topics. As the majority of students acknowledged the inclusion of referencing, spelling, grammar etc. positively, this serves to uphold the institution's reasons for including these seemingly unnecessary topics in the syllabus. The justification for teaching content that students would have encountered in the schooling system, is explained in the curriculum statement as follows: "Although these skills are imparted to a greater or lesser extent in the schooling sector, they often tend to be insufficient for the development of media professionals. Prior to entering the world of work, learners will be able to transfer learned skills to their other learning subjects" (BMH SCS, 2019: 18). Here the institution alludes to the

skills taught in schools as insufficient for students to develop as media students and subsequently as media professionals.

4.3.2. The Purpose of the ADL1

Most of the Diploma and Degree participants think that the purpose of ADL1 is to improve their English vocabulary, written and verbal communication and comprehension. Student responses are in line with the lecturers' perceptions of the subject. The lecturers provided the following feedback:

Lecturer 1: "ADL1 was created to give students the necessary skills and knowledge to be academically literate; arming them with knowledge on how to write academic text and how to give credit to sources."

Lecturer 2: "ADL1 was created to induct students into the academic world of writing and referencing."

Lecturer 3: "The purpose of ADL1 is to give students the ability to contribute to meaningful conversations, especially the topics that envelope the academic fields of study, including referencing techniques."

The BMH ADL1 Subject Curriculum Statement (2019: 4) states that "learners wishing to progress in the world of media require literacy skills that will facilitate their ability to understand and be understood. Whether a learner ultimately chooses to work in media as a researcher, writer or presenter, the mastery of the basic literacy skills of reading, writing and understanding are essential." Although the institution, faculty and students all concur on the purpose of ADL1 involving literacy skills (reading, writing, comprehension etc.), it is clear that students and faculty do not perceive the link with the world of work or the media relevance in this subject that the intuitional document repeatedly highlights.

4.3.3. Effectiveness of ADL1 in improving academic writing skills

Despite the majority of diploma and degree students claiming that ADL1 was "very effective" in improving the academic writing skills, it can be argued that students at first-year level do not really know what 'academic writing' entails. They believe that learning about proper sentence construction and basic Harvard referencing is synonymous with improved academic

writing skills. The poor results in summative assessments (which comprise largely of academic essay writing and referencing) attest to the fact that students' academic writing ability remains extremely poor, even at the culmination of the course.

This is evident in the feedback provided by the lecturers.

Lecturer 1: "ADL1 is effective to some extent. I believe that BMH is doing the best it can without other support systems. The support systems I refer to will be – a specific institutional referencing guide (set up by BMH for BMH), Turnitin facilities to assist students to detect referencing errors before they submit and to assist staff and institution to identify and deal more consistently with plagiarism."

Referencing and plagiarism are a serious problem at BMH and is the most prominent reason students fail their assessments. However, BMH does not utilise plagiarism detection software, nor does the institution provide their own referencing guide. The institution believes that Harvard referencing guides are readily available on the internet and are taught in class effectively by the lecturer and does not require additional focus. This view is clearly not recognised or upheld by students or lecturers.

Lecturer 2: "on the whole students do improve their general writing ability at the end of the course and learn how to write ethically. However, some students will still manage to earn a pass mark without having mastered writing essays and who still plagiarise without really knowing why."

Lecturer 2 highlights a very important point that students may or may not be aware of. Students who pass the subject believe that they have effectively learned how to write like academics. Lecturer 2 can attest to the fact that students who do not know how to reference or write academic essays or even adhere to academic conventions, are still able to pass the course. They progress without learning the basics because assessments are designed to award students for following structural or technical guidelines and do not sufficiently penalise students for plagiarism or poor content creation.

Lecturer 3: "ADL1 is not very effective because many students find the module boring and not interesting, and therefore do not give it the necessary respect it deserves."

Lecturer 3 acknowledges that students who may deem the course ineffective found the course boring and therefore did not attend classes or pay attention to the important aspects of the course. This could also be a contributing factor to the high failure rate of the subject as pertinent information was not conveyed.

4.3.4. Least helpful aspects of ADL1

Constant repetition of topics

Repetition has emerged as a theme throughout this study. Students find the repetition of topics quite tedious and unhelpful in the learning process. Some lessons, particularly on referencing and writing conventions, continue for ten lessons continuously. The perceived absence of new knowledge in these lessons deters students from engaging in the lessons because they become bored therefore extricate themselves from these/the lessons.

Oral lessons

Oral presentations or speeches have been a constant feature of the ADL1 curriculum over the years. However, speeches and oral presentations have never been assessed in ADL1 and as such, students perceive these lessons as a waste of time. All assessments for ADL1 are assignment-based, so students have learned to attend classes or engage with content only if it directly impacts their assessments. Oral presentations and speeches are completely disregarded by students as a result.

Online learning

Many students found that online learning was not helpful. Students found little or no help on ColCampus and reverted to studying on their own. They read their textbooks and taught themselves by doing Google searches or watching YouTube videos. The onset of the Coronavirus pandemic meant that all education practices and procedures at BMH moved to online or digital platforms. Prior to the pandemic, BMH had largely ignored the importance of technological advancements in learning and were reluctant to conduct any lessons or provide any learning material on their learner-management system (LMS): ColCampus. The claim was that "BMH are an accredited contact institution only" (BMH Annual Report, 2019) and this justified the avoidance of utilising their LMS. When the country was forced into a lockdown, BMH was not sufficiently prepared for online learning. Students and faculty were

not familiar with the LMS, and online learning became extremely challenging. Apart from data and internet connectivity issues, students were further disadvantaged by the poor online capabilities and knowledge of the institution. The institution essentially adopted a trial-and-error process for conducting lessons and assessments on ColCampus and this presented a major problem for all concerned.

Spelling, grammar, punctuation

The focus on spelling, grammar, and punctuation by the institution is driven by necessity. Students may find these topics boring and repetitive, but the evidence suggests that many students do not proofread or spellcheck their work. As a result, they lose unnecessary marks. Despite many students claiming that lessons on spelling, grammar and punctuation are not helpful, these topics are still an area for concern and have to be taught. Additionally, the institution justifies the inclusion of these topics by explaining their relevance for the world of work.

> "The world of work demands that occupants are competent in both written English and the spoken word. Unless written English is understood theoretically and practiced in an applied manner, performance will never be deemed competent. The learning/academic environment requires the learner to be competent in his/her English language and grammatical abilities. This requirement and the achievement thereof, prepares the learner for competence in the workplace" (BMH SCS, 2019: 14).

This is where Lea and Street's (2006) study skills model, academic socialization model, and academic literacies model could be of assistance. As explained earlier in this report, the academic literacies model, used in conjunction with the study skills model and the academic socialisation model presents a holistic dynamic that is able to account for changes in student perceptions and could indicate where (or in which areas) students experience difficulty in acclimatising to academic discourse and higher education conventions of reading, writing and communicating. Therefore, the institution must contextual all forms of knowledge in ADL1 in terms of necessity and improving grammatical competence and proficiency for entry into the world of work as professional media practitioners.

4.3.5. Possible topics to include in ADL1 in the future

Most of the topics that students would like included in ADL1 in future are beyond the scope of the subject or covered in other subjects. For example, students said they would like to be taught how to write a CV. BMH offers a subject called 'Professional Skills' where students are taught about CV's and interviews and general preparedness for entry into the world of work. One student said they would like to do 'voiceovers in class'. This is something that is covered in another course called 'Radio Production.' Other students mentioned essay writing and creative writing, which is already covered in ADL1. Students' suggestions indicate a lack of familiarity with ADL1's content and purpose. One student said that we should teach "journalism writing and referencing." This student has correctly identified a problem that has been reported in the Journalism Internal Moderation report that students include Harvard in-text referencing techniques instead of attribution of sources in accordance with Journalism conventions (BMH, JRN2 IM Report, 2019: 5). For example, students would include quotes with Harvard references such as the following in a newspaper article:

"President Ramaphosa has announced an easing of the lockdown restrictions" (Ramaphosa, 2020: 15).

Instead of: President Ramaphosa has announced an easing of the lockdown restrictions.

Students do not realise that academic essay conventions are not applicable in their Journalism subjects in instances such as these. Including aspects of referencing and attribution that students are likely to cover in other subjects would undoubtedly allow students to make these distinctions. Socialising students into the discourse of the discipline is vitally important if transferability is to be achieved. Lea and Street's "academic socialization model presumes that once students have learnt and understood the ground rules of a particular academic discourse, they are able to reproduce it" (Lea & Street, 2006: 227). Therefore, if students do not really understand the discourse of a discipline, replication of this discourse will not be achieved; and these examples indicate where academic socialisation may be lacking at BMH.

A theme that has emerged from the Degree students is a need for lessons involving in-depth research techniques, writing of research reports and proposals. As mentioned earlier in this study, the BBA is a four-year degree. In their fourth year of study, the degree students are expected to produce a research project. This is the first time that the students are exposed to research methodology and research projects. They have one year in which to work with

their supervisors to produce and present their projects. In their fourth year, many students recognise how inadequate their prior studies on referencing and research are in producing academic content at NQF level 8. As such, these students would like to learn more technical referencing and research methods, particularly relating to academic journals, scholarly articles and the use of secondary sources. Students would also like to learn how to search for and access more academic content. BMH does not have an online library, nor are students given access to academic libraries and portals. This has emerged as a significant weakness of the institution and a great disadvantage to the students.

4.3.6. Transferability of Knowledge

Despite the majority of the students claiming that they can transfer knowledge and skills learned in ADL1 to other subjects, the evidence suggests that this is not the case. Moderation reports for subjects such as 'Journalism, Advertising and Television' reveal that students are not able to reference their sources despite the many referencing lessons in ADL1. Students are also unable to transfer the skills of answering short questions or essays to other subjects. Additionally, students struggle to articulate themselves or answer questions holistically when the instructions in other subjects are not as explicit as those in ADL1.

Lecturer 1: "For some reason, to a large extent, students are not able to transfer skills and knowledge from one subject to another. I think it is to do with the lack of other support systems in the institution (support systems mentioned previously). And that we are dealing with Radio and Video subjects where the focus of both the lecturer and students are not necessarily academic. Journalism has a different type of referencing technique utilised with attribution of sources and does/should not use academic referencing (Harvard)."

Lecturer 2: "Throughout my time at BMH I have learned that students do struggle to transfer knowledge across subjects. We teach them essay writing with the assumption that they will use the structure of an essay to structure other forms of writing like short answers, but students up until 3rd year will still struggle to write a coherent passage in some cases."

Lecturer 3: "To a full extent, yes, students are able to transfer knowledge. Students are able to use skills such as referencing techniques in other disciplines. Some modules expect students to

express themselves fully when responding to questions, and Academic Literacy equips them the skills to write and speak articulately."

The institution believes that "prior to entering the world of work, learners will be able to transfer learned skills to their other learning subjects by consolidating the learning processes that have taken place across the semester. Ultimately this learning process will be carried over to the world of work, where learners will have the ability to transfer knowledge and skill within new and often unfamiliar contexts" (BMH SCS, 2019: 4-5). However, evidence from moderation reports and faculty at BMH reveal that transferability remains a problem that needs to be addressed in the teaching and learning processes of the course.

It is interesting that the students believe they are able to successfully transfer knowledge from ADL1 to other subjects, but the lecturers do not believe this to be true. This disconnect may indicate that students falsely believe that they are acquiring the necessary skills, but their grades indicate otherwise. This could also be attributed to the lack of consistent opportunities for students to have their work informally assessed or to self-assess. Access to quality exemplars or memoranda to show students what standards of excellence look like might serve as a partial solution to the problem (Carless, 2015: 141).

4.3.7. Strengths of the ADL1

Predictably, most students believe that the course's strengths were its ability to teach them about referencing and improving their academic writing skills. The lecturers for the course also share this view. Only one student mentioned that the course "instilled a sense of professionalism." This student was able to identify a link between the subject and the outcomes that the institution emphasises as "the alignment of this subject extends, not only, to the overall learning programme, but to the world of work, where the learner will ultimately have to prove him/her self as a competent and literate employee" (BMH SCS, 2019: 5). Within the parameter of the course, this is good feedback, but it is disappointing that the ADL1 practices are not integrated sufficiently so that other students can see that the alignment of the course does actually extend beyond referencing and writing skills. These comments should prompt any institution to relook at the course design in the light of the overall purpose of the qualification.

4.3.8. Weaknesses of ADL1

The fact that some students chose to mention that many topics were redundant or repetitive or the same as High School English must be addressed. At tertiary level, students must be able to perceive topics at the correct NQF level (NQF level 5). If knowledge is "dumbed-down", many students may become disinterested and choose not to attend classes if they are not learning anything new or relevant. The inclusion of teaching modules such as 'The Grammar Toolkit' – which includes parts of speech; spelling; grammar; punctuation, is akin to primary school level of English, and one can easily expect students who come from better resourced schools where these topics were taught successfully, to become bored and devalue the subject as a whole based on said teaching practices. This is evident in students' comments about the repetition of content and suggesting that they have not learned anything new in ADL1.

4.3.9. Students' recommendations for ADL1

<u>Make ADL1 more practical</u>

The students and the lecturers would like ADL1 to be more practical. The subject is extremely theoretical despite the subject Curriculum Statement's claim that "this subject is a very practical subject and relies heavily on the learner's commitment to understanding, practicing and internalising the skills learned" (BMH SCS, 2019: 5). There are few opportunities for students to practice their writing, and minimal time for lecturers to informally assess written work due to extremely large class sizes. The first time that students' written work is assessed is when they submit their first assessment. As there are only two assessments for the semester, failing one assessment is enough to fail the course. Additionally, time constraints do not allow for the practical implementation of subject content.

<u>Extend the duration of the course</u>

Quite a few participants indicated that ADL1 should be a year-long subject. This will allow students adequate time to learn the concepts and practice their application of said concepts. The lecturers for the subject also believe that additional classes are needed.

Lecturer 3: There is so much to cover and a semester is too little to finish the module's syllabus. Therefore, I believe that extending the teaching and learning period to a full year would be very beneficial.

Lecturer 1 suggested incorporating a series of workshops where students bring written pieces of work to class for analysis and discussion. This would certainly assist students to identify quality pieces of work as well as affording student the opportunity to address any weaknesses they may perceive in their work.

Smaller class sizes

ADL1 class sizes range from 80 – 100 students at a time. Such large numbers make it difficult to assess students' progress in class. Often the lecturer is unable to gauge whether students actually understand what they have been taught. From a students' perspective, the inability of the lecturer to provide individual attention means that they are unable to meaningfully engage with the lecturer and ascertain for themselves that they actually understand the concepts or theories that are being taught. The implementation of smaller tutorial classes or the addition of support structures such as writing centres would also help to address some of the problems.

Teach more 21st century skills

Students in both the Diploma and Degree participant cohort have indicated that they would like to learn 21st-century skills or media relevant knowledge that depicts current trends and technological advancements. Educators for the subject have also indicated that teaching students' traditional academic conventions only are not beneficial for media students who need to be taught an array of media-related skills and practices. These contemporary topics can be used as a basis for refining student's academic literacy and digital skills.

Provide Memoranda for Assessments

One student mentioned that the availability of marking memoranda would significantly improve students' performance as they will be able to gauge where they went wrong and not repeat the same mistakes in future assessments. This pertains to marking practice where markers do not include adequate commentary on assessments and students are unable to ascertain where or why they lost marks. Providing adequate guidance for improving future

assessments (either formative or summative) by using exemplars and memoranda will certainly enhance students' ability to self-assess as well as to consider different possibilities when completing academic tasks. The use of exemplars is supported by David Carless (2015: 141) who notes that "exemplars have considerable potential to support students in understanding the nature of quality work." Students do not necessarily benefit from exemplars or model answers taken from fellow students from previous cohorts as these may lack sufficient detail and may not necessarily be examples of excellence that one should strive to replicate. Therefore, the exemplars should be crafted meticulously by educators and aim to show students how their work can be improved in line with the examples of excellence presented.

Include Referencing techniques of various sources and subjects (not just Harvard)

Students have indicated that the range of referencing techniques they learn in ADL1 is insufficient to sustain them throughout their three or four years of study at BMH. As students' progress, the basic referencing they are taught in first-year ADL1 reveals many limitations, and students have to effectively teach themselves how to reference in subjects such as advertising, photography, animation, graphics, and journalism.

Highlight importance of topics for the world of work/media industry

Students are unable to see the link or relevance between what they learn in ADL1 and how it relates to the media industry or the world of work. Students would benefit from lecturers who are able to teach concepts by bringing applicable media examples into the classroom. Students do not perceive ADL1 as developing professionalism or preparing them for their future endeavours.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter the most pertinent research questions have been revisited and addressed in light of the findings as presented in Chapter Four.

5.2. The Research Questions Revisited

5.2.1. Why is academic literacy included in the curriculum for Boston Media House diploma and degree students? What is the institution's rationale behind offering such a course?

As mentioned earlier in this report, the consensus in South African Education is that student abilities to write clear and coherent English are diminishing (Council on Higher Education, 2011; Pineteh, 2013; Van Dyk, Van de Poel, and Van der Slik, 2013). Higher education institutions cannot simply blame the school's system for the shortcomings of their students. They also have a responsibility to help students and improve the educational landscape. As a result, many universities and colleges in South Africa have taken the necessary steps to help bridge the proverbial gap by offering academic literacy interventions. BMH designed and offered an ADL1 curriculum with the specific intention of bridging the gap between the poor schooling system in South Africa and the more advanced tertiary education system. Many colleges and universities offer courses or modules that deal with academic literacies and improving the English writing skills of students. As noted in the literature review, first-year students struggle to integrate and succeed because they experience academic language problems and are deficient in one or many literacies that are valued in academia, and this appears to be a problem, not just in South Africa, but in many countries around the world (Darlaston- Jones et al. 2003, Leki 2006, Brinkworth et al. 2009). Therefore, BMH's rationale for offering Academic Literacy at first-year level is certainly valid and as research has shown, academic literacy is extremely necessary. BMH's intentions also extend to media literacy and moulding students towards a career as a media practitioner, so their curriculum must extend beyond simply improving academic writing ability.

5.2.2. To what extent does the academic literacy course address the concerns of the students at BMH?

Unfortunately, this report has revealed that students' concerns are not specifically addressed in ADL1, especially as they pertain to media relevance and the practical implementation of course. Students and faculty participants did not recognize any media relevance in ADL1. Additionally, students are concerned that the course does not prepare them for the world-of-work; neither can they explicitly identify the extent to which the course will facilitate or assist them as they progress to subsequent stages in their studies.

According to the curriculum statement, ADL1 "is designed to induct students into a range of media-related field practices as media professionals or managers" (Boston Media House, 2019: 3). However, the course is not aligned to these aims as students who participated in the study raised concerns regarding the lack of topics regarding professionalism and workplace preparedness in ADL1. Again, this speaks to the lack of practical activities or procedures in the course that do not translate to tangible experiences of importance for the students.

5.2.3. What changes to the academic literacy curriculum would be necessary to improve the academic engagement of students at Boston Media House?

<u>Practical Implementation of ADL1.</u>

Students and faculty have noted that the practical implementation of ADL1 is non-existent. It is evident that students, faculty, and the ADL1 SCS value the inculcation of English language skills and that the relevant topics (spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence construction, academic vocabulary) should continue to be incorporated. However, the modes of dissemination should be practical and pitched at the appropriate NQF to have any real meaning or impact on the students' academic performance at BMH or assimilation into the world-of-work. Additionally, aspects of language should be addressed in context so that they are not seen as isolated sections so they are not seen as a repetition of English language that was taught in high school. As such a practical, task-based, feedback driven mode of dissemination should be embedded in the course curriculum.

The inclusion of Referencing and Plagiarism Detection Software

It is clear that students value the lessons on referencing as it helps them avoid being penalised for plagiarism. Plagiarism accounts for a large number of failed grades in ADL1. Many students fail ADL1 because they are penalised for plagiarism. The infringements are often technical, and students do not intentionally plagiarise. ADL1 only has two assessments for the semester, and failing one assessment is often enough to fail the course. The issue of fairness as it relates to assessments practices would also need to be addressed. The institution's failure to obtain plagiarism detection software further disadvantages students who are unable to learn how to reference correctly during/after one semester of ADL1. It is suggested that issues surrounding referencing and plagiarism infringements be addressed by the institution and a suitable method to assist students is devised. Furthermore, students must be encouraged to use the referencing guides that are available. The ADL1 referencing module should focus strongly on paraphrasing and synthesising skills of the students; both of which are essential in eliminating plagiarism.

Provide Context-Specific Academic and Media Literacy.

Create or design a curriculum for ADL1 that directly relates to those literacies that will facilitate students in their media-related fields. This entails creating a curriculum that comprises discipline-based writing development in context-specific scenarios, rather than incorporating generic language, communication, or writing courses. Such a shift would serve to strengthen the institution's structure and inform practices for future pedagogical advancements. Lea & Streets' (2016) academic literacies model is especially helpful in explaining the importance of a context specific curriculum. As mentioned earlier, "the academic literacies model is concerned with meaning making, identity, power and authority and foregrounds the institutional nature of what 'counts' as knowledge in any particular academic context" (Lea & Street, 2016: 228). By providing context specific examples and topics, BMH students will feel confident and be able to identify strengths within themselves that will help navigate their media specialisations successfully. Students will feel less alienated by engaging with content they can relate to in a meaningful way.

Additionally, BMH could investigate a construct for academic literacy on which the subject will be based. This construct of academic literacy outlines clearly the skills and abilities that must

be developed in a student to ensure that they are academically successful. If ADL1 is based on a sound construct of academic literacy, essential skills will be targeted. A sound construct will also ensure that there is no overemphasis on referencing and grammar but a development of other (more) important skills. This would increase student motivation and ensure the 'buy in' of the students. The new ADL1 must include the skills and abilities that students will need as future media practitioners. A focus on genre and disciplinary conventions can help in this regard.

Provide More Graded Assessment Opportunities

Most of the students who answered the survey believe that ADL1 is worthwhile and has value. They think the course is necessary despite grades being very low overall. Positive perceptions of the course do not translate to better grades. It would be useful to examine assessment practices to determine why students perform poorly at a subject they value and are motivated to learn from. As mentioned earlier in this report, there are only two assessments for ADL1 (one formative that constitutes 40% of final grade and one summative that constitutes 60% of the final grade), which do not allow for sufficient engagement and could account for the high failure rate of the subject. Additionally, students are not being given the opportunity to develop the skills to self-assess.

Include Faculty in the Re-curriculation of ADL1

It is evident that the lesson plans and subject content design of ADL1 do not promote or highlight any significant or direct link to the media specialisations at BMH. As mentioned earlier in this report, students for the Diploma in Media Practices can choose a major from the following options: Public Relations; Radio Production; Television and Broadcasting; Advertising; Marketing; Animation; Graphic Design. If Academic Literacy hopes to achieve the outcomes set out in the Subject Curriculum Statement, then lecturers will need to be trained to show students the links between ADL1 and their various specialisations. Additionally, course content and teaching materials must be aligned to these aims. In order to make ADL1 viable and fit-for-purpose, all stakeholders need to be involved in the process and reach consensus on what and how students should be taught. Knowledge of pedagogical principles and how they relate directly to tertiary education practices is vital in this regard.

The researcher argues that there is enough evidence for BMH to ensure that faculty are involved with the re-curriculation of ADL1, are suitably qualified and knowledgeable, and are trained to impart contextualised academic literacies for media students specifically, and do not continue to perpetuate generic or archaic ideas of academic literacy that have no bearing on the institution in question or on the unique qualifications on offer.

5.3. Conclusion

The purpose of this research report was to investigate students' perceptions of Academic Literacy at BMH. These perceptions have allowed the researcher to identify content and processes of Academic Literacy at BMH that need to be improved or revised. The researcher and BMH are able to utilise the feedback within this report to create future Academic Literacy curriculum that is holistic, relevant and fit-for-purpose, and addresses the challenges faced by BMH students.

The study found that students find the course useful in terms of academic referencing techniques and avoiding plagiarism; and improving Basic English language skills such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation. No other topic areas of the course had any impact on the students, nor were they seen as relevant to their studies or the world-of-work. The study further revealed that the institution's media-specific contextualization of the subject is not evident in the students' experience or engagement. Ultimately, the students' perceptions that were revealed in this study indicate that Academic Literacy processes and procedures at BMH would only benefit from input from all stakeholders, including the students. More research is required to fully interrogate how students experience teaching and learning at BMH. More intensive qualitative research including focus groups would have allowed for more in-depth views from students. This is a shortcoming that should be addressed in future research projects on ADL1 at BMH. Despite the shortcomings, this research report serves to inform BMH and similar institutions of the ongoing revisions and advancements that subjects such as Academic Literacy must endure in order to continually address the changing needs of the stakeholders and industry.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Information Sheet and Consent Form
Appendix II: Student Questionnaire
Appendix III: Faculty Questionnaire
Appendix IV: Permission Letters from BMH
Appendix V: Ethical Clearance Letter

Appendix I
Consent Form

Research Topic:
Bridging the Gap: Student perceptions of Academic Literacy at Boston Media House.

You have been invited to take part in a research study on student perceptions of Academic Literacy at Boston Media House. I ask that you read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be part of this research study.

The study is being conducted by: Thamashni Bux, Masters Student at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Background Information
The purpose of this study is to determine if the academic literacy course is fulfilling its purpose at Boston Media House. All feedback received will be utilised to make necessary changes/improvements to the course.

Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:
- Complete a survey/questionnaire

Risks and Benefits of being in the study
The risks to participants are low, as all surveys/questionnaires are filled in anonymously and will only be viewed by the researcher for data analysis purposes.

Confidentiality
You will not be identified as the survey is completely anonymous. The records of this study will be kept private. Any sort of report that might be published, will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may terminate your participation in the survey or questionnaire at any time.

Contacts and Questions
The researcher conducting this study is: Thamashni Bux. If you have any questions you are encouraged to contact her via email - thamashni@boston.co.za. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to engage with someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact: Dr Lauren Dison (Wits University) laura.dison@wits.ac.za.

Statement of Consent:

I, ... (Full name) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to my participation in the research study.

Signature of participant: Date:

.....

Appendix II
Student Questionnaire

- Questions for students at Boston Media House (BMH)

Diploma in Media Practices	☐	2nd year student	☐
BBA in Media Operations Management	☐	3rd year student	☐
		4th year student	☐

- Do you think that Academic Literacy 1 was a necessary course to undertake in your first year of study at BMH? Provide a reason for your answer.

_____

_____

_____

- What do you think is the purpose of the Academic Literacy course?

_____

_____

_____

- How effective was the Academic Literacy course in improving your academic writing skills? Explain your answer.

_____

_____

_____

- What did you find least helpful during the Academic Literacy course?

_____

_____

_____

- What would you have liked to learn about that was not included in the Academic literacy course at BMH?

_____

_____

_____

- Did the Academic Literacy course allow/teach you to transfer knowledge and skills to other disciplines? Explain.

  _____

  _____

  _____

- What are the major strengths of the Academic Literacy course?

  _____

  _____

- What are the major weaknesses of the Academic Literacy course?

  _____

  _____

  _____

- What would you recommend to improve the course?

  _____

  _____

  _____

Appendix III
Faculty/Institution Questionnaire

- Questionnaire for ADL1 Lecturers at Boston Media House

- What were the guiding principles for including Academic Literacy in the BMH diploma and degree curricula?

_____

_____

_____

- Do you believe that Academic Literacy 1 has been successful in achieving its objectives at BMH?

_____

_____

- In hindsight, what topics that are not included in the Academic literacy course, do you think would be beneficial for students at BMH in the future?

_____

_____

_____

- From an institutional point of view, are students grasping the concepts taught in ADL1 and how successful (or not) are they at achieving the objectives. What evidence do you have to support this?

_____

_____

_____

- Does the Academic Literacy course allow students to transfer knowledge and skills to other disciplines? Explain.

_____

_____

_____

- How do you think the Academic Literacy course could be improved?

_____

_____

_____

Appendix IV
Permission Letters from BMH

Letter to the Academic Head and Branch Manager at Boston Media House (Sandton)

Date: 24 October 2019

Dear Ms. Carike Verbooy

I am a student in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand as well as a Lecturer at Boston Media House (BMH). I am conducting research on the impact of the Academic Literacy course offered to first year students at BMH.

My research involves conducting surveys and interviews with students who have completed Academic Literacy 1 at BMH to gauge their perceptions or views on the content of the subject as well as the subject procedures. Additionally, I would like to interview faculty that are involved in designing and implementing the course in order to understand the nature and purpose of Academic Literacy course at BMH holistically.

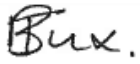
I am inviting your college to participate in this research because as an educator for the subject at BMH, I believe the information derived from such research would only benefit the institution as well as the students in their academic endeavors.

Particulars of the study are as follows:

- The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any consequence.
- There are low foreseeable risks in participating in this study.
- The participants will not be paid for this study.
- The data for the research study will be collecting during the first semester of the 2020 academic year. Data collection methods will not affect any classes or cause any disruption to the academic programme at BMH.
- The names of the research participants and will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study.
- Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.
- All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project.
- My research supervisor is Dr. Laura Dison (Laura.Dison@wits.ac.za)

Please let me know if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely
Thamashni Bux



Email: thamashni@boston.co.za
Cell No.: 084 277 0253

Statement of Consent:

I, Carike Verbooy (Academic Head and Branch Manager of Boston Media House - Sandton), hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to Boston Media House's participation in the research study.

Thamashni Bux has been granted permission to conduct surveys/interviews with relevant students and faculty members at Boston Media House during the 2020 Academic year.

Signature: Date:



11 November 2019

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Letter to the Registrar of Boston Media House

Date: 24 October 2019

Dear Ms. Lizel Badenhorst

I am a student of the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, as well as a Lecturer at Boston Media House (BMH). I am conducting research on the impact of the Academic Literacy course offered to first year students at BMH.

My research involves conducting surveys and interviews with students who have completed Academic Literacy 1 at BMH, to gauge their perceptions or views on the content of the subject as well as the subject procedures. Additionally, I would like to interview faculty that are involved in designing and implementing the course in order to understand the nature and purpose of Academic Literacy course at BMH holistically.

I am inviting your college to participate in this research because as an educator for the subject at BMH, I believe the information derived from such research would only benefit the institution as well as the students in their academic endeavors.

Particulars of the study are as follows:

- The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any consequence.
- There are low foreseeable risks in participating in this study.
- The participants will not be paid for this study.
- The data for the research study will be collecting during the first semester of the 2020 academic year. Data collection methods will not affect any classes or cause any disruption to the academic programme at BMH.
- The names of the research participants and will be kept confidential at all times and in all academic writing about the study.
- Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.
- All research data will be destroyed between 3-5 years after completion of the project.
- My research supervisor is Dr. Laura Dison (Laura.Dison@wits.ac.za)

Please let me know if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely
Thamashni Bux
Bux.

Email: thamashni@boston.co.za
Cell No.: 084 277 0253

Statement of Consent:

I, Lizel Badenhorst (Registrar of Boston Media House), hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to Boston Media House's participation in the research study.

Thamashni Bux has been granted permission to conduct surveys/interviews with relevant students and faculty members at Boston Media House during the 2020 Academic year.

Signature: Date:



11 November 2019

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Appendix V
Ethical Clearance Letter

WITS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: 2020ECE006M**
PROJECT TITLE	Bridging the Gap: The Impact of the Academic Literacy Course Offered to Students at Boston Media House
INVESTIGATOR	THAMASHNI BUX
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	WITS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
DATE CONSIDERED	20 July 2020
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
EXPIRY DATE	Date of submission of the project report

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 27 July 2020 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Dr Paul Goldschagg)

cc: Supervisor: Dr Laura Dison

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** emailed to the Ethics Office: Matsie.Mabeta@wits.ac.za .

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Bux.

_____ 28 July 2020

Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES