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Academic writing challenges faced by first year B.Ed students at a South African university.

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ACADEMIC WRITING CHALLENGES FACED BY FIRST YEAR B.ED STUDENTS AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY.

RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF MASTERS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

JOHANNESBURG, JUNE 2012

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research was to investigate academic writing challenges faced by first year B.Ed. students at the University of the Witwatersrand in order to assist tutors support these students.

One of the main findings is first year B.Ed. students find it challenging to move from school literacies to academic literacy, and thus they need to be 'initiated' into academic literacy. The findings indicate that students need assistance with reading the articles on which essays are based, with understanding what essay questions require them to do, with quoting and referencing from sources and with the 'mechanics' of writing.

A further finding is that some students face academic writing challenges because they resist being initiated into academic conventions for several reasons.

The study concludes with some recommendations to course designers and tutors including the recommendations.

Keywords: academic literacy; first year B.Ed. students' challenges

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters in English Language Education at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Name of candidate Signature of candidate

_____ Day of ----------, 2012

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DEDICATION

To my parents Leocardia and Beau Mbirimi (late). They have been a source of inspiration in my life. They taught me to be hardworking and to be a woman of virtue.

To my sister Rutendo for taking care of family issues during my period of study. Thank you my sister.

To my daughter Tendai whose endurance and understanding amazes me every day.

To my husband Taurai for being there for me all the times

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

This chapter outlines the background to the research and outlines of the research aim, questions and rationale.

1.1 Background to the research

Both locally and internationally it is argued that that the massification of tertiary education requires academics to take a fresh look at the academic writing challenges faced by students at university. According to Kantanis (2000) an era of shift to " a mass education tertiary landscape necessitates a re-evaluation of academics' expectations of first year students, a re-conceptualisation of first year students and the qualities they bring to the university, and a reconstructed understanding of the needs students have which the university should meet." (Kantanis 2000:2)

In South Africa, poor preparation for university study has been one of the major contributions to the high percentage of university drop outs in South Africa. According to a report that was produced by the National Benchmark Tests Project (NBT) in August 2009, less than half of first year students have the academic literacy skills needed to succeed without support.

Professor Eloff, vice chancellor of the North-West University and former chairperson of Higher Education South Africa, stated in 2009 that "there is a direct correlation between bad results at school and poor performance at colleges and universities. Professor Eloff told parliament's higher education committee that most first year students could not read, write or comprehend adequately.

According to a report that was compiled by Higher Education South Africa (HESA) based on the NBT project, it is clear that the South African school system is continuing to fail its learners and the country. Professor Eloff further stated that, "So far, the only outcome from the outcomes based education system is university students who can't read and write." www.universityworldnews.com updated 19 August 2009. In his view, "[I]f you are not schooled well, your chances of performing well at FET colleges and universities are not great. Many universities in South Africa have introduced academic literacy courses for first- and second-year students. Normally, students who commence their first-year studies are given a literacy test to do. If they fail, they are enlisted as students for a year's course in academic literacy on improving reading, writing, accounting and mathematics." www.achieveronline.co.za updated 15 April 2010.

In February 2009 13000 first year university students from the universities of Cape Town, KwaZulu Natal, Rhodes, Stellenbosch, Witwatersrand and Mangosuthu University of Technology wrote entry level literacy and mathematics proficiency tests. The objectives were to probe the relationship between university entry requirements and school exit outcomes. The student sample was broadly representative because half of the students were black, 27% white, 14% Indian and 8% coloured (mixed race). In terms of language 50% were African first language speakers, 42% English first language speakers and 8% Afrikaans speaking. The results showed that only 47% were proficient in English, 46% fell into the intermediate category whilst 7% had only 'basic' academic literacy. www.universityworldnews.com updated 19 August 2009. This report shows that many students who enter university are not adequately prepared to tackle the academic literacy challenges of their courses.

According to this report black students are the most affected by academic literacy challenges. This is mainly due to the fact that English is not their first language although it is the main language of instruction in higher education. Although black students now comprise 63% of enrolment in South African Universities, about 50% drop out of university and only a third obtain their degrees within five years. www.universityworldnews.com updated 19 August 2009.

The main reason given by researchers for low participation rates, poor graduation rates and high attrition rates is that many students are under prepared for higher education. (Scott et al, 2007). According to Van Dyk and Weideman (2004), in Scott et al (2007), under preparedness refers to students who are generally academically under prepared and specifically under prepared in reading and writing. This also means that students who are underprepared find the transition to university even more challenging in programmes where advanced literacy skills are required. (Van Dyk and Weideman (2004), in Scott e tal (2007:17)

Leibowitz et al (2009) argue that it is important for academics to pay attention to the moment of greatest transition, the first year of study. There is much consensus in the literature local and international about the challenges that the transition from school to university present and the need for early intervention." For Mann (2008:90), in Leibowitz (2009:4), "[O]ne of the reasons for the focus on the first year is the overwhelming influence of schooling, which socialises students into particular approaches to learning and responses to educational institutions."

In 2010 I was employed as a student tutor in a new course called New Literacies for Teachers (NLFT) at the University of the Witwatersrand for first year B.Ed. students. The course is primarily concerned with new literacies and academic literacy is one of the six literacies

addressed in this course. Academic literacy is threaded through each of the other literacies which are: digital literacy, school focussed, and research, environmental and visual literacy. From the very first class it was evident to me that for many students there was a chasm between their experiences of reading and writing at school and what was expected of them in the university.

1.2 RESEARCH AIM

The aim of the research project is to investigate academic writing challenges experienced by first year B.Ed. students after they enrol at the University of the Witwatersrand. Though there might be other academic challenges that first year students face at university, the scope of this research is limited to academic writing based on academic reading.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The main research question is:

What are the academic writing challenges faced by first year B.Ed. students at the University of the Witwatersrand?

1.4 RATIONALE

This research is important because:

- It seeks to produce findings that could assist course designers to address the challenges that students face in academic writing based on academic reading.
- Assisting students who intend to be the next generation of teachers is particularly important given the role that they can potentially play in improving writing throughout the school system.

1.5 Outline of chapters to follow

1. Chapter 2: Literature Review
2. Chapter 3: Research Methodology
3. Chapter 4: Presentation and analysis of data
4. Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The focus of the literature reviewed is on research conducted in South Africa and elsewhere in the world about the nature and importance of academic writing, the academic writing challenges faced by university students and interventions designed to address these challenges. Thus the chapter is divided into three sections.

2.2 The nature and importance of academic writing

There are various conceptions concerning the nature of academic writing. However for the purposes of this research I will use the definition given by Winch, et al (2001:158) in Harris, et al (2003:12), "Writing …. is not merely a tool for learning. Writing is or can be learning itself." White (1987:69) notes that "[E]nglish has become an international language, more and more people need to learn to write in English for occupational and academic purposes." Thus, writing occupies a very important role in a range of different contexts. With reference to writing as a mode of learning, as long ago as 1983 Emig wrote that "writing provides physical or visual evidence of the thinking as it is documented, writing provides time and space for reflection" Emig (1983) in Leibowitz (2000:22). This notion is supported by research conducted in the United States of America by Langer and Applebee (1987:135) in

Leibowitz (2000:23). The research concluded that "activities involving writing lead to better learning activities involving reading and studying alone."

Why is writing important? There has been a lot of talk in South Africa about the importance of writing in the academy. According to Leibowitz (2000), "writing is a medium in which writers are required to display their knowledge." For students to succeed in the academy it is important for them to have control over the academic writing discourse.

As early as early to mid and late 1980s, writing in the academy was already being recognised to be essential because it helps to bring out the challenges that students may be facing in academic endeavours. According to White, (1987) "Writing can be used as a tool to provide feedback where the teacher can diagnose individual and general problems. For Smith (1984) "Writing has a utility to all individuals, that everyone who does not write loses both power and potential, comparable to losing a limb or sight or hearing" (1984:11). If writing skills are as important as any limb of the body then it is important for students to be taught the necessary academic writing skills that can lead them to academic success.

Success in academic writing is important in the academy. According Leibowitz (2000) "[S]successful writing is vital to success and lack of success with writing operates as a significant barrier to success." Success in academic writing for university students encompasses the writing and knowledge practices of both lecturers and students. Leibowitz argues that "[I]n order to enhance students' writing, we need to pay attention to the writing of both students and lecturers." The way lecturers write influences how they encourage or do not encourage students to write.

Students' academic writing is likely to be influenced by their lecturers' writing. In 1997 Leibowitz and her colleague conducted a workshop for lecturers entitled 'Writing Techniques for Lecturers'. According to Leibowitz (2000), most of the participants who attended the

workshop acknowledged the interrelationship between lecturers' writing and that of the students. It was generally agreed by the participants that lecturers were students once, and the way they learnt to write often informs the way they write today.

From the results of the deliberations at the workshop Leibowitz and her colleague agree with Fulwiler et al that " [T]he faculty is the dominant influence on the mode and quality of education at a university and that, consequently, their attitudes and practices have direct bearing on student writing and thinking." (Fulwiler, Gorman and Gorman (1986:65) in Leibowitz (2000:17).

The process of writing in the academy takes place over a long period of time. For students to succeed in writing it is important for them to understand that writing is a process and it is a process that has to be improved throughout the years spent at university. According to Hannon (1995:195) in Leibowitz (2000: 17), "Writing has become more than just 'putting ideas on paper' it includes 'playing' with ideas, re-working ideas, revising, editing etc."

The features of academic writing need to be taught to students so that they become initiated into an academic writing culture. As early as 1982 Zamel emphasized that students should be taught that academic writing is a process, which leads to the final product. More recently, Connor (1996) writing should be taught as a process involving writing, rewriting, composing, revising and editing until the final product emerges. Connor went on to state that "writing is not a solitary act it involves teachers, peers and other readers." For Neville (1996) "… only when students understand the nature and complexity of academic writing can they see the necessity for writing more than one draft."

Academic writing is an aspect of academic literacy and it is influenced by the way we speak. According to King (1989:8) in Leibowitz (2000:19) "[R]eading and writing are a continuation of a process of language learning already well-established in speech." Leibowitz

emphasizes the need for students to speak in the academic discourse in order for them to internalize the concepts and phrases necessary for academic discourse when they write. She argues that talking involves a variety of styles or registers, ranging from informal conversations to formal lectures, as does writing. According to Leibowitz (2000), the 'academic discourse' that academic writers are expected to acquire is often incorrectly assumed to be embodied solely in academic written text. In actual fact, she argues, there is a continuity of forms within spoken and written language.

It is important to consider how reading and writing are related in academic writing. Zamel (1992) explains that in reading to find meaning there is need for active engagement by the reader. Zamel (1992) suggests that, meaning in a text is only constructed when the text begins to speak to the reader. Text can only speak to the reader if the reader sees the meaning. The meaning according to Zamel, can only be realized if the reader connects to the text through writing. Reading to find meaning is what makes writing possible at the end of the day. She says it is necessary for readers to ensure that they read whilst writing comments, underlining portions of the text and scribbling some comments. For Zamel (1992: 47), "One cannot write without reading for as we write we read the words that pour or dribble on the page..... understanding is much deeper if response to the reading is done in writing." Snow (2002) makes an important point about the challenges that academic texts can pose for the inexperienced reader when she writes that; "Academic language is designed to be precise and authoritative. To achieve these goals it uses sophisticated words and complex grammatical constructions that can disrupt reading comprehension. Graddol (1997) also notes that "English has become more and more the language of research." He suggests that "[T]hose who do not possess skills in reading in English are hindered from accessing most information and consequently in progressing in their field of study and or research." Authors in most cases, as Perera (1996) points out, use complex vocabulary, grammar and discourses that

make it difficult for students to understand. Perera (1996:41) says "the change from nonfiction to a fiction mode of text gives students difficulties in following meaning."

1.2 Academic writing challenges experienced by students

Considerable research has been done to investigate why students in university face academic writing challenges. According to Nevile (1996), students at university need to adopt a new identity that relates to the academic culture. He suggests that "[T]his identity should correspond to what can be referred to as 'tertiary literacy' or 'academic literacy'." In his view, students' difficulties can be traced to lack of academic literacy. Nevile refers to findings that students do not realize in most cases that the essays that they write should correspond to the academic discourse of the academic discipline in which they are studying. Many students are concerned with content only, rather than with the academic discourse. Students do not use the appropriate discourse for the specific discipline. For example, Anthropology students use the Anthropology discourse when they write essays in Sociology. Students do not realize that there is need to use the content in collaboration with the discourse required for the specific discipline.

Nevile (1996) also describes process related difficulties prevalent amongst students. The actual process of writing and not the product is what Nevile cites as one of the major causes of difficulties in writing. Nevile has observed that some students do only one draft in producing an academic essay and notes that "[A]n average academic working on an item to be published is likely to produce three or four drafts and often asks colleagues to comment on what has been written." (Nevile, 1996:40)

According to Nevile (1996) there are also product related difficulties where students produce essays that do not have the academic reader in mind. For example, as noted by Mahalski (1992) in Nevile (1996:41), "Many students fail to understand the role of an introduction in an academic essay." When the tutor or lecturer reads an academic text they expect to get a clear statement of the position to be argued with respect to the problem posed in the essay topic. The reader also expects to get some guidance to the structure of organization of the argument and the definition of key terms in the introduction of the essay.

Paxton's (2007), research introduces the notion of 'interim literacies', after conducting research on academic writing challenges experienced by first year students at the University of Cape Town. According to Paxton (2007), "students make meaning by reworking past discourses, appropriating and adapting new discourses to make their own" (2007:47). Paxton uses the term 'interim literacies' to describe first year students writing practices because most of the students in first year have not mastered the new discourses in academic writing. In her research, she found that some students drew strongly on a variety of spoken discourses and genres from oral tradition that revealed something about their social and historical roots. Paxton points to the features such as clause chaining, repetition, rhetorical, questioning and the use of first and second person pronouns. Paxton suggests that this finding can be explained by what Gee (1996) refers to as failure to master a particular discourse. A student in this situation may fall back on his/her 'primary discourse' or uses a related secondary discourse.

The South African context poses academic writing challenges to students when they enter into university. Leibowitz (2000) mentions that one of the challenges students face in academic writing is because the curricula at university is failing to exploit the relationship between writing and oracy or talking. According to Leibowitz, the African oral culture with regards to storytelling, debating societies at schools and praise singing. She points out that

these discursive turns are long winded and circuitous introduction and use of idiomatic usages is typical of African languages. When students write in university some of them bring out these primary discourses and Leibowitz observed that such students receive comments to show them that such practices have no place in the academy. Such discourses are regarded by most academics as unacceptable in the academy. However Leibowitz argues that such oral practices are valuable to draw upon when supporting students' writing development at university.

The first chapter of this research report provides an overview of general perceptions about the poor performance of students when they enter into university. One of the reasons cited is poor schooling, background and general under preparedness for tertiary education. Most students who enrol at university are not acquainted with academic discourses. Leibowitz (2000) points out that "the academic discourse is a middle class variety" (Leibowitz 2000: 22). As such the university discriminates in favour of students acquainted with the academic discourse. In South Africa, many students who enrol at university are not familiar with the conventions of academic writing because they come from poor families, backgrounds and above all they are not first language speakers of English. These students need to learn these conventions when they enter into university. According to Leibowitz, the need to learn the academic conventions may provide a triple burden, in conjunction with language difference and poor schooling. A further difficulty is that students may feel that they do not have the right to request assistance from lecturers and tutors.

According to Ivanic (1998) it is important to consider the writer's identity in students' academic writing. It is also important to focus on the interaction between the students as individuals and the norms of the culture which they are operating in. The strong desire to identify with certain aspects of language also manifests itself in choices of written language. Ivanic (1998) attributes to the social approach to academic writing and the relation to writer

identity. In academic writing there is student identity relating to academic writing. There is need to consider how student construct knowledge in particular ways depending on the subject area and discipline.

The identity that students portray when writing is not their own but a 'rich stew' Ivanic (1998) with its ingredients coming from the discourses that they are familiar with in their family and community spaces. "The language of writing in the academia is a much specialised discourse which presents a problem for all students whether first or second language speakers" (Archer 2010:495). She points out a major stumbling block in academic writing for many students in South Africa. She says that many students have to write academic essays in a language that is not their own as a result such students suffer an identity crisis. Mainly because they do not identify with what they are writing as such they write for them (tutors) Lillis (2001) they do not get involved in what they write.

Ivanic (1998) agrees with Brooke (1988:23) who says "writers learn to write by imitating other writers…" As such students avoid using their own language because they feel they are not good enough. Lillis (2001) reiterates this by saying that student writers feel academic writing is 'their standard' and it is an unattainable standard. Ivanic (1998:87) emphasizes the need for teachers to help students to take on an identity as a person who writes.

According to Archer (2010), in South Africa most students find it difficult to establish a voice when they write because of underlying strains by tutors to allow students to find a voice. Most tutors at university discourage students to use personal pronouns such as 'I', 'me' and 'us' in their essays. The denial to use personal pronouns when they write makes many students feel that they are not recognised in their writing. Starfield (2009) also brings out the same notion that she observed in first year students' writing in Britain. She argues that the use of pronouns such as 'I', 'me' and 'us' gave students the 'right to exist' in higher

education. If students are allowed to use the autobiographical self (Clark and Ivanic, 1997) when writing they are empowered to use their voice thereby making them feel the right to exist in the academia.

Ivanic(1997),Lillis(2001) point out different aspects that affect student authority in writing and it includes race/ethnicity age, gender, previous failure in the education system etc. As such Lillis says that students should be able to establish authority in their writing. Students should be able to establish their authority in writing and the starting point is the ability to show their personal experience in writing. According to Lillis (2001) students should be allowed to use personal pronouns such as 'me', 'I', and 'we'. The use of personal pronouns helps students to find who they are and to identify with their own writing.

According to Leibowitz (1997), "many student writers in university often express their frustration and bewilderment about exactly what is required and they feel they do not have the right to demand that tutors department of institutions actively inform them." Leibowitz emphasises student writers are not familiar with what are often considered to be standard academic conventions.

In section 2.2 of this literature review I mentioned that writing is a process where "[I]t has become more than just 'putting ideas on paper' it includes 'playing' with ideas, re-working ideas, revising, editing etc. " Hannon (1995:195) in Leibowitz (2000: 17). One of the challenges noted by Leibowitz (2000) is that most writers have a tendency to leave writing to the last minute. As a result most students fail to produce academically crafted because they just produce one draft and submit for assessment also with the aim of beating the submission deadlines.

Students' lack of confidence in their own voice and ideas is one reason for plagiarism. Plagiarism and difficulties with referencing are one of the challenges faced in academic writing by many first year students. According to Angelil-Carter (2000:155), "plagiarism is a complex, contested concept and in student academic writing it may be the manifestation of complex learning difficulties."

In this light, one can assume that plagiarism by university students may be unintentional. This can be due to a number of factors that Angelil-Carter outlines. One of these is that some students face problems in expressing their ideas in an additional language and thus resort to using direct words from author.

Angelil-Carter (2000) says that some students get involved in unintentional plagiarism because they are not familiar with the academic discourse that is supposed to be used in their essays. Students, when they write with discourses of a community they take the identity of the people in authority. Ivanic (1997) explains that most students have a sense of inferiority, they lack confidence in themselves and they view themselves as people without knowledge and authority. They find it easy to use authoritative voices in the form of the author's direct words which they pick from the text

The way a language of learning was taught at school affects students when they come to university. In high school according to Angelil-Carter (2000:162), "Students are used to the formulaic language where chunks of language are learned and reproduced word for word." Students in first year at university may believe that if they reproduce chunks of sentences from a text it means they have mastered it. This, as Angelil-Carter (2000) explains, is due to the fact that they have been taught to reproduce material without using it to support their own ideas.

Kamler (2001) brings is an important observation that Education students have an uneasy space between being students in university and teachers in secondary school. These students have very little space for innovation and moving beyond the boundaries of what is currently practiced due to the fact that they are guided by disciplinary knowledge. Kamler argues the need to teach students to be critical after reading their texts rather than simply summarizing. Students are encouraged to ask critical questions such as:

- Who produces the text?
- For who is it produced?
- Why has the text been produced?
- What is the text trying to do to the reader?

If students ask these questions whilst they are reading they will a good starting point of critical reading practices and this will enhance their writing practices.

2.4 Interventions to address the writing challenges experienced by students.

Lea and Street (1998) argue that learning in higher education involves adapting to a new ways of knowing: new ways of understanding, interpreting and organizing knowledge. They outline three models that have been used for assisting students with writing: study skills, academic socialization and academic literacies.

According to Lea and Street (1998:157) "study skills are the set of atomised skills which students have to learn and which are transferable to other contexts." A study skills approach emphasizes grammar, punctuation and spelling in the writing of the students. This approach focuses on content and it is influenced by theories such as behaviourism which are concerned

only with the transmission of content. While students need these writing skills when writing academic essay, they need more than these.

The second approach outlined by Lea and Street is academic socialisation. Here, "…. The task of the tutor/adviser is to induct students into a new culture, that of the academy…" This approach is concerned with the students' orientation to learning and interpretation of learning tasks through conceptualization.

Lea and Street (1998) favour a third approach academic literacies which views literacy as a social practice. It views writing and learning as issues at the level of identities rather than skill or socialization. They quote Gibbs (1994) who asserts that "Academic literacies practices, reading and writing within disciplines constitute a central process through which students learn new subjects and develop their knowledge about new areas of study" Gibbs (1994) in Lea and Street (1998: 158)

In South Africa, numerous interventions have been introduced in order to provide enough academic support for students. One of these interventions is the establishment of writing centres at universities. The University of Cape Town, established a writing centre in 1994. It provides a one on one consultation sessions to help students to improve their academic writing. It also provides support in terms of information about academic conventions such as referencing. The writing centre does not provide editing services; rather it aims to enhance understanding of writing as a process and encourages critical thinking through writing. It is open to all students.

Archer (2010), reports of an investigation into the effectiveness of writing centres as an intervention to student writers. She emphasises that there is need to assist students who come to university inadequately prepared. It was found that the support offered by the writing

centre assisted students to improve their academic performance and it might mean that they stayed in the tertiary system.

However, she points out that although the writing centres are used for helping students in academic writing, it is difficult to ascertain the influence of writing centres on students' writing. She outlines three points that make it difficult to ascertain the exact effectiveness of writing centres because there are many factors affecting student writing other than visits to the writing centre and it would be artificial to attempt to construct a 'control group'. Also writing centre practices tend to be somewhat ad hoc, with some students coming for once off consultation and others maintaining a relationship with the centre throughout their degree.

The University of the Western Cape, with the guidance of Brenda Leibowitz, has experimented with providing workshops to student tutors as a way of spreading understanding of writing. According to Leibowitz (2000) there has been success in this endeavour. Leibowitz states that such workshops help to raise awareness about useful techniques and processes in academic writing. However Leibowitz acknowledges that such workshops will not make the participants good writers in a day or a week but rather it is a gradual process.

In relation to interventions designed to address improving academic writing, Leibowitz (2000) mentions a slower but more enduring procedure which is the 'writers support group.' In this set up students get together at regular intervals preferably supported by an experienced writer or facilitator. These student writers support each other with a particular piece of work. Leibowitz emphasises the need for such groups to be informal where colleagues can pass pieces of writing to each other periodically for comments. This strategy can also apply to lecturers who can also enhance their writing through such groups.

According to Leibowitz (2000), writing is often developed in most universities in South Africa through writing intensive courses offered in the first year of study. However, Thesen (1990) in Leibowitz (2000:27), argues that these courses are successful only if methods and practices are dovetailed with those of other courses students take. In relation to this point the University of Michigan has designed a first year writing course where all students take at the beginning of their studies then they also take an additional writing intensive course in their major subject in third year. According to Leibowitz (2000) this intervention allows the student to relate the writing practices to the way writing is used in their discipline and possibly in the profession they will follow after graduation.

The University of Witwatersrand introduced one year subject based foundation courses to assist first year students to cope with academic literacy challenges encountered in their first year of study. Students from disadvantaged communities were selected by the Faculty Admissions Committee if their responses to a biographical questionnaire and essay demonstrated academic potential. According to Dison (2009), "[T]hese students were placed on two foundation courses. The main focus was to consciously develop students' reading and writing abilities."

Dison, together with discipline specialists, developed interventions that made discoursal conventions, literacy and assessment expectations of a range of disciplines explicit. According to Dison (2009), [T]hrough this programme there was a shift amongst academics with regards to plagiarism from a 'a blame the student' perspective to one in which departments took responsibility for developing students' ability to use sources appropriately."(Dison, 2009:6)

While the Foundation course programme is no longer available across academic disciplines at the University of Witwatersrand, in 2010 the Wits School of Education introduced a course called New Literacies for Teachers (NLFT). This course was designed for all first year students who are enrolled to become teachers in primary and secondary schools. The students study different teaching disciplines. The course aims to develop students':

- Personal literacies
- Culture of reading and writing for pleasure
- Academic literacy that they need for their own studies
- Ability to work critically and evaluate a wide range of texts
- Ability to develop the literacies needed for the different learning areas and subjects in the school curriculum
- Awareness of multiple literacies such as out of school literacy, academic literacy, digital literacy, visual literacy, environmental literacy etc.

(New Literacies for Teachers Course Outline Module 1, 2010:3)

This course was designed to assist student teachers to develop the literacies that they need as teachers and to prepare them academically so that they are able to become academically prepared teachers who will be able to teach using the various literacies necessary for teaching.

In addition to this intervention a writing centre was established at the Wits School of Education. The writing purpose of the writing centre is to support students in their academic writing endeavours.

Through a literature review, this chapter has outlined the importance of academic writing, academic challenges faced by university students and the interventions designed to address the challenges. The interventions bring out empirical interventions that have been

implemented in South Africa and elsewhere in the world in order to address the academic writing challenges faced by students in their first year of study in university. Some interventions have been successful and on-going since their inceptions but others have been abandoned prematurely.

The next chapter outlines the methodology of the research project.

CHAPTER 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The research is a case study located in the New Literacies for Teachers (NFLT) course outlined at the end of Chapter Two. According to Gillham (2000) a case study investigates individuals, a group or groups of people in order to answer specific research questions. "[It seeks a range of different kinds of evidence, evidence which is there in the case setting, and which has to be abstracted and collated to get the best possible answers to the research questions" (Gillham, 2000: 79). For Stake (1995) there are three categories of case study research, one of which is intrinsic case study. According to Stake this is the type of case study in which a researcher's interest is in understanding the particularities of the case at hand. In this research I am interested in finding out particular academic writing challenges faced by first year students at the University of the Witwatersrand in order that they may be addressed by myself and others involved in academic literacy work. Stake (1995) emphasises that "[A]n intrinsic case study aims to generalise within the case."

3.2 Research Methodology

The data for this study consists of 36 student essays, three of which are analysed in depth, and responses to a questionnaire administered to 36 students in a tutorial group for which I was the tutor.

3.2.1 Students' essays

In this section I begin by outlining the background to the first essay assignment given to the students.

3.2.1.1 Content and activities with a focus on reading

During the first semester students were introduced to academic reading through academic articles such as:

- *The four roles of a reader* by Freebody and Luke (1990). This article articulates the four roles of a reader and was used as a basis for discussion of how students can engage with academic texts.
- *New literacy studies* by Gee (1996). This article situates literacy within socio-cultural contexts. This article was given to students as an introduction to New Literacy Studies. It was used as a basis for discussion of the'd' and the 'D' in discourses.

Students were also introduced to a book club. The main purpose of the 'book club' was to encourage them to read for pleasure. During tutorials students were exposed to extracts from selected novels which were read and discussed in class. The extracts were taken from the following novels:

- *Trinity Rising* by Fiona Snyckers
- *Dog eat Dog* by Niq Mhlongo
- *Shirley Goodness and Mercy* by Chris Van Wyk

3.2.1.2 Content and activities with a focus on writing

After being exposed to a range of academic and pleasure readings students were introduced to academic writing. During tutorials students participated in a range of activities which focussed on:

- Writing an introduction to an essay
- Introducing and presenting arguments in an essay
- Writing coherent and cohesive paragraphs
- Quoting and referencing accurately

3.2.1.3 The first essay assignment

After completing the activities outlined above, students were given an assignment which required them to read a journal article written by Susan Jones (2006) called *One Body two heads: girls exploring their bicultural identities through text*. Below is the essay question:

> *Read the article <u>One body two heads: girls exploring their bicultural identities through text</u> by Susan Jones again.*
>
> *Write a short essay of 2-3 pages in which you do the following: describe and comment on the British Asian girls' use of magazines and the Welsh girls' use of electronic texts to demonstrate and consolidate their identities as bilingual and bi-cultural individuals', (Jones, 2006:5).*

The assessment criteria were as follows:

CRITERIA	WEIGHT
Content: how well have you understood and expressed how the British Asian girls and the Welsh Girls used the selected texts to mark their identities as bilingual and bi cultural nature	30/40
Form: Is your essay logically and coherently structured? Have you used appropriate language to express yourself?	10/40

The article outlines findings from a research project conducted by Susan Jones in which her research subjects were British Asian girls from England and Welsh girls from a town in North West Wales. The British Asian girls spoke both English and Asian languages such as Punjabi, Hindu and Urdu at home. When they read magazines and books they read mainly in English but some of the magazines focussed on the Indian sub-continent. Welsh girls also spoke Welsh at home but when they communicated through electronic mail with their friends they used mainly English. The research paper shows that although these girls identified themselves as Asian and Welsh they also wanted to be themselves with the linguistic and cultural practices of British teenagers.

3.2.1.4 Analysis of the essay

Three essays were read three times in order to identify themes to use in the analysis. After this each essay was analysed in terms of the themes identified and this analysis was followed by a comparison across the three essays. In addition all 36 essays were analysed in terms of understanding the journal article (text), understanding the question and aspects of academic literacy.

3.2.1 Analysis of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was distributed towards the end of the year because I wanted to find out whether the students were able to identify their continuing academic writing challenges based on their performance in writing essays in the New Literacies for Teachers course and in any other course that required them to write essays. Each of the 36 students in my tutorial group completed the questionnaire in class so that all were returned for analysis.

The questions were designed to gather information about students' perceptions of (i) their ability to write academic essays; (ii) writing challenges still being experienced and (iii) the assistance they had received. The questions are included as Appendix A.

3.3.2 The Questionnaires

The 36 questionnaires were analysed question by question. As with the essays I aimed to identify themes but also to note any unusual responses. Key findings are presented in chapter four.

CHAPTER 4: Presentation and Analysis of Data

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses data collected from a group of first year B.Ed. students who registered for the *New Literacies for Teachers* (NFLT) course in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2010. The data that is presented and analysed in this chapter was collected from:

1. A detailed analysis of one essay written by three students

2. An overview of the same essay written by the other 33 students in the group.

3. A questionnaire completed by 36 students

4.2 Presentation and analysis of data from students' essays

An essay written by one student in each of the three following categories was analysed: fail, borderline and average. The categories used in this analysis were:

Academic reading with a particular focus on:

- Understanding the question
- Understanding of the article

Academic writing

- Plagiarism
- Referencing
- Developing an argument

.

Language use in writing

- Accuracy of grammar, lexis and punctuation
- Cohesion

4.2.1 Discussion of themes emerging from the analysis of student A's essay

Student A failed the assignment for several reasons but particularly because she did not understand the text or the requirements of the question. Her essay is reproduced as Appendix B.

Limited understanding of the journal article

Student A's introduction indicates that she did not have sufficient contextual background in regard to the location in which the research was done and this caused her to face challenges in understanding the text well enough to answer the question. Student A believes that Wales is a different country from Britain. In her introduction she refers to Wales and Britain as different countries.

> *"The article explains/talks about two (2) different language groups living in the urban society such as Wales and Britain."* ***(Appendix B paragraph 1)***

It was only when I was assessing this student's essay that I realised that I had taken for granted that students in my class would know the geographical location of Wales within Britain. I also assumed that from 'British Asian' they would have understood that this group of teenagers lives in Britain although they have an Asian background.

From student A's essay, I observed that she was unaware of either the locations or the contexts in which the research subjects were situated. Reflection on my incorrect assumption about students' knowledge made me realize that "What tutors regard as 'common sense' is a strange convention to the students." Lillis (2001:37).

Student A also failed to understand the text because she did not understand the academic language that was used in the article. As indicated in chapter two, Snow (2002) and Graddol (1997) argue that failure to read academic texts well contributes to failure in the academy. The quotation below shows that student A did not understand the terms identity, bilingualism and biculturalism. These terms are used throughout the article and form the basis of the essay question.

*"However some parts in this article broadens the picture about how a person can change his or her identity and end up being classified as bilinguals (speaking more that 2 languages) Oxford Dinctionary New Edition) Biculturalism having more than one culture).''(**Appendix B paragraph 4)***

Failure to understand the essay question

The question required students to show how British Asian's girls use of magazines and Welsh girls use of electronic texts provided evidence that they viewed themselves as bilingual or bicultural. However she looked at advantages of using electronic texts instead of focusing on how the British Asian girls and Welsh girls construct their bilingual and bicultural identities through their use of electronic texts. She writes:

"Bilingual and electronic text link because in some point they change their Welsh names to English. The advantage of dealing with electronic is that the Welsh are exposed to English most of the time you can code switch depending on who you chatting with. The Welsh girls still believe and respect that English is a world wide language that can be used anytime while communicating with the outside world." ***(Appendix B paragraph 14)***

This quotation indicates that student A did not understand the requirements of the question. It is also evident that she was not able to articulate how the Welsh girls' decision to code switch between Welsh and English is evidence of their bilingual and bicultural identities.

Her focus was on the social value of electronic communication:

"Nevertheless the Welsh girls used electronic text to communicate, as they also young girls they are to socialise and so electronic text is the only way they can be updated or socialise without moving from one domain to the other." ***(Appendix B paragraph 1)***

Academic writing difficulties

Student A has three kinds of writing difficulties: referencing, constructing an argument/position, using grammar and vocabulary accurately. Although student A has begun to understand that she should acknowledge the source of quotations, the quotations she uses are not properly referenced. She used quotations that are cited by Jones and did not acknowledge that she was citing from the journal article. For example she cited Gruffud (1997) when she should have cited Gruffud in Jones.

"Gruffud (1997) indicates that many young Welsh speakers actively choose English during adolescence as a reaction to the language of authority." ***(Appendix B Paragraph 14)***

Student A seems not to be aware of the academic literacy convention which requires acknowledging when one cites sources that have been cited by other authorities.

Although students were taught at the beginning of the course about referencing, student A's essay shows that she is facing challenges in using referencing conventions. As another example she referred to Barack Obama's autobiography in the following way

> *"A clear example is in Barak (2007page 49-50) Dreams From My Father, where he ..."* ***(Appendix B paragraph 3)***

This example indicates that student A did not know that the title of the source should be placed in a reference list and not in the essay and also that an author should be referred to by his or her surname. Also she is not aware of the correct format required when citing year of publication and pages of sources.

It is important to note that although she faced challenges in proper referencing she did not plagiarize. According to Ivanic (1997), "Plagiarism is patching together extracts longer than one word or two from published sources without putting them in quotation marks. Student A quoted an example of how Welsh girls code switched when they communicated on the internet. Below is a further example from her essay:

> *"A good example is shown as a welsh girl is code switching "dloch am gyrru site t iv" meaning thanks for sending me your site."* ***(Appendix B paragraph 18)***

She used quotation marks to show that she is quoting from a published source but did not reference it.

Presentation and support of arguments

According to Mahalski (1992) in Nevile (1996:41) "When the tutor or lecturer reads an academic text they expect to get a clear statement of the position to be argued with respect to the problem posed in the essay topic."

The statement of the position that the writer takes in the essay should be established in the introduction. In student A's introduction there is no clear statement of her argument. Her introduction reads:

"The article explains/talks about two (2) different teenage groups living in the urban society such as Wales and Britain. The essay will be dealing about how these two adolescent (teenage) groups go about in practicing their literacy in their particular surroundings (domains) dominated by selected cultures and languages." ***(Appendix B paragraph 1)***

Although student A's attempts to show that the essay will discuss the literacy practices of the girls she makes no reference to the girls' bilingual or bicultural identities.

The question required students to use evidence from the text to show how the British Asian and Welsh girls use magazines and electronic text to demonstrate and consolidate their identities. In her essay student A does not keep this in focus in her argument. For example she writes:

> *"In addition their use of magazines helps them to explore more because they are not allowed to talk about sex in their culture, but if they can read about it in the magazines that may give them more information.* ***(Appendix B paragraph 13)***

While what she writes is correct this sentence makes no direct reference to bilingual and bicultural identities.

Student A did not use evidence from the text as was required by the question. She did not use evidence from the text to support her arguments. For example she writes:

> *"On the other hand British Asian girls were advantaged because they manage to read magazine in two different languages. They carried out their literacy practice for pleasure in English because they were part of British culture which in some ways United Kingdom is using only one major medium of instructions language which is English."* ***(Appendix B paragraph 4)***

She should have supported her argument by quoting from the text to show that the British Asian girls could read in two different languages and to discuss the possible influences of these reading practices on their bicultural and bilingual identities.

Language use in writing

According to Hammond, (1990) "In writing, there is need for the reader to be borne in mind in terms of the context, the grammar and the lexical items to be used. This is because a written text cannot give clarifications and is decontextualized. It is the duty of the writer to ensure that their text makes sense to the reader" (Hammond, 1990:43). Student A seems to be

facing challenges in writing a coherent essay that makes sense to the reader. For example she writes:

"For example, am an African girl (black) my home language is Isizulu and am forced to speak my language when am at home with the elders to show respect while am at school (Varsity) I must speak English at all times, so in order for me to balance. I must code switch just like F-Fion". ***(Appendix B paragraph 5)***

This paragraph is incoherent. Towards the end there is sudden mention of F-Fion from the text whom student A says code switches. She does not inform the reader who Fion is and also between which languages she code switches. She also does not show how this answers the question. Of course as the tutor I knew that F-Fion is one of the British Asian girls mentioned in the article but anyone without the contextual background of the text would not be able to understand student A's essay.

Grammatical Errors

Grammatical errors are common in student A's essay. This shows that she faced writing challenges. I will point out a few examples from her essay where she failed to use correct tenses or verb forms in her essay:

1. *"The British Asian girls were advantaged because they manage to read different magazine in two different languages."*
2. *"However the Bollywood magazine is giving them a broader picture of what was happening in Asia concerning culture, music, movies, etc."*

Spelling Mistakes

It is also important to mention that student A's essay has what are more likely to be spelling mistakes than errors. For example she wrote:

- *"dinctionary"* instead of dictionary.
- *"test"* instead of text.

The spelling mistakes that she made suggest that she may not have taken time to read through her essay to look for mistakes before she submitted. This may suggest that student A wrote one draft and submitted it for marking. According to Neville, (1996) "… only when students understand the nature and complexity of academic writing can they see the necessity for writing more than one draft.

In the following section, I analyse the essay that was written by student B. Student B's essay is reproduced as Appendix C. His essay obtained a border line pass mark.

4.2.2 Discussion of themes emerging from an analysis of Student B's essay

Understanding the journal article

Student B's essay shows that he understood the text. For example he is able to discuss how the British Asian girls built their bicultural identity through the use of magazines. He mentions that because of the accessibility of Asian magazines in Britain, British Asian girls are able to read more about Asian cultures. Student B also clearly articulates that the British Asian girls identify themselves as bicultural and bilingual because the magazines they read embrace both their Asian culture and their British way of living. Below is an extract from the essay:

a. *Accessibiltiy*

Because of the accessibility of the Asian magazines in Britain, it is much easier for the British Asian girls to use them as source of knowledge about their other culture the Asian culture; as the main objective of these magazines is to help the minority language users also reflect on their non-dominating culture. Even though the magazines are served in English the contents mainly promote recognition of their other culture.

b. *Nature of magazines*

"The magazines are contemporary in nature; they are designed in a modern manner that embraces the style of the British Asians. Unlike Welsh magazines which may be four or five pages the British Asians ones are long; they are not only discourse but also cover discourse." ***(Appendix C paragraph 4 and 5)***

Understanding the question.

The question required students to show the how British Asian girls used magazines and how Welsh girls used electronic text to consolidate their identities. Student B's essay clearly shows how British Asian Girls used magazines. He also articulates how Welsh girls used web pages to mark their identity. He mentions that the Welsh girls pasted the Welsh flag on their web pages, thus marking their Welsh identity. In addition, Student B clearly articulates how the Welsh girls use their web page to identify with their English friends. He also mentions how the Welsh girls maintain their Welsh identity. Student B shows how the Welsh girls show their bilingual identity by mentioning that they code switched on the Welsh web page. Below is an extract from the essay:

Welsh girls use of the web as an identity builder.

Welsh girls set up their own web page , in them they are free to use whatever language of authority even though they know their contact are Welsh. What has been recognized of the Welsh girls is that even in their state of using English they still emphasize their identity as Welsh, through pasting their national flag so as to symbolize that they belong to this type of culture.

The girls' ability to code switch is tremendously amazing, they engage into their own little world. To fit into the Welsh web world the girls are expected to know how to code switch. ***(Appendix C paragraphs 7 and 8)***

Academic literacy

Plagiarism

Although student B understood the requirements of the question he plagiarised in some parts of his essay. According to Angelil-Carter (2000) some students get involved in unintentional plagiarism because they are not familiar with the academic discourse that is supposed to be used in their essays. Student B may have plagiarised because he used what he was taught in high school which was to use authors' words without using quotation marks. Angelil-Carter suggests that in South African high school they were used to "the formulaic language where chunks of language are learned and reproduced word for word" Angelil-Carter (2000:162). They find it easier to use authoritative voices in the form of the author's direct words which they take from the text than to use their own.

Below is an example of sentences student B copied from the second paragraph of page 8 of the text:

"As in the essay I will be focussing on the given girls' use of their illiteracies and try to make a link between them and their identity. As Jones brought to attention that, awareness of ones

culture strengthens identity within minority groups and bicultural identity can shift depending on context. There is a link between respective bilingual that is the position to speak a minority language. There has to be interaction with text to find meaning and by so doing there is construction and recognition of their minor language. [1]***The girls in the survey are adolescents, it has been identified that the girls form a balance of psychological and social factors so that they may have a true ego." (Appendix C paragraph 3)***

Referencing

Student B used direct quotations from the text, albeit inaccurately. The quotations are poorly referenced or not referenced at all and he did not use the referencing convention that was discussed in class. For example he cites Baker as quoted by Jones but he does not include the year of publication. He wrote:

*"In the Jones article the three girls; Jaspreet, Priya and Farah use these magazines as their mothers, cousins and aunties recommend they read."(**Appendix C paragraph 6)***

Support and presentation of arguments

The essay required students to show how British Asian and Welsh girls use printed and electronic texts to consolidate their identities. Students were required to use evidence from the article by Jones (2006) to show how the British Asian and Welsh girls' literacy practices identified them as bilingual and bicultural.

Student B uses poetic and metaphorical language in his essay. He writes the first two consecutive paragraphs without presenting his argument. His introduction does not present the argument of his essay. Student B has not mastered the 'tertiary literacies' (Nevile, 1996) required in academic writing. Paxton (2007) uses the term 'Interim Literacies' to describe

[1] Copied sentence from the text

first year students writing practices. In chapter two, I referred to Paxton's research where she found that some students drew strongly on a variety of spoken discourses and genres from oral tradition that revealed something about their social and historical roots. Paxton suggests that this finding can be explained by what Gee (1996) refers to as failure to master a particular discourse. A student in this situation may fall back on his/her 'primary discourse' or uses a related secondary discourse. Although, Student B attempts to define the key terms in the essay question, he seems to be resorting to a primary discourse of using metaphors e.g. (blocks as in building blocks) and use of inappropriate personal pronouns e.g. (use of 'to me' in an academic definition) because he has not mastered the 'secondary discourse'.

Below is an extract from his essay:

Identity regards concepts of certain characteristics of a person; a person may be identified according to the form of dress, language and culture. A person's identity is built on a daily basis as it is accessible on each day, it can be altered and can be heightened daily. Language is one of the elements and concepts which build up identity, the ability to speak a language, to write it and read it are blocks to creating identity. Bilingualism to me is the ability to speak, read and write more than one language, although some may argue my point and do not emphasize the reading and writing part. To regard a person as bilingual, he/she must have the ability to do with that language what he/she can do to their own.

Culture, on the other hand also plays an important role in building a person's identity. Culture is a person's belief on customs which a person holds dear to the heart. Should identity be a house language and culture would be two main building blocks I would prefer to use; culture as my bricks and language as the mud that holds the two to build a house.

(Appendix D paragraphs 1 and 2).

4.2.3 Discussion of the themes emerging from an analysis of Student C's essay

The following section will analyse data from the essay written by student C who received the highest mark in my tutorial group even though this mark was only 60%. Her essay is reproduced as Appendix D.

Understanding the journal article

From student C's essay it is clear that she understood the article, she clearly articulates how the British Asian girls use magazines to identify themselves as bilingual and bicultural. She mentions that the girls read Asian magazines so that they stay in touch with their Asian culture. She also mentions that the girls also read British magazines so that they know about cultural aspects that are not practised in the Asian culture. Below is a quotation from student C's essay:

Firstly, I would like to look at a group of British Asian girls. This group of young ladies are studied within the literary context of magazines- both popular British magazines and those aimed at the Asian readers specifically. Magazines are popular amongst teenage girls and this is shown by Susan Jones (on which the essay is based) where 82, 2% of the girls participating in the said study stated they read magazines.

I have mentioned, previously that the subjects (British Asian girls) of this study did not keep to only reading British or Asian magazines but rather made use of both. The girls tended to use Asian magazines as a way of creating links and relations with other family members or to learn more about certain cultural aspects. ***(Appendix D paragraphs 1 and 2)***

Understanding the question

As an example of her understanding of the question, student C discusses how the Welsh girls show their bilingual and bicultural identity. She uses examples from the text to show how the girls use the internet to mark their identity. She mentions that the girls communicated in English on their websites. She also mentions that the girls display the Welsh flag to show that they identify with the Welsh culture. Student C also mentions that the girls code switched from Welsh to English. Below is an extract from her text.

*"When one further analyses the websites, one will notice the different interpretations of Welsh culture through screen names. Some girls used names that directly point to their Welsh origins, while others use names in English. This could be interpreted as their personal affinity towards their culture. The use of certain graphics can also point to various facets of the author's identity and the role of their culture within that identity. The use of the Welsh flag is a common graphic indicative of culture. Other graphics which lead to identity include fashion logos, band insignia and cartoon characters****." (Appendix D paragraphs 7 and 8)***

Academic literacy

Plagiarism and Referencing

Student C was not guilty of plagiarism her essay. However, although she quotes from the text, she does not use proper referencing conventions. The text is written by Susan Jones and in the text Jones quotes from other authorities. As was the case for student A in her essay, student C cites sources quoted by Jones as if she read these sources. She quotes from Gruffud (1997), Sommerfield (2002).

It is also important to note that while student C does have a reference list at the end of her essay, she copied this from Jones' reference list and yet she did not read all the sources used by Jones. Student C is not aware that the reference list should consist of only sources cited in the essay. **(*Appendix D under reference list.)***

Presentation and support of arguments

Student C does not present her arguments clearly. In her introduction she states what she will outline in her essay. However, she could have done better if she had defined the key terms such as 'identity', 'bicultural' and 'bilingual'. As indicated in chapter two, Nevile (1996) some students have 'product related difficulties' when they write academic essays, they write essays that do not consider the reader. Failure to define key terms is an example of lack of consideration for readers.

Student C did not make it clear in her introduction that her essay will discuss the British Asian and Welsh girls use of magazines and text to consolidate their identities. Below is an extract from her introduction:

In this essay, we will examine the influence of certain types of text and literacy and the varying effects it has on a group of girls in their teens. These girls all, speak at minimum two languages and have a culture, apart from that of the country they live. The two modes of literacy we will focus on will be magazines and the internet, also referred to as electronic text. ***(Appendix D paragraph 1)***

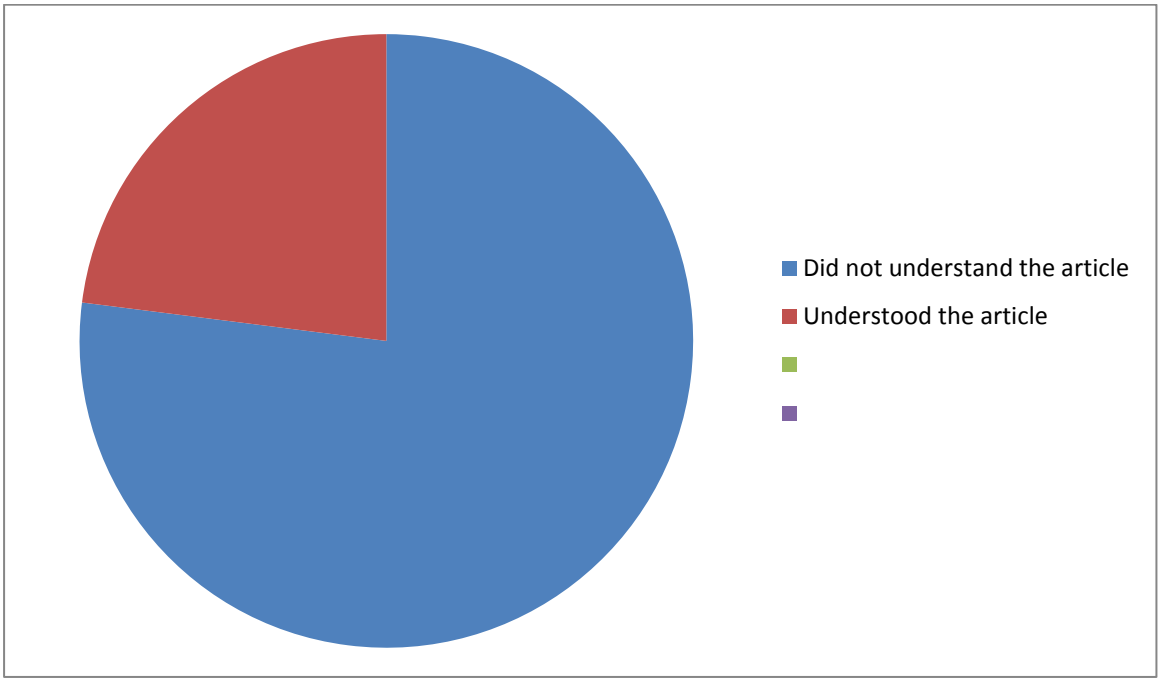
While the three essays discussed in this section have been analysed in some detail, the remaining 33 essays written by students in my tutorial group were reviewed in terms of three general categories.

4.2.4: Findings from a review of the remaining 33 essays

In the following section I present quantitative data generated from a review of the essay of the other 33 students in my tutorial group. I present a summary of how my tutorial group performed in terms of:

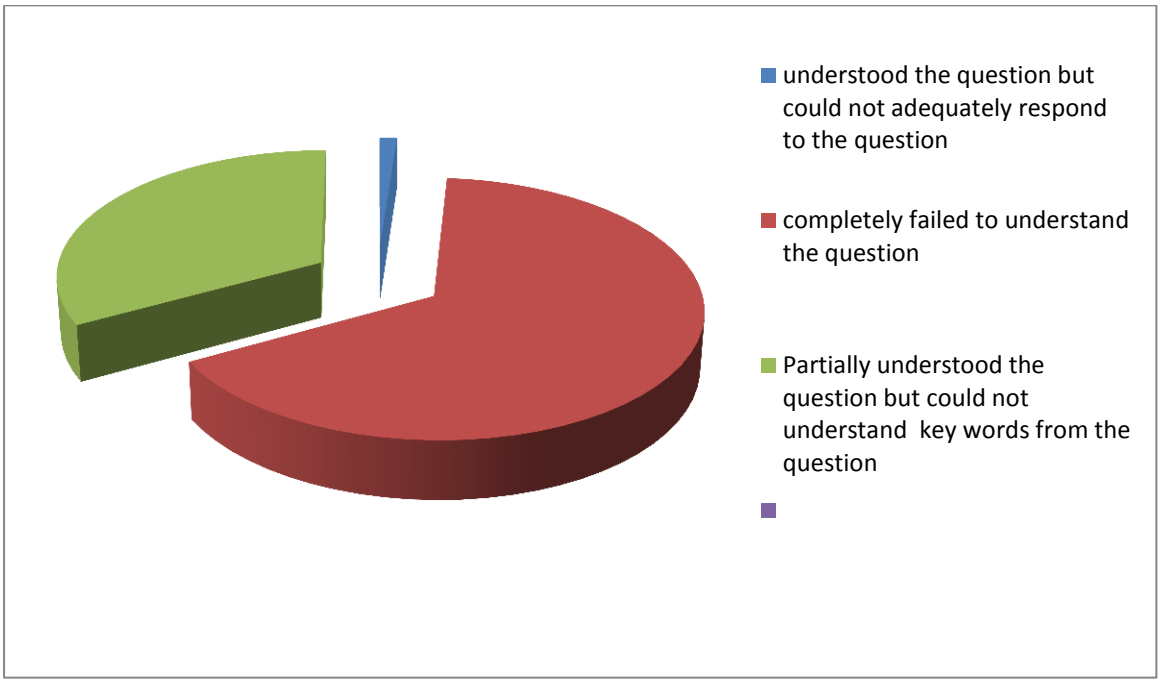
- Understanding the journal article
- Understanding the question
- Aspects of academic literacy

Understanding the journal article



From the chart it is evident that most students did not understand the journal article. Out of a total of 33 students, 26 students failed to understand the article and only seven managed to understand the article. This caused most of the students to face difficulties in answering the question. It is possible that failure to understand the journal article can be attributed to "[T]he, use of complex vocabulary, grammar and discourses that make it difficult for students to understand" Perera (1996:41). Below is a review of the students' ability to answer the question.

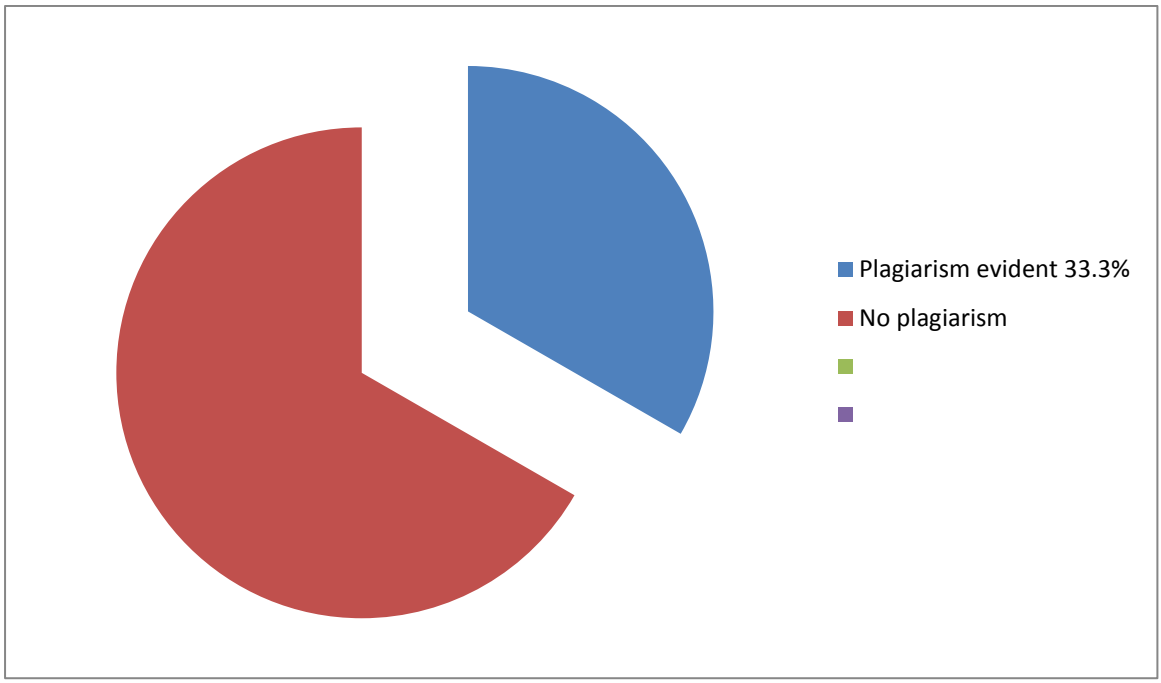
Understanding the question



The diagram shows that most students in the group had difficulties in understanding the requirements of the question. While failure to understand the question may be attributed partly to limited understanding of the academic journal article, it is also likely that many students did not understand how to use information to respond appropriately to the question. From the students' essays most of the students who faced challenges in understanding the article also failed to understand the question.

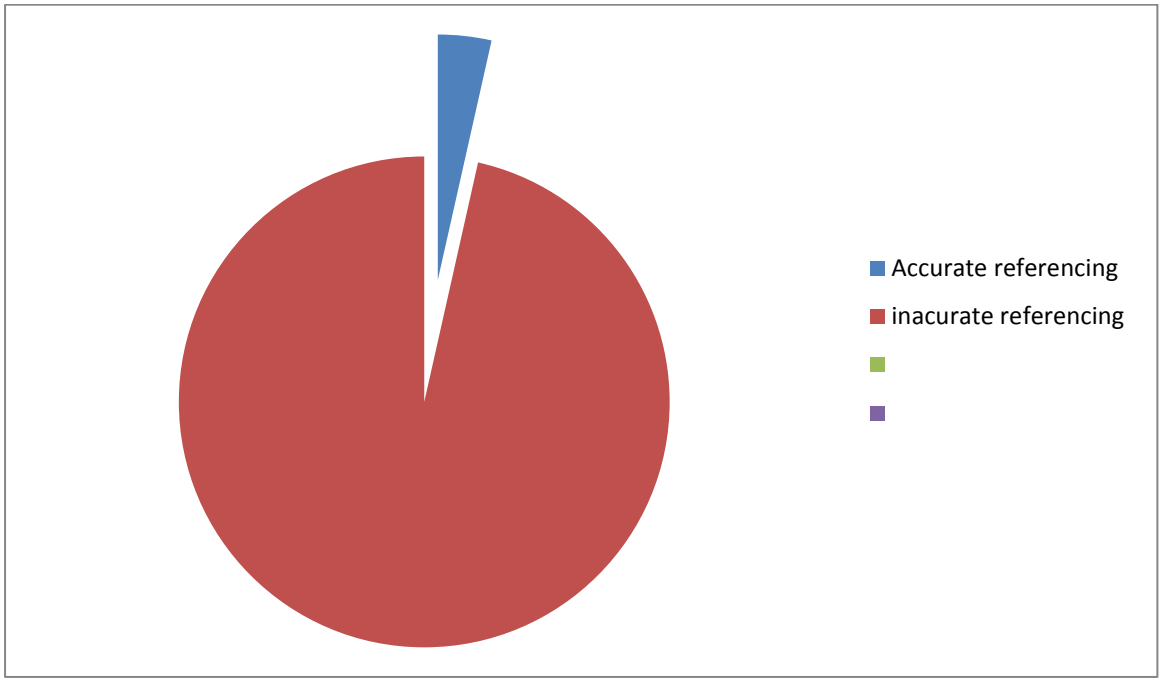
Academic Literacy

Plagiarism



From the pie chart it is clear that two thirds of the students did not copy from the text without any acknowledgement. Out of the 33 students' essays, 11 copied sentences from the text without using quotation marks. However, although 22 students used quotation marks when they quoted from the text this shows that approximately two thirds of the students understand the importance of using quotation marks when writing academic essays although some of them did not do this accurately.

Referencing



The pie chart shows that most students in my tutorial group faced challenges in referencing sources. 26 students faced challenges in using correct referencing convention while only 7 did not. Most students faced challenges when they made references to Jones in their essay because they referenced these as if they had read from these sources. For example some students wrote*: "According to Gruffud (1997)..."* Gruffud is cited by Jones but the students did not read Gruffud's article.

Several students copied the reference list from Jones' reference list. They seemed unaware that they should not refer to texts that they have not read.

4.2.5 Findings from the questionnaire

In this section I present and analyse the findings and data gathered from the questionnaires administered to the 36 first year B.Ed. students in my NLFT tutorial group in 2010. I will discuss findings from the data. It is important to note that these were administered approximately six months after the essays analysed in the previous section.

4.2.5.1 Students' perceptions of academic writing

Students were asked if they are 'comfortable' writing academic essays after they have been taught in the NLFT course. 21 students expressed their confidence in academic writing especially after class discussions about it. Below are some quotations from the students who answered this question.

- *I now feel very comfortable to write essays because I now know how to reference.*
- *I am now comfortable because even my marks have improved in other courses where I have been using what I was taught in this course.*
- *I am now comfortable because I apply what I was taught in class about academic writing especially what my tutor always says about 'keeping the eye on the ball'.*
- *I am now comfortable writing because I am no longer repeating the same things like I used to do before I was taught to write academic essays in this course.*
- *I am now comfortable writing academic essays because I now know that I should not use 'didn't', 'wanna', 'gonna', and some sms language that I used to use in my essays.*
- *I am now able to express myself because at first I knew what I wanted to say but I could not express myself.*

- *I am comfortable because I was encouraged to use "I" in my essays I feel it helps me to express myself.*

According to McCormick (1994) in Ivanic (1997) "some students accommodate willingly the conventions of academic writing and the identities these set up." The quotations from these students show that they have accepted and identify with the conventions of an academic writing discourse community. These students now perceive themselves as able and comfortable with academic writing through what they have been taught on the course.

However, 12 students expressed that they are not comfortable with writing academic essays. Some reasons that students gave are that they are still confused about what is required in academic writing in different courses. They do not know what is required of them in the different courses. One of the students says:

> *"I am not comfortable because I do not know how to write an academic history essay. I have been taught to write essays in New Literacies but not in History."*

Hounsel (1984, 1987) refers to the fact that students are not aware of what is expected of them in academic writing. "This is the broken cycle of communication between tutors and students." (Hounsel 1987:114) The fact that the student does not know what is required in writing History essays makes the student lose confidence in what he/she was taught in academic writing in the NLFT course.

One student said he is not comfortable with writing academic essays. The student wrote:

"I am afraid of plagiarising when I am writing essays".

Although students were taught how to write academic essays some still resist academic writing requirements. Some students do not find it necessary to use the required academic

writing practices. This student perceives her writing challenges to emanate from expected writing practices. She says:

"I don't feel comfortable to write academic essays because I feel restricted to express myself. I want to express myself in every way possible."

According to Ivanic (1997) "[S]tudents who have problems with academic writing have a sense that their writing is failing to convey a true impression of their qualities." This student feels that the academic writing discourse does not allow her to express herself and shows her resistance to being initiated into the academic discourse community.

One student wrote:

"Yes, I am comfortable because it is a must that I should write academic essays and it's worth marks."

According to Ivanic (1997: 102) "student writers may conform to what appears to be the values of their readers and obtaining good marks without really believing that they live up to these assessments." This student has conformed to the academic writing requirements because he wants to pass the course.

Another student said:

"I am not comfortable to write academic essays, although I have a history of writing good essays from school."

This student has been socialised to the writing literacies valued at school but finds it difficult to conform to the academic discourse valued in the university. (McCormick 1994).

4.2.5.2 Academic writing challenges

Students were asked to outline the problems that they are facing in academic writing. There were different responses to this question. Below are some of them.

1. *"I have a problem in using the correct language or saying what I intend to say and saying it in a way that would make sense to the reader. I have a lot of thinking that I cannot put on paper."*
2. *"The way I need to structure my sentences and the different/proper words that I have to use."*
3. *"I don't know how to introduce an essay, connect ideas and to conclude the essays."*

The problems mentioned by the students show that they have problems with academic discourse. They feel they do not know how to use language and appropriate vocabulary when they are writing academic essays. They believe that they do not have enough vocabulary to express themselves even though they know what they want to say.

Other students expressed their problems differently. This group consists of both second language and first language speakers of English. The statement below is representative of their frustrations about referencing requirements:

> *"I have to reference every single thing, which I find boring because I know that these are not my words, why do I have to reference everything."*

This student does not understand why it is important to use references. According to (Ivanic 1997) "there are power relations in the academic discourse community where the academic discourse has expectations that have been established by those in authority. This may be

difficult to understand for those who have not been socialised into the academic discourse community. Those people who do not see the importance of valuing other peoples' work."

Ivanic's observation is relevant to the first year students in my tutorial group. They do not understand the importance of using references when they write academic essays. These students have not been socialised into writing academic essays. They do not understand the importance of referencing.

a. *"I do not know how to use quotations from texts and I am afraid of plagiarising though I do not know what it really is."*

b. *"I am confused about using 'I', 'me' in my essays. Some lecturers do not mind but others do"*

c. *"I do not understand the academic text which we are given to read I find them boring to read."*

One student who responded to the questionnaire raised an interesting point about the course especially in academic writing. She says:

> *"I don't have any academic writing challenges in fact most of the things which we were taught on this course are familiar. I was taught most of the stuff in high school. I feel like i was wasting my time attending tutorials and lectures."*

This student is a first English language speaker and she attended an advantaged secondary school. She seems to have been exposed to academic writing in her high school. This is student C. By the end of the year she was writing well-crafted academic essays. However, the

analysis of her first essay suggests that she did not understand the requirements of academic writing.

Students were asked if the NLFT course is adequately teaching them to write academic essays. Below are examples of responses from the students:

1. *Yes there was a lot of help from the tutor before writing an assignment also we are encouraged to use the writing centre.*
2. *Yes we have been taught how to reference in tutorials and in lectures.*
3. *Yes and I have been able to use what I have learnt in the NLFT course to write essays in other courses.*

12 of the 33 students believe in the help they have been given in academic writing in the course and that they have benefited from the tutorials, lectures and the writing centre.

The following are responses from students who feel that they have not been adequately taught to write academic essays. Only two of these respondents suggested what they feel should be done to help them overcome academic writing challenges. Six of the students who responded to the question did not give suggestions about why they think the course is not doing enough to help them with their academic writing challenges. Below are responses from students who wrote what they think should be done to assist:

1. *No although the course is helping. I think I need more time. The course should continue to second year.*
2. *No. we need more practice we should be given to write more academic essays with more help on the language and referencing.*

It is interesting to note that one student in the responses acknowledged that the course is assisting them in academic writing but the writing centre is not helping. This runs counter to the pattern in the findings because, as I mentioned earlier in chapter two of this research report, the writing centre has been set up for students to consult and to get assistance from the writing centre consultants. The writing centre was set up in order to give students facing academic writing challenges assistance on a one on one basis with the writing consultants.

The student said:

"Yes I am getting enough assistance from the tutorials but the writing centre has not helped me in any way actually they have been confusing me."

As mentioned in chapter three of this report, students were required to read for pleasure and also to read academic articles. One of the questions in the questionnaire aimed to find out the students' perceptions of whether the academic reading that they do for the course is helpful in improving their academic writing. The responses below are representative of students' responses:

- *The readings are too long and difficult to understand.*
- *Too many difficult words and sentences.*
- *It is difficult to understand the text because there is not enough background information.*
- *The reading is too much. Its' better to have more writing and less reading.*
- *The question was too difficult to understand.*

From these responses, it appears that students feel that the texts (mainly academic journals articles) were difficult and too long which made it difficult for them to understand them and

to manage the reading load. Lack of enough background information about the text is also one of the generally agreed causes of reading difficulties. The reading difficulties that the students faced can be said to have also caused them to face writing challenges. In his response, one student wrote that when he wrote the essay he only used the information which was discussed in class and did not use quotations from the text because he had not understood the text.

4.3 Summary of findings

In this chapter I have presented and discussed the findings from the data that I gathered from students' essays and questionnaires. The essays provided evidence of the academic writing challenges that are faced by some students and the questionnaires foregrounded the students' perceptions about the challenges that they are facing in academic writing.

The main findings from analysis of both the essays and questionnaire are the following:

The essays suggest that weaker students did not have enough background knowledge to understand the text (for example that Wales is part of the United Kingdom). In the questionnaires some students said they needed more background information in order to understand the readings they were given.

Some of the students failed to understand what the essay question required them to do.

In all three analysed essays it was evident that students had difficulties in quoting and referencing which resulted often in plagiarism. Many students wrote on the questionnaire that they do not understand how to reference and that they were afraid of plagiarising.

Some students are not aware fully of the academic discourse that they are expected to use in their essays and of why it is important to use this.

Chapter 5 outlines the conclusions and recommendations arising from the findings. Areas that need further research will also be indicated.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusions, Recommendations and a Post-script

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the academic writing challenges faced by B.Ed first year students at the University of the Witwatersrand. This chapter presents conclusions based on the findings of the research in relation to the literature that has been reviewed. Recommendations and suggestions to the course designers of the NLFT course will also be outlined. The report ends with a personal reflection.

5.2 Conclusions from the study

The findings from the research suggest that students in first year face challenges in identifying with the academic discourse community. One reason for this may be that students continue to rely on the school literacies that they acquired in high school. (Ivanic, 1997; Nevile, 1996). As evidenced in the essays and questionnaire responses students in one tutorial group of a B.Ed. programme at the University of the Witwatersrand have not yet adopted the academic writing discourse (a secondary discourse) required for writing essays and they fall back on their primary discourse from home or from a more established secondary discourse from school days (Gee,1996).

There is evidence from both the essays and the questionnaire responses that many students are underprepared for university. As noted by Professor Eloff, "If you are not schooled well, your chances of performing well at FET colleges and universities are not great."

From the findings of this research it can be concluded that some students face academic writing challenges because they do not understand academic articles that they are given to read. Students mentioned in the questionnaire that the academic articles they were given to read were difficult to understand. According to Perera (1996), authors use difficult and complex words when they write academic articles and this makes it difficult for the students to understand. It is also important to mention that B. Ed. many students in first year at the University of the Witwatersrand do not have experience in reading academic texts although they may have been used to reading literature set books in high school. For Perera (1996) "The movement from reading fiction to nonfiction articles pose a great challenge for students to understand academic articles."

"Academic reading is a skill that is acquired through active engagement with the text" (Zamel 1992). Findings from this research suggest that many students in first year have not mastered the skills required in academic reading. Most essays that were written by the students showed that they had not understood the academic article. Some students even mentioned in the questionnaire that the article was difficult to understand and they did not attempt to read and understand the academic article written by Susan Jones.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

I would like to recommend the following based on the findings of this research:

- It is important for tutors and the NLFT course designers to realise that students come to university without experience in reading academic articles. It is important to provide as much scaffolding in class as possible to ensure that they understand how to read academic articles. It is also important to start by giving students short and relatively straight forward academic articles so that they gradually get initiated into understanding academic texts. (Arguably, the Jones' article was too difficult for a first essay assignment).
- Whilst the writing centre is a very important initiative that has been put in place at the Wits University Education campus, it is important for the NFLT course designers to ensure that the writing centre meets the requirements of first year B.Ed. students. The consultants at the writing centre should be aware of the academic writing challenges faced by students so that when students visit the writing centre they are assisted according to the challenges they face.
- Students need to be taught the need to understand that writing is a process that involves writing, rewriting, editing and composing the final product in academic writing. (Zamel 1982, Connor 1996). First year students are not aware of the process of writing. They face academic writing challenges because they are not aware of the importance of revising their work before the final product is submitted. The NLFT course designers may need to consider incorporating ways that will ensure that students produce first and second drafts before submitting for assessment.

- The NLFT course should be offered up to second year for the B.Ed. students. In second year it should focus mainly on academic reading and writing. This will help students who still feel that they need some guidance and assistance in academic writing.

- It is important for me to mention that as a tutor who taught on the NLFT course in 2010 I also faced challenges in teaching the course. The reason being that I had not been 'initiated' into teaching at tertiary level. I would like to recommend that student tutors on the course also need to have writing workshops organised for them so that they are made aware of their writing challenges as well. Leibowitz (2000) emphasises that such workshops help to raise awareness about useful techniques and processes in academic writing.

5.4 Postscript: a personal reflection

I have been a teacher for six years in Zimbabwe and my experience has been that in high school, students are not prepared academically in terms of reading and writing. Having taught for the first time at university level in the NLFT course I have realized that the academic requirements at university are not taught at high school. In the six years that I have been an English teacher, it never occurred to me that there was a need to consider the student's academic life after school.

During this research, I took some time to reflect on my university life. When I did my undergraduate degree, I realized that high school did not prepare me well enough to be in university. I remember one of my lecturers telling me that 'I was not university material'. This posed a very big challenge for me because I had been accepted into university because I

qualified to be there and I believed that the school literacies I had acquired during my six years in high school had adequately equipped me to cope with academic demands at university. University as well did not prepare me adequately in academic writing. I remember the frustrations I always had about not knowing the proper referencing conventions. Also I was always afraid of plagiarising. The main reason I was afraid is that lecturers always warned us that "plagiarism is a serious offence". The truth is I was not aware what plagiarism is, all I knew was it is a serious offence. I would like to mention that as I put this research report together I faced academic writing challenges. I have come to realise that I am an underprepared post graduate student in terms of academic writing. My supervisor has done a great job to assist me with proper academic discourse to use in my research report. Leibowitz (2000) gives me 'academic writing hope' when she says "one cannot be a good writer in a day or a week but rather it is a gradual process."

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APPENDIX A

Interview Schedule for Students

1. Are you comfortable writing academic essay? Why or Why not?
2. What problems do you have with writing academic essays?
3. How many of your courses require you to write essays?
4. What do you do well when you write academic essays?
5. If there are other courses other than NLFT where essay writing is required are you being taught how to write the essays?
6. Is there any special attention paid to academic writing in other courses in the first year curriculum?
7. Do you think the course New Literacies for Teachers is doing enough to help you overcome your writing problems?
8. Do you think you are being taught how to write academic essays in the course? Why or why not?
9. Are you happy with the writing approach that is being taught on the course?
10. Is the reading that you do as per the requirements of the course helpful in improving your academic writing?
11. What do you feel should be done to help students to improve their academic writing?
12. What other comments would you like to make regarding the learning and teaching of writing in the course.

Thank you for participating in this research.

APPENDIX B: STUDENT A's ESSAY

PART A

(1) The article explains/talks about Two (2) different teenage groups living in the urban society such as Wales and Britain. The essay will be dealing mainly about how these two adolescent (teenage) groups go about in practicing their literacy in their particular surroundings (domains) dominated by selected cultures and languages.

(2) One body two heads introduces such extra-ordinary information about how your surrounding can influence your life style or culture meeting a person can adopt some particular features in order to fit-in.

(3) A clear example is in Barak (**2007** page 49-50) Dreams From My Father, where he talks about his life as a young American living in Indonesia. The point is that he practiced Indonesian culture but still knowing that he is American.

(4) However some parts in this article broadens the picture about how a person can change his/her identity and end up being classified as being bilinguals (**speaking more that 2 languages) Oxford Dinctionary New Edition)**Biculturalism having more than one culture).

(5) For example, am an African girl (black) my home language is Isizulu and am forced to speak my language when am at home with elders to show respect while when I'm at school (Varsity) I must speak English at all times, so in order for me to balance. I must code switch just like F-Fion

[one body and two heads by Susan Jones (2006) page ...] After reading the article one can say it depends on the majority by which is the dominating language and that is being bilingualism.

(6) On the other hand, the British Asian girls were advantaged because they manage to read magazine in two different languages. They carried out their literacy practice for pleasure in English because they were part of British culture which in some ways United Kingdom is using only one major medium of instructions language which is English.

(7) **82/2%** Which is the majority of British Asian girls did not mind to code-switch because they understood both languages but they spoke Bombay English which is a mixture of Hindu and a bit of English. Although their reading of magazines is a large contribution in understanding

6 11 953 1400

literacy. The British Asian girls practiced their school literacy example (writing notes, reading textbooks) and out of school literacy (magazines).

In addition they may practice the modern culture which is English because of their domains but they still carry-out their cultural beliefs like

and even though they are not in Pakistan of India they still understand and respect their culture, they use their identities, language and culture to practice their literacy while maintaining connection (solidarity) between them and their roots.

British Asian girls used test as their literacy practice showing their identity. The reason I say this is that they read ordinary magazines that show everyday lifestyle e.g. Move, People, etc, these are teen magazines because they talk about Love, Life, Fashion, Movies and Music and again they read Asian magazines which mostly focus on Bollywood life-style (e.g. Films, Celebrities, etc.) and so that shows their bicultural activities, they engage in different text (British – Asian) to show their identity and in the Bollywood magazine Bombay English was used which is different from the ordinary Britain English and that is showing their bilingualism identity.

However the Bollywood magazine is giving them a broader picture of what is happening in Asia concerning culture, music, movies, etc. regionally. They may not be in Asia but they try and learn about what is happening around the place and they can be classified as Asians.

On the other hand, the British-Asian girls use the magazines language to express their emotions and feelings. As a young adolescent emotions can be stressing as you may have different emotions everyday and so what I can say is that magazines may have given them tips on how to deal with emotions, and I can also say that their identity is bicultural and bilingual. The reason is that they practice 2 cultures British and Asian through magazines as they read them in two different languages.

In addition their use of magazines helps them to explore more because they are not allowed to talk about sex in their culture, but if they can read about it in the magazines that may give them more information about it. It will also give them a chance to email to that type of magazine asking for more information or giving information about sex in their regarding their culture (being against sex). Magazines play a very important role in their lives because they talk about aspect of life that their culture does not talk about. Most magazines expose more information which their culture thinks is taboo and its disrespectful to discuss with them, (e.g. girls in bikinis, half naked men and women, etc.)

Nevertheless the Welsh girls used electronic text to communicate, as they also young girls they are to buy socialize and so electronic text is the only way the can be updated or socialize without moving from one domain to the other.

Bilingual and electronic text link because in some point they chance their Welsh name to English. The advantage of dealing with electronic text is that the Welsh are exposed to English most of the time but you can code-switch depending on who you chatting with. The Welsh girls still believe and respect that English is a world-wide language that can be used anytime while communicating with the outside world.

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⇒ The Web use different languages, as you speak to different people and that is being bilingual (Welsh and English)

Gruffudd (1997) indicates that many young Welsh speakers actively choose English during adolescence as a reaction to the language of authority.

Facebook is a good example to show electronic text as it is used world-wide and people code-switch as they meet different people around the world. As sometime you can speak (test) English or any preferable language. The Welsh also did that as they use Welsh when they talk and English for reading instruction in the Web pages.

15

Nonetheless the Welsh girls' use of (electronic text) web is showing their identity because through the web page they come across different people, some are Welsh or English speaking, the reason they use both or more than one language is to communicate with different people around the web pages.

16

Most of the time the language used is English. When using the web page some of the sources written in the web pages are written in English and so in order for Welsh speaking girls to understand what they downloading they must read and understand the text as there are written in English and English is the language used most on internet and most of the terms and conditions and for them to use the web they must understand English very well.

17

Their web page adds to their identity, the pictures used to communicate are having huge impact in their every day life as they use cute looking animals. Disney logs demonstrate their Welsh identity.

18

APPENDIX C: STUDENT B's ESSAY

Identity regards concepts of certain characteristics of a person; a person may be identified according to the form of dress, language and culture. A person's identity is built on a daily basis as it is accessible on each day, it can be altered and can be heightened daily. Language is one of the elements and concepts which build up identity, the ability to speak a language, to write it and to read it are blocks to creating identity. Bilingualism to me is the ability to speak, read and write more than one language, although some may ague my point and do not emphasize the reading and writing part. To regard a person as bilingual, he/she must have the ability to do with that language what he/she can do to their own.

Culture, on the other hand also plays an important role in building a person's identity. Culture is a person's belief on customs which a person holds dear to the heart. Should identity be a house language and culture would be two main building blocks I would prefer to use; culture as my bricks and language as the mud that holds the two to build a house. In Jones article, Barker establishes that speaking a language does not one gets involved in the culture of that culture, but if culture was defined differently then it would be considerable to use bilingual and bicultural as brothers.

As in the essay I will be focusing on the given girl's use of their practices or illiteracies and try to make a link between them and their identity. As Jones brought to attention that, awareness of ones culture strengthens identity within minority groups and bicultural identity can shift depending on context. There is a link between respective bilingual and bicultural, and that is the position to speak a minority language. There has to be interaction with the text to find meaning and by so doing there is construction and recognition of their minor language. As the girls in the survey are adolescent it has been identified as that the girls form balance of psychological and social factors so that they may have a true ego.

The British-Asian use of magazines as an identity builder

Reading magazines forms a large part of the girl literacy. A survey conducted showed that the females, up to 83 percent use these magazines. When figuring out why they have to rely on magazines this is the outcome;

a) Accessibility

   Because of the accessibility of Asian magazines in Britain, it is much easier for the British-Asian girls to use them as a source of knowledge about their other culture the Asian culture; as the main objective of these magazines is to help the minority language users also reflect on their

non-dominating culture. Even though the magazines are served in English, the contents mainly promote recognition of their other culture.

b) Nature of the magazines

The magazines are contemporary in nature; they are designed in a modern manner that embraces the style of the British-Asians. Unlike the Welsh magazines which may be four or five pages, the British-Asians ones are long; they are not only discourse but also cover Discourse. Culture becomes diverse as they are not only exposed to language but to other stuff too.

5

c) Relevance to their lives.

Because of their contemporary nature of the magazines, the girls are able to relate to their daily happenings, in the Jones article the three girls; Jaspreet, Priya and Farah use these magazines as their mothers, cousins and aunties recommend they read. When interacting with each other and their families there is relevance in that they all know what and how to relate and interact with the text in building their identity.

6

From the magazines the girls are able to build their identity; they take in context and language to create a culture.

Welsh girl's use of the web as an identity builder

Welsh girls set up their own web pages, in them they are free to use whatever language they may feel to, mostly they use English as they believe and perceive it to be the language of authority even though they know that their contacts are Welsh. What has been recognized of the Welsh girls is that even in their state of using English they still emphasize their identity as Welsh, through pasting their national flag as if to symbolize that they belong to this type of culture but can easily adapt to the standards of the world.

7

APPENDIX D: STUDENT C's ESSAY

Part 1

Demonstrations and Consolidation of Identity in Bilingual and Bicultural Individuals

In this essay, we will examine the influence of certain types of text and literacy and the varying affects it has on a group of girls in their teens. These girls all speak, at minimum, two languages and have a culture, apart from that of the country they live. The two modes of literacy we will focus on will be magazines and the internet, also referred to as electronic text. ✓ (1)

Firstly, I would like to look at a group of British-Asian girls. This group of young ladies are studied within the literary context of magazines – both popular British magazines and those aimed at the Asian readers specifically. Magazines are generally popular amongst teenage girls and this is shown in the study by Susan Jones (on which this essay is based) where 82.2% of the girls participating in the said study stated they read magazines. The reason behind this becomes clear upon consultation with the study group. Among these mentioned several opinions were shown to be universal: Magazines are accessible, current in nature and relevant in relation to their audience's experiences and concerns. British-Asian girls, in particular, benefit from the emotional support and discussions on 'taboo' subjects, such as sex. ✓✓ (2)

I have mentioned, previously, that the subjects (British-Asian girls) of this study did not keep to only British or Asian magazines but rather made use of both. The girls tended to use Asian magazines as a means of creating links and relations with other female family members, or to learn more about certain (3)

cultural aspects which past down each generation. The fact that these are shared and read openly within the home in comparison to the veil surrounding the English magazines, shows old cultural beliefs are still prominent. ✓✓

British pop culture magazines still mainly receive a less favourable opinion amongst male parents as they tend only to see the less agreeable aspects. While this highlights the female position in Asian communities (the afore mentioned prominent cultural beliefs), the girls seem to defend their choice to read such text. This action can lead to small revisions and adaptations in the homes of the less rigid families. Through this the girls are modernising their current culture and that of future generations. ✓ 4

To further continue this insight into demonstrations of bicultural & bilingual identity, I would like to refer to the Welsh-English group participating in the study by Susan Jones. The participants are studied in the context of their use of the Internet. Firstly, to understand how and why identity is formed we must consider what insight we receive through their personal websites. I believe it is important to note that the sites mainly make use of English as the primary language. This shows the understanding of the world that the girls have, and displays their comprehension of English as the language of communication within the world in general. ✓✓ 5

quoted by Susan Jones

We should also consider Gruffudd (1997). He states in his theory that the possibility for the reason that the young girls in Jones' study have chosen to converse mainly in English is a way for them to counter authority figures (ie. parents and/or guardians) who, most likely, communicate with them in Welsh. ✓ 6

When one further analyses the websites, one will notice the different interpretations of Welsh culture through screen-names. Some girls will use

names that directly point to their Welsh origins, while others use names in English. This could be interpreted as their personal affinity towards their culture.

The use of certain graphics can also point to various facets of the author's identity and the role of their culture within that identity. The use of the Welsh flag is a common graphic indicative of culture. Other graphics which lead to identity may include fashion logos, band insignia and cartoon characters.

Bilinguistic aspects are brought to light in the use of 'language–mosaics'. Mor – Sommerfeld (2002) defines this term as the written combination of two or more languages and scripts. By combining certain features of the languages in question (Welsh and English) in a 'txt' format, the author demonstrates her position within her two languages. This also forces the reader to decode using the knowledge of rules from both Welsh and English. Hence it is made obvious that the writer of the website considers both languages to be equal in importance.

To conclude my essay, I would like to draw attention to the subjects manipulation of literacy to both create and question their own identity and role in their community and culture.

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