

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND ACADEMIC READING AND WRITING

SECTION A: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This study investigates perceptions and attitudes to academic development classes held by Engineering lecturers, Academic Development Practitioners and students in the Engineering Faculty at TUT. What follows is a literature review of the various definitions and histories of academic development at South African universities. This literature overview provides a theoretical, conceptual and historical framework for considering academic development at TUT.

Since 1994 noteworthy changes have occurred within institutions of higher learning in South Africa. This has had significant implications for higher education as a number of students who have been traditionally excluded from higher education have now been permitted access. According to Makoni (2000:3), the corollary massification, globalisation and the reconstruction of society has radically changed the profile of the student body in such a way that under-prepared students, working adults - with little or no formal qualifications - and candidates from rural communities are now able to gain access to higher education institutions that were previously meant for students who came from advantaged, historically white high schools. Within this environment, Ferman (2002:146) claims that quality and accountability in higher education have assumed a high priority - with the standard of teaching, particularly, coming under the spotlight.

2.2 A history of academic support at the University of the Witwatersrand

There is a range of Academic Development Programmes available at various South African Universities. However, for the purposes of this research, I will refer mainly to the programme at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) since it was one of the first universities to introduce academic development in a South African context. I will only briefly refer to programmes at other South African institutions of higher learning in order to offer a broader picture of such programmes. Starfield (1994:16) describes the experience at Wits - in Johannesburg - which faced immense challenges when it began re-opening its doors to black students in 1980 - after several decades of Apartheid exclusion. She goes on to pose a question about how Wits responded to the ravages of “Bantu Education” with the entry of students who - in addition to being socio-economically disadvantaged - had been systematically under-prepared for university study. In response to this problem, some kind of assistance had to be given to these students and Wits established an Academic Support Programme (ASP). Thus, the ASP at Wits was started in 1980 with the aim of assisting black English Second Language (ESL) students from segregated schools of the Department of Education and Training (DET) to achieve success at Wits.

According to Starfield (1994:16), the aim of the ASP was to assist students from the black school system to succeed in a context in which students and faculties were, traditionally, focused on English First Language speakers from mainly white, middle-class backgrounds who were reasonably well-prepared for tertiary study as a result of their privileged schooling. In Starfield’s view, the students from underprivileged schools needed support in study skills, English language, logical reasoning, critical thinking and conceptual skills - and these were offered as add-on courses.

This model of academic support, however, was not to last at Wits. The evolution of academic support had to shift from a “support” model to a “development” model to cater for the needs of a diverse, multi-cultural and multilingual post-apartheid society and this marked a paradigm shift from the notion of *academic support* into *academic development*. According to Starfield, in 1993 ASP was renamed Academic

Development. This was done because the ASP was no longer seen as a support for disadvantaged students in isolation from their disciplines but rather to assist academic staff in developing students' academic literacy *within their disciplines* through appropriate curriculum development (Starfield, 1999:29). This had an impact on curriculum reconceptualisation in relation to shifts in the South African political and social context and an integrated curriculum was seen as more useful and beneficial pedagogically. At this stage it had become evident that it was not only the students who needed support, but their lecturers *also* needed to be equipped with the skills of dealing with students from diverse schooling backgrounds. Mehl makes an interesting argument when he states that

... it is not simply a case of students carrying various educational deficits onto the campus with them because of the socio-economic and political dispensation, but rather a case of the universities themselves, as represented by academic and administrative staff, being deficient, if the vision of a non-racial democratic South Africa is to be realized (1988:17).

Boughey (2003) proposes a similar idea by suggesting that in South Africa the field of academic development grew out of an earlier endeavour termed, "Academic Support", which was established in the early 1980s to provide support to the, then, small number of black students who had gained admittance to historically white universities. According to Boughey, these students were deemed to be "under- prepared" for tertiary study and the earliest academic support initiatives were, essentially, liberal in intent - in that they located the phenomenon of "under-preparedness" or "disadvantage" in factors inherent in the individual student, not in the political system of Apartheid which systematically produced disadvantage.

In as much as these students had gained access to the historically privileged institutions, such as Rhodes University, the University of the Witwatersrand and a few others, access to them meant much more than just admission into the institution. The big question was: "Did these students possess the necessary tools to cope with academic demands?" In Boughey's view (2003:1), the fact that academic support was, essentially, contained within a few historically white institutions at the time posed a danger of creating an elite class of black students. Gee (1990) suggests that

membership of a social group - elite or not - is dependent on the acquisition of a set of shared understanding and values, which give rise to certain kinds of behaviour. For Fisher (1995:7) access involves more than academic literacy - it also involves students' retention and socialisation within the institution and their growing intellectual and social competence, advancement and success with the specialised forms of knowledge and the academic disciplines which are at the core of academic enterprise among other things. Bizzell (1992) feels that entering college could be seen as an initiation in a positive sense - a process that provides mechanisms of inclusion and empowerment, especially for so-called non-traditional students. Zamel (1998:188) maintains that students entering a new community must take on its ways of knowing and its "ways with words". Gee (1996) notes that there are particular literacies, social languages and discourses that are operational in these new communities and this may pose a threat to someone who has not been adequately prepared for this kind of environment. It is in this context that academic development was seen as a "solution" in other tertiary institutions, like Rhodes University, the University of Natal, the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Cape Town, which started admitting "under-prepared" students.

2.3 The concept of labelling

A range of terms has been used to refer to students in different higher education contexts who have – historically - largely been excluded from higher education. Lillis (2001) refers to the "educationally disadvantaged" in South Africa and to "disadvantaged minorities" in North America. Zamel *et al.* (1994) recognise the tensions and conflicts that are becoming prevalent in institutions of higher learning as student populations become more diverse. Diversity may be found in different forms. For example, it may concern issues of language, gender, social and schooling backgrounds, culture and many others, which may impact on students' performance in higher education. Switzer (1996:53) questions the criteria used to define the term, "disadvantaged". He cites the case of the University of the Western Cape where he discovered that a significant portion of students came from the black middle class. One may, then, need to establish what it is that would deem students to be regarded as "disadvantaged". In other words, what are the skills that the students lack for them to

be regarded as “disadvantaged”? Switzer (1996:53) lists poor language, mathematical and analytical skills as well as poor study skills as some of the aspects that need attention. By the same token, the question of academic standards always comes up when one talks about under-prepared students who need support in order to cope with tertiary education. In connection with the foundation course at Rhodes University, Switzer (1996:59) writes:

It is in the interest of *all* the students that the standards of our degrees be maintained. Nobody wants a degree that is not respected worldwide. Rhodes University has set up foundation programmes in commerce, science and arts, in which under-prepared students may select a mixture of standard (full) courses and special *foundation courses*, designed to prepare them thoroughly for other standard courses that will follow.

The concept of “under-preparedness” seems to be linked to other factors - in addition to the ones that have been cited. For instance, according to Switzer, academic performance is also linked to other issues relating to student morale, insufficient technical and staff support, curriculum revision, use of library resources and unregulated enrolment. Thesen (1997:490) asserts that the terms, “under-prepared” and “second language”, are used as an institutional shorthand for historically excluded students. Thesen further cites an article by Ndebele (1995) where he cautions staff about the implications of the use of the term, “disadvantaged” - that “the namer isolates the named.” In Tema’s view (1998:29), these are the students who have been alienated by the very system that has been set up to help them. Tema and Thesen’s views indicate that it is imperative for Academic Development Practitioners to understand the real nature of the students’ backgrounds in order to provide meaningful support programmes.

But what is *academic development*? Scott (2001:3) asserts that there is no official definition of the term. He further maintains that “academic development” refers to the design and implementation of educational processes and initiatives that are intended to promote equity and to redress historical inequalities in student access to - and success in - higher education. Baume (2002:110) feels that “academic development” is concerned with the improvement of processes of higher education, educational

development and with enhancing the capabilities of those who directly support learning in higher education. Starfield (1999:29) makes an interesting distinction between academic development and academic support in the sense that academic support evolved into academic development when it became apparent that student diversity in higher learning had an impact on the teaching strategies and the curriculum at large. The main focus of academic support was the students themselves, whereas academic development went on to address the concerns of both the students and the lecturers in terms of how they taught, and what it was that they taught.

It is worth noting that the concept of academic development is not only unique to South Africa - it is something that is found all over the world. This is because students who are under-prepared for tertiary studies are growing in numbers. The use of terms like “students at risk”, students with “poor English” or “students with deficiencies” has become a sensitive matter. However, these are the students who need some extra support to succeed in tertiary education. The perception of English as a dominant and global language has serious implications for higher education. The students’ proficiency in English plays a major role in their success at tertiary level. As some institutions in South Africa are involved in a merger process, much discussion is taking place around the models of academic development that will be adopted by the new institutions. For instance, Technikon Northern Gauteng, Technikon Pretoria, and Technikon North West are engaged in serious discussions about the direction that academic development should take in the new institution - TUT. This discussion is also informed by the policies that are set down by government regarding higher education.

In the Council on Higher Education’s draft document, *Improving Teaching and Learning Resources* (2003), it is suggested that student learning is primarily influenced by structured teaching-learning interactions. According to the document, the enhancement of student learning involves attention to both academic support and development functions in the institution. It is for this reason that the draft advocates an integrated and holistic approach to creating conditions for learning. The document goes further in defining student development as distinct from student support. Student development refers to those extra-curricula campus activities designed for

quality of life and for personal and social development, such as leadership development, sport, gender support groups and student political, cultural, religious and social societies - as well as appropriate forms of communication and support off-campus. Student support deals with services, like financial aid, residences, library resources and many others, that support students in their day-to-day lives on campus. Surely, then, the factors mentioned here have an impact on the students' academic performance? For instance, students who struggle to get financial aid for their studies cannot be expected to be at their best when they run a risk of exclusion from the examinations if they do not pay their fees.

For the purposes of this research, the emphasis will be on *student academic development* which the document defines as “the curriculum strategies” employed at the teaching-learning interface to enhance the quality of learning and the academic performance of students. Therefore, the focus is on curriculum strategies that can be put in place to enhance the teaching and learning of students. In the South African context, the draft document explains that a specific meaning of student academic development is, alternatively, understood as academic development or educational development. This refers, specifically, to institutional responses to the needs of under-prepared students. At the moment student development in the South African context refers to both specific “stand alone” or “add-on” programmes, like “Bridging, “Recruitment”, “Preparation” or “Foundation Programmes”, whose main aim is to address the specific needs of a particular group of students. Most of the literature on academic development in South African institutions of higher learning places a great emphasis on writing centres and writing development.

2.4 The role of the Academic Development Practitioner

From the previous discussion, it has become clear that many students need support when they enter institutions of higher learning. In institutions where there are lecturers and Academic Development Practitioners, academic development becomes the core task of the Academic Development Practitioner to ensure that under-prepared students are properly initiated into academic discourse, while lecturers concentrate on subject content. There may be a thin line between Academic Development

Practitioners and mainstream lecturers because while lecturers offer mainstream courses, Academic Development Practitioners assist students with the skills to deal with their mainstream course. These are not separate, but inter-connected. Scott (2001:5) maintains that academic development is best designed and delivered by academic staff with a sound knowledge of - and interest in - relevant educational theory and practice, as well as an expertise in the subject matter. In Scott's view, this may assist in bringing about some stability in recurrent funding for academic development provision - which will then promote the continuity and development of the field.

2.5 The “skills” debate

The important questions for the Academic Development Practitioner are: “What is it that is under-developed in our students’ backgrounds?”; “What skills should they be equipped with to make sure that they fit into the discourse community of the university?” Dison and Rule (1996:85) suggest that Academic Development Tutors have focused on developing skills, such as essay writing, intensive reading, examination techniques, time management, etc. among students, and have attempted to relate these skills to the content areas of the mainstream curriculum in an “adjunct model of instruction.” They further suggest that Academic Development Tutors often develop an institutional identity as “skills people”, and this is seen as problematic in that the skills label can limit Academic Development Practitioners in the processes of curriculum development where mainstream staff assume that they have nothing besides “skills” to contribute. In Dison and Rule's opinion (1996:85), Academic Development Practitioners are at the forefront of developing the theory and practice of learning within a discipline and should not restrict themselves in an exclusive skills domain. This idea agrees with Scott's comment (2001:5) that it is of value to have core specialist academic development specialists with attributes, like relevant educational theory and practice as well as expertise in the subject matter.

Dison and Rule (1996:87) and Starfield (1999:22) concluded that - in the case of under-prepared students who entered Wits in the 1980s - students' knowledge of Maths and the Sciences was underdeveloped. It was further discovered that English

language, particularly in terms of the kinds of cognitive academic language proficiency needed for university, was exceptionally problematic. Starfield (1999) refers to the problem of poorly trained teachers who also speak English as an additional language and as a result cannot develop the necessary language proficiency in their students. The students, it seemed, could not engage in independent learning and the problem-solving activities demanded by university study. By reflecting on some examples of how Academic Development Practitioners engage in a meta-discourse about academic culture, academic conventions and academic language, Engel and Slemming (2001:1) consider them to be mediators of students' understanding of the varying demands of the academic communication process. As stated earlier, lecturers may easily misdiagnose their learners' problems as poor language proficiency while current debates have shown that there is more to language proficiency than what is, generally, believed. The next section explores the language proficiency debate in greater detail.

2.6 Language proficiency debate

The issue of language proficiency is well explained by Cummins (1996:50) who states that children who speak a non-standard variety of English are frequently thought to be educationally handicapped by their educators and less capable of logical thinking. He continues by saying that their language is viewed by these teachers as inherently "deficient" for expressing logical relations. Cummins (1996:53) provides a framework which demonstrates the interplay between language and cognition and why it is that students are under-prepared for university study. In the literature, there are a number of misconceptions that people have developed when trying to explain why certain students under-perform at tertiary level. Cummins (1996:52) refers to these misconceptions as "linguistic prejudices". One such misconception is given by Dunn (1987) in Cummins (1996:55) who argues the case that some Latino pupils on the US mainland could not understand either English or Spanish and as a result of this, they could not function adequately at school. He goes further by arguing that these children did not have the scholastic aptitude or linguistic ability to handle two languages well or to switch from one language to the other – demanded by the language of instruction at school (Cummins, 1996:52). Dunn gives an interesting

reason for this where he suggests that the causes of this lower scholastic ability are environmental factors and genes that influence scholastic aptitude. Cummins (1996:52) challenges this by proposing another misconception: where students may seem to have control of the language when they converse fluently in English may be interpreted as proficiency in the language. This has relevance to students in the South African context of higher education where quite a number of them are exposed to bilingual education. However, when they enter higher education, they still have not mastered full competence in English which is, unfortunately, the language of teaching and learning in the majority of tertiary institutions. According to Granville *et al.* (1998:257), students in South Africa leave school with a less than full competence in English - the language of power with an inflated view of its importance and value. This is yet another issue for debate regarding the hegemony of English in South Africa.

The view that a lack of English proficiency is the major reason for bilingual students' failure is challenged by Cummins (1996:53) who maintains that this view is problematic as it ignores the social and historical factors that influence bilingual students' academic performance. In addition to this, Cummins suggests that this view fails to specify what is meant, exactly, by proficiency in English. He presents the view that there is a fundamental distinction between conversational and academic aspects of language proficiency. He distinguishes between Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and Basic Interpersonal Conversational Skills (BICS) which fall within the extremes of the context-embedded/context-reduced continuum. Cummins further claims that conversational abilities often develop relatively quickly among English language learners because this form of communication is supported by interpersonal and contextual cues, and makes relatively few cognitive demands on the individual. He feels that the mastery of the academic functions is a more formidable task because such uses require high levels of cognitive involvement and are minimally supported by contextual or interpersonal cues. It is under such conditions of high cognitive demand that the students would normally be forced to stretch their linguistic resources to the limit to function successfully. The view is vital for Academic Development Practitioners who need to understand that academic language proficiency is a complex issue which impacts on students' performance at tertiary level. Cummins further suggests that language and content will be acquired most

successfully when students are challenged cognitively, while they are provided with the contextual and linguistic support required for the successful completion of a task. This kind of support is referred to as scaffolding (Cummins, 1996:60). In my opinion, the majority of the students at TUT - who come from poor schooling backgrounds - have a great need for scaffolding and this is where academic development becomes a necessity.

2.7 Issues of access, funding and quality in academic development

As stated earlier, issues of cost and quality are critical factors which impact seriously on Academic Development Programmes. Griesel (2000:90) highlights the existence of a paradox between access and policy and further recognises the tension that exists between policy formulation and the actions of higher education institutions. There is no doubt that this tension is brought about by sweeping socio-political change - as Griesel refers to it. The government committed itself to increasing access through redressing past discrimination and ensuring equal access for all. Scott (2001:4) finds that over the two decades of its history, academic development work has had to rely disproportionately on external donor funding. The implications are that in many institutions academic development became unstable and sometimes ended up disappearing completely. At the formation of The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE), it was given the task to press for the expansion of Higher Education to meet the demands of equity and development (Griesel, 2000:90). The specific challenge that the NCHE was faced with was to reconcile the time lag between policy formulation and implementation.

The issue of access cannot be discussed separately from funding, because if there is more access to higher education that will have financial implications in the *New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications in Higher Education* (2002). The Department of Education has committed itself to achieving improved graduation rates through its preparedness to fund Academic Development Programmes as an integral part of the new Funding Framework. According to Winberg *et al* (2003:9), all foundation programmes need to combine mainstream course subjects with support courses in order to qualify for state funding. Scott (2001:4) suggests that the *National*

Plan for Higher Education was seen as shifting the policy emphasis from “access” to “success”. In Scott’s opinion (2001:2), the national policies on higher education recognised the need for special measures - particularly Academic Development Programmes - to facilitate the success of talented students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds.

The establishment of academic support programmes in institutions of higher learning was a direct response to what Starfield (1994:16) refers to as the “ravages of Bantu Education” which affected the entry of students who - in addition to being socio-economically disadvantaged - had been systematically under-prepared for university study. Therefore, there had to be a way of addressing these learners’ difficulties while keeping to the required standards or quality education which would address the global economic needs of the country. It is against this background that the National Qualification Framework was established. According to the *New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications in Higher Education* (2002), institutions should - among other functions - facilitate the provision of programmes that will produce graduates who can compete in global economy and knowledge societies in contextually appropriate ways. In response to the need for academic development, various institutions responded by establishing different models of academic development which all shared a similar goal.

Lillis (2001:22) asserts that various countries responded in different ways to the “problem” of under-prepared students entering higher learning. She found that in a number of parts of the world the trend has been to focus on additional support for student writing in various forms. Lillis cites the example of the US where - she claims - the main provision of support comes in the form of “composition” classes. According to Lillis, in the UK only fragmented and additional support is available to under- prepared students. In terms of this approach, support exists in the form of foundation or introductory modules in specific discipline areas in which 1st year undergraduate students may be offered guidance on essay writing as one of the several “study skills” they need for higher education. Winberg *et al* (2003:21) gives examples of two models used by Pretoria Technikon and the Durban Institute of Technology, respectively. The former offers a generic Engineering Foundation Programme for all Engineering disciplines, while the latter offers the same

programme for the Health Sciences. According to a brochure published by the Directorate of Student Support and Development at the former Pretoria Technikon, the main focus is on the student as a learner; the student as a person; and the student as a prospective worker. Their academic skills development programme consists of four to seven one-hour appointments which are conducted by a study counsellor. The themes that are generally covered in these sessions include time planning, note-taking techniques, summarising, memorising and movement integration. One would have expected more emphasis on aspects like assignment writing, referencing, reading of academic texts and many other topics.

At the former Technikon Northern Gauteng, the functioning of the Department of Teaching and Learning was centralised - Academic Development Practitioners were allocated to the various faculties to provide a core service on teaching and learning, (*JST Teaching and Learning Development*, TNG Audit, 2003). The Department of Teaching and Learning had two sections - that is, Student Development and Staff Development which were located within different faculties. The situation, as such, was that two Academic Development Practitioners were appointed for reading and writing development for all 1st years in all the faculties. This, again, confirms the importance of reading and writing skills. The four other student developers offered life-skills in the Faculties of Commerce, Engineering, Economic and Management Sciences and the Health and Social Sciences. In addition to this, student developers arranged workshops for students and facilitated topics, such as examination preparation, time management and any others that the students may have required.

After the merger of the three institutions (Technikon Northern Gauteng, North West Technikon and Pretoria Technikon) into TUT in January 2004, a new structure for the institution was introduced. The former Staff Development section was separated from Student Development and a new Directorate for Curriculum Development was established. At the moment the relationship between the student academic development directorate and the curriculum development directorate is still unclear. The current position of academic development at TUT is such that foundation programmes are located within faculties of Engineering, Natural Sciences and Information Technology. In all these instances, academic development appears on the timetables of all the foundation students. Once students pass all the courses in the

foundation programme, they gain admission into the mainstream courses. Academic development is also offered to mainstream students as *per* request from various lecturers who have identified the need for such an intervention. Academic Development Practitioners also arrange “quick fix” workshops for students towards semester examinations during which they help students prepare for their examinations. The idea of “quick fix” programmes is challenged by Lodge (1997:30) who maintains that such activities may encourage the mindset that academic development is an activity that can provide a “quick fix” to difficulties experienced by students and so allow mainstream academics to abdicate their responsibility of fostering deep-learning in their students.

The entire Academic Development Programme is made up of five programmes - reading skills, life skills, study counselling, assessment and English proficiency - run by Programme Managers. At the Soshanguve campus of TUT, there are five Academic Development Practitioners - four of whom are language specialists. The mode of delivery is lecturing, conducting workshops, individual counselling and a reading laboratory where students can improve their reading through computerised self-assessment exercises. In the Institution’s Operational Plan (2005-2009) the following proposed organogram and reporting units for Teaching and Learning and Technology is given:

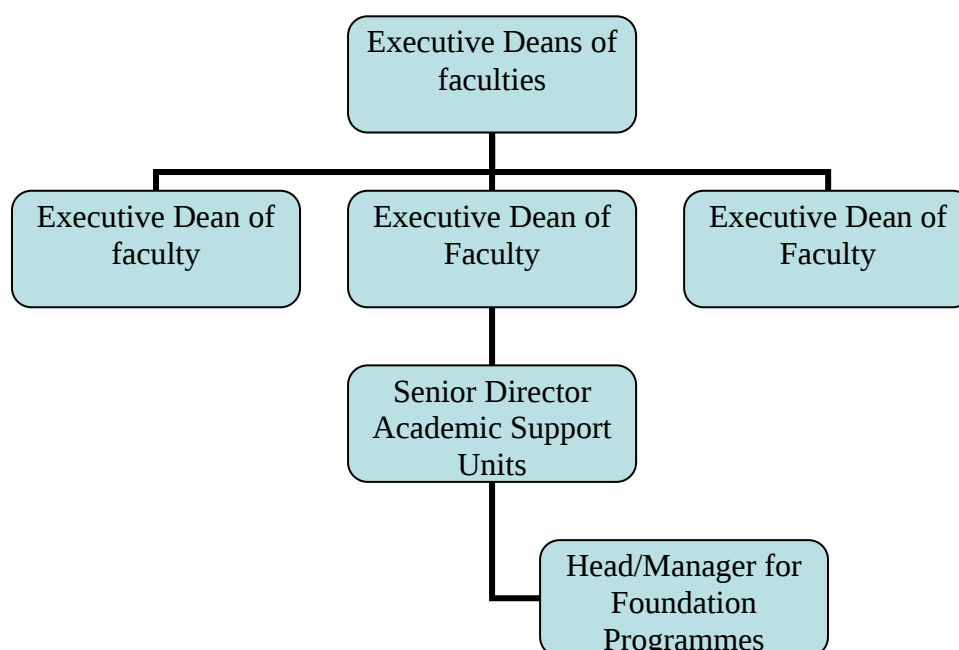


Figure 1: Organogram and reporting units for Teaching and Learning and Technology

The proposed structure indicates a close link between academic support units and the academic departments - as represented by the executive deans of faculties.

SECTION B: ACADEMIC READING AND WRITING

The absence of a more explicit writing programme at TUT prompted me to also conduct secondary research on reading and writing within the Academic Development Programme at the institution. This section briefly explores writing as one of the aspects that is commonly found in Academic Development Programmes in South African tertiary institutions.

2.8 Academic literacy and academic development

Why is there so much focus on writing in Academic Development Programmes? My belief is that writing is the mode by which students pass their examinations and which, therefore, needs more attention. Leibowitz (2000:21) asserts that writing has received a great deal of attention because it is the medium in which writers are required to display their knowledge. Mastery of this medium, therefore, assumes a central importance. According to De Kadt (2003), academic support programmes - aimed, traditionally, at improving academic literacy - have concentrated on English language usage and not on the development of academic writing. Lea (1998:157) feels that these programmes have concentrated on only one aspect of a complex problem. Emig in Leibowitz (2000:22), on the other hand, refers to writing as a mode for learning and that the development of one's writing skills advances learning. In certain instances, writing may be viewed as a privilege for a particular class of students who may enter tertiary institutions already possessing some of the skills for successful writing at tertiary level. De Kadt (2003) suggests that students embarking on tertiary education - in a system which privileges communication in written form - are expected to learn to utilize disciplinary discourses with their implicit values, assumptions and practices as a resource for making meaning. She goes further to state that students bring with them their own "repertoire of resources" which are embedded in the history of their life outside the academic institution.

In the *Council for Higher Education Improvement and Learning Resources Draft Document* (2003), it is clearly stated that with respect to English language proficiency, it is well-known that South African students – typically - demonstrate high levels of oral fluency in everyday English, but weak reading and writing in formal academic registers. Leibowitz (1995:34) explores the ability to read and write effectively within the university content in order to pass from one level to another. She refers to it as academic literacy - a term that was coined by people, like Gee and Street. According to Leibowitz (1994:34), a broader definition of academic literacy means being able to read and write, independently, within the academic context; with understanding; and with a level of engagement in the work. She further asserts that a student who is academically literate uses writing - consciously or unconsciously - as a tool for learning. In trying to explain the term, “literacy”, Gee (1990) introduces the notion of discourses.

Gee distinguishes between “a discourse” and “Discourse”. According to Gee, “a discourse” is connected to stretches of language that make sense, like conversations, stories, reports, arguments and essays, whereas “Discourse” (with a capital letter D) in Gee’s framework is “always more than just language” (Starfield, 1999:74). Gee (1990:146) describes Discourse as

...ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes. ... a sort of ‘identity kit’... a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group...

Gee (1990:146) further makes a significant distinction between primary Discourses and secondary Discourses. In his view, primary discourses are acquired whereas secondary Discourses are acquired and learnt. According to Gee, the acquisition is a largely unconscious process of exposure and socialisation - within a group - to its norms, without formal teaching. He stresses that acquisition must - at least in part - precede learning: “Discourses are mastered through acquisition, not learning.” Literacy becomes “mastery of, or fluent control over, a secondary Discourse” (Gee,

1990). In Starfield's view (1999:75), in order to gain this fluency which is not simply verbal but also involves the full range of beliefs and behaviours, a "student" has to be allowed entry, "through scaffolded and supported interaction" and to be allowed to become an insider. Gee's views on discourses have implications for under-prepared students who may - because of failure to master the appropriate discourse of the academe - find themselves as "outsiders" (1990: 147). For them to be "insiders", they need to fully master the Discourse and that can only be possible through scaffolding - a function that may partly be achieved through academic development (Gee, 1990:155).

Even though learners arriving at university may be literate in other areas, these primary literacies are seldom adequate for the communicative demands of the academe - new competencies are needed for survival in the new discourse. Engel and Slemming (2001:1) quote Ballard and Clanchy who claim that to make the academe accessible to students is largely based on "acculturation". For them acculturation into academic literacy is a necessary process of "coming to terms with observing the appropriate styles of cognitive and linguistic behaviour" (Ballard & Clanchy, 1998:8). They further maintain that becoming literate involves becoming acculturated - that is, learning to read and write the culture.

Ballard and Clanchy argue that language is indivisible from the culture in which it functions. By implication, then, tertiary institutions operate within a particular cultural context which requires the student to understand the rules of that culture. According to Ballard and Clanchy, understanding the "deep" rules of the culture shapes the entire process of student writing. In many instances, students' real academic problems are taken at face value and such problems are merely diagnosed by lecturers as "poor English" which tends to reinforce the students' misconceptions of their major areas for development. Starfield (1999) maintains that there are hidden rules that students may not have had access to because of factors, like school background, which may have an impact on their levels of proficiency in the second language - which, unfortunately, is the language of the academic discourse. The fact that the majority of students at TUT come from disadvantaged home and school backgrounds implies that many students have a need for support in order to cope with tertiary education tasks. It is of interest to note that much as they may need support,

they bring with them some form of literacy which may - or may not - be relevant to tertiary education.

The view supported by Gee (1990) and Lea and Street (1998) is that literacy practices are embedded in social practices and assumptions and are expressed in terms of discourses and genres. Lea and Street (1998:158) introduced the notion of academic literacies. In their opinion, academic literacy practices and reading and writing within disciplines constitute central processes by which students learn new subjects and develop their knowledge about new areas of study. According to Lea and Street (1998:158), a practices approach to literacy takes account of the cultural and contextual component of writing and reading practices and children start acquiring a wide range of literacies from an early age. It is worth noting that a small sub-set of these literacies - which are mostly middle class - is reinforced and further developed at school. Depending on their social class, race and gender, learners are more or less prepared for the tasks and practices of school-based literacy (Multimedia Education Group, University of Cape Town, 2003). This is in agreement with Gee's idea of "authentic beginners" and "false beginners" (2001). In his view, "false beginners" are those learners who enter tertiary institutions already in possession of some of the school literacies, and "authentic beginners" are those learners whose literacies are irrelevant to tertiary education. In Bourdieu (1991), it is suggested that some learners enter a learning environment already possessing the "cultural capital" of the school and this will give them a better advantage over those who do not have it.

The Multimedia Education Group (MEG) at the University of Cape Town supports the view purposed by the New Literacy Studies that literacies are acquired rather than learned. However, scaffolding and explicit instruction are productive pedagogical approaches which help to reduce the complexity of the acquisition process and to sequence and articulate key features of the valued genres, discourses and practices for novices (Multimedia Education Group, 2003). For the student to be successful, the MEG feels that courses need to acknowledge students' starting points, prior knowledge and literacies, since these can be both valuable as well as serious stumbling blocks for both students and teachers. Lillis (2001) in Curry (2002) states that tutors need the time and resources to learn about students' educational backgrounds, career or vocational objectives, and reasons for study. Curry (2002)

further maintains that this information enables tutors to design and build curricula - not only to respond to students' needs and interests, but also to draw on students' strengths. The realisation that students enter higher education possessing some form of literacy - and taking that into consideration when developing curricula - can be beneficial to the students' success. Courage's debate on school literacy *versus* non-school literacy is of great relevance to this discussion (Courage, 1993).

In Courage's view, reading and writing practices are located in historical and socio-cultural contexts. This view marks a paradigm shift towards the multiple literacies approach that literacy is located within other social practices. In stressing this point further, Courage (1993:491) goes on to say that without exploring the non-school dimension of our students' literacy experiences, we operate what in Bartholomae's pedagogy is referred to as "a rather thin conception of student culture" in ignorance of the material of other lives which can be brought to bear on the development of a critical academic stance. Courage believes that students enter our institutions already having been exposed to other public literacies, like the languages of the government, business, law, the labour movement, community organisations, religious bodies and many others. He further argues that participation in such public literacies may develop not only language practices, but also a sense of self-worth that enables some students to enter more easily into academic literacy and culture. Courage feels that the task for the Academic Development Practitioner is to help students identify their non-school literacies and reflect on the resources hidden there - as well as their relation to academic literacy.

Furthermore, for them to succeed, it is the task of the lecturers and Academic Development Practitioners to ensure that students are properly initiated into academic discourse and the discourse community. This leads to a discussion of what academic discourse and the discourse community entail.

2.9 Academic discourse and the discourse community

When students enter institutions of higher learning, they have to cope with the particular discourses of the academic world. What does this mean? According to

Bizzell (1992:222), a discourse community is a group of people who share certain language-using practices and who are bound together, primarily, by their use of language. They may be bound together by other ties as well, like geographical location, socio-economic levels, ethnic identity, professional ties, etc. Language usage in a group is a form of social behaviour and that discourse is a means of maintaining and extending the group's knowledge and for initiating newcomers. The problem comes when people enter a certain discourse community without a full understanding of the community's rules. At times it may appear as though the rules have been hidden from them. These newcomers will struggle to cope and they may end up getting various labels, like students "at risk", "under-prepared students" and many others.

Leibowitz (2000:20) concludes that academic discourse is essentially a middle class discourse, whereas Elbow in Zamel and Spack (1998) asserts that discourse carries power. He further maintains that failure to help poorly prepared students with academic discourse is simply to leave a power vacuum and, thereby, reward privileged students who have already learned academic discourse at home or at school. To solve the problem, Lea and Street (1998:158) suggest that in order to understand the nature of academic learning, it is important to investigate the understanding of both academic staff and students of their own literacy practices - without making prior assumptions as to which practices are either appropriate or effective. Zamel (1998:187) comments on the challenges that face students when they enter higher education. She says:

The students have to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and they have to do this as though they were members of the academy, or historians, anthropologists or economists, they have to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language ... they must learn to speak our language.

Davidson (1996:5) shares this sentiment when he suggests that if students are to imitate rather than invent and discover knowledge, these will mask genuine understanding. On the basis of this, Academic Development Practitioners have a

daunting task to perform in order to initiate under-prepared students into the “discourse community” - as mentioned by Bizzell (1992:222).

2.10 Attitudinal Research

The main objective of this study is related to the attitudes of students and staff to academic development which suggests that attitudes are a complex issue. In order to have a better understanding of the attitudes of staff and students in this study, it is imperative that one understands that this report is rooted in the area of attitudinal research.

Various definitions of attitudes have been put forward by proponents of attitudinal research, such as in the studies by Allport (1935), Cohen (1960), Landy (1966) as cited in Fishbein (1967:477). He maintains that after more than seventy-five years of attitude research, there is still little - if any - consistent evidence supporting the idea that the knowledge of an individual’s attitude towards some object will allow one to predict the way he/she will behave towards the object. Sarnoff (1970) in Noris-Holt (2002:2) defines attitudes as that which deals with a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects. Noris-Holt (2002:2) asserts that attitudes can be classed as items of social knowledge that are continually formed, strengthened and modified. She continues by saying that attitudes are a means of adjusting to - and making changes to - one’s social environment. Baker (1988) in Noris-Holt (2002:2) outlines what he regards as the main features of attitudes:

- Attitudes are cognitive and effective.
- Attitudes are dimensional in that they vary in degree of favourability/unfavourability.
- Attitudes incline a person to act in a certain way.
- Attitudes are learnt.
- Attitudes often persist - however, they can be modified by experience.

Fishbein (1967:477) reports that after considering more than a hundred different definitions of attitude, Allport concluded that, basically, most investigators agreed

that an attitude is a learned predisposition to respond to an object or class of objects in a consistently favourable or unfavourable way. According to Fishbein, Allport further warns that two people could be equally favourably disposed toward an object, yet feel differently about components or characteristics of the object. In 1947 Doob argued that while attitude is a learned behaviour, a person has to learn what response to make to it. Doob reached the conclusion that there is no innate relationship between the attitude and behaviour since one still has to learn a behavioural response, (Fishbein 1967:478).

In an attitudinal study conducted by Newell-Jones *et al* (2005:1) they sought to highlight some of the obstacles and complexities encountered when attempting to define academic skills and to develop an effective support system. One of the aims of their study was to explore the staff perceptions of issues around students' academic skills. Their study indicates an attitudinal change to academic skills development for various models to be set into place. For example, the Academic Skills Development Group involved students in the planning and development process as well as in the delivery. This echoes the belief by Norris-Holt (2002:2) that attitudes do bring about adjustments and changes to one's social environment.

2.11 Conclusion

In this chapter an overview of the research literature in the field of academic development, and in particular, reading and writing practices has been presented. The next chapter, Chapter 3, focuses on the research methodology used to carry out this investigation.