

Academic Writing Challenges at TTC's in Rwanda: A Case Study of TTC Kirambo, Burera District, Rwanda.

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the findings of an inquiry into the nature of academic writing weaknesses inherent among TTC students in Rwanda, using TTC Kirambo, as a case study. One hundred and sixty-three students and four lecturers constituted the sample. Document analysis, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used as data collecting instruments. Results were presented and discussed qualitatively. The study revealed that first, second- and third-year college students' written papers are riddled with a multiplicity of weaknesses suggesting that students view writing as different from speaking. Students should treat writing as a process rather than a product. The paper also recommends that there be a paradigm shift in the teaching of academic writing at TTC Kirambo, from a study skills orientation to an academic literacies' orientation. The paper further recommends an integrative approach to the teaching of writing at colleges.

Key words: Academic writing, writing as a process, writing as a product, study skills orientation, academic literacies orientation.

INTRODUCTION

As lecturers in charge of communication skills across TTC Kirambo curriculum, the department is concerned about students' generally weak academic writing. The researchers' aim is to have students who can produce stronger, clearer, more grammatically correct, more organized, cohesive essays that have well-cited sources and are well-referenced, especially after doing the academic writing aspect of the Communication Skills course. After studying the academic writing component, students are expected to put what they have learnt into practice as they write assignments in English and other subjects. The communication skills course at TTC Kirambo, apart from introducing students to the theory of communication, focuses on listening, speaking, reading, and writing itself. Writing contributes an undoubtedly high percentage to the learning that takes place at any college. Adams et al. (1980) agree that formulating the study essay is but a very demanding exercise. A fluid and fluent discussion of a subject is arrived at through the analysis and synthesis of the information pertaining to the subject, that is, writers analyze the mass of material by breaking it down into smaller details relevant to the specified topic and synthesize or make general statements about these details (Adams et al., 1980). In academic writing, the analysis and synthesis tools lie in effective use and effective manipulation of language in writing.

Writing presents its unique demands on every student, especially when it is in a second language, as is the case with TTC Kirambo students under study. Ahmad (2015) located the problems in foreign secondary school and adult English Language students' written work in two sites. It could be unfamiliarity with the language itself especially lexical and grammatical errors or it could be attributable to the medium rather than the language, for example problems of organizing information, punctuation, and spelling.

The researchers were interested in establishing the nature of academic writing weaknesses that Rwandan College students display, why the weaknesses occur and what could be done to make their academic writing more successful.

Not only does writing enhance greater appreciation of any subject, it is also of much practical utility. Angélic-Carter (2000) says writing is a way of learning, you can actually achieve deeper insight into any subject by writing out your thoughts. TTC Kirambo lecturers have expressed concern that some students who participate quite eloquently in tutorials often perform disappointingly below expectations in written essays. This seems to confirm the view that oral fluency does not spontaneously translate into written fluency. Almatarneh et al (2018) have also noted that people who have no difficulty talking often freeze when they have to write. The researcher believes that if these weaknesses in students' academic writing are systematically investigated, classified and their possible sources explained, the students would be more academically literate if they follow the recommendations made in this paper. Effective academic writing is crucial to every college student, since much of the assessment that goes on at college is based, not only on what information students present, but also on how that information is presented, in writing.

Research Questions

1. What challenges are faced by students in academic writing?
2. What possible intervention strategies can promote students' academic writing?

Writing: A Conceptual Framework

Because there are probably as many definitions of writing as there are authors on the subject, perhaps this complex activity may best be conceptualized, firstly by briefly differentiating it from speech, secondly, by viewing it as a process, thirdly, in terms of the skills which writing entails, fourthly, as an aspect of academic socialization, and finally, as an aspect of academic literacy. While in speech, meaning can easily be enhanced by paralinguistic features like facial expressions, gestures, body movement, proximity and other suprasegmental features like voice, pitch and volume, tone, intonation, stress and pause while writing lacks these elements Ahmad (2015). For this reason, writing has to be well punctuated and more cohesive if it is to achieve its purpose. Archer (2010) rightly observed that writing requires greater precision and care than speech, as it is a more formal activity producing a permanent record. When we speak, we gauge our listener's response and clarify any points, which haven't been comprehended. As no such interaction takes place in a piece of writing, our communication skills have to be unambiguous. Archer (2010) go on to advocate clarity, conciseness, exactitude and appropriateness, if effectiveness is to be achieved in writing. Ahmad(2015) sum this up thus: "Because writing is permanent, it should be better organized and easier to understand than speech." In his view of writing as a process, Nightingale (2000) asserts that competent writers do not produce final texts at their first attempt, but that writing is a long and often painful process, in which the final text emerges through successive drafts. This is unlike the product view of writing in which emphasis is on correction and comments on finished products by teachers of writing (Dysthe, 2001).

Effective writing, therefore, has to go through a series of stages, until a final, meaningful product, is produced. Bacha (2002) agree that writing should go through processes of pre-writing (such as brainstorming), drafting, revising and proofreading. We find the latter two stages very important as they, among other things, ensure a fluent, linguistically competent piece of writing. In light of this, the researchers were interested in unearthing whether TTC Kirambo students regard writing as a process or as a product, the latter view which is eschewed by Nunan for resulting in shoddy pieces of writing. A view of writing (an aspect of literacy) as a set of generalizable skills has been the dominant view in the last century (Dysthe, 2001) and is described by Badenhorst (2011) as an autonomous model of literacy, where writing skills are seen as neutral and universal, something akin to Paulo Freire's 'banking' model of education. Dysthe (2001) refers to this view as the study skills orientation to the teaching of writing. It is this orientation that informs the teaching of academic writing at TTC Kirambo in Rwanda. In conceptualizing writing in terms of these discreet skills, Ahmad (2015) reminds us that writing is a special skill that does not spring naturally from an ability to speak a language. Palmer goes on to divide writing skills into graphical/visual, grammatical, expressive/stylistic, rhetorical and organizational skills. Graphical/visual skills include the ability to spell

words correctly, and Dysthe (2001) writes that knowledge of possible and probable spelling patterns is enhanced by sensible use of a dictionary.

Can (2009) also acknowledges the importance of the spelling skill in writing and asserts that steady practice will make you a better speller. Also, included under graphical skills is the ability to punctuate one's written discourse correctly. In affirming the significance of punctuation in writing, Can (2009) further posed the following pertinent questions to writers:

- Have you capitalized the beginnings of your sentences?
- Do you have question marks where they are necessary?
- Are any of your sentences run-ons or comma splices?
- Could you clarify the writing by using a semi-colon to join two independent clauses or a dash to separate a thought?

Format is also a visual skill and it includes such aspects as the layout of a letter, report, memorandum and other kinds of writing. Expressive or stylistic skills, according to Ahmad (2015) referred to a writer's ability to express precise meanings in a variety of styles or registers, selected appropriate vocabulary, sentence patterns, and structures. Rhetorical skills entail the writer's use of cohesive devices or linking devices or the ties, which make a piece of writing, "hang together". These include conjunctions, which Ivani? (2004) put into four categories, viz. additive, adversative, causal, and temporal. Ahmad(2015) calls these devices connectives and groups them into those which show continuity (moreover, furthermore, in addition to); those which signal change of direction or focus (however, nevertheless, conversely, on the contrary, despite, in spite of, though), those signaling cause/effect (consequently, therefore, because), and the ones which showed that the writer is concluding (therefore, finally, hence, thus, lastly) Jordan(1997) emphasizes the importance of organization and development in writing.

Organizational skills concern themselves with how information is organized into paragraphs and texts by sequencing ideas, rejecting irrelevant information and summarizing relevant points Ahmad (2015). Thus, this study was interested in analyzing students' essays with focus on graphical, grammatical, rhetorical, organizational skills and others. From an academic socialization orientation, writing is seen as a tacit aspect of learning to be a member of the discourse society of a particular discipline (Dysthe, 2001). This view of writing eschews any teaching of writing, arguing that as students' study, they spontaneously picked up writing, which is, learning to write by osmosis.

Finally, from an academic literacies point of view, writing is seen as a complex, developing accomplishment which is closely tied to the character of each discipline and the knowledge claims made by each discipline (Dysthe, 2001). Not only does writing vary from subject to subject, but it is also influenced by students' literacy contexts outside of school, as well as their personal, social and cultural experiences Lea & Street (1998). Apparently, this is the same view, which Li (2007) shares in his ideological model of literacy, in which literacy is seen as being imbedded in social practices and is, therefore, contextual and situated. Li (2007) also shares the same view. In view of this, the study will also briefly discuss students' writing from academic socialization, academic literacy, and ideological model perspective. To sum up, writing could best be conceptualized by differentiating it from speech, by viewing it as a process rather than a product, by regarding it as a set of skills, by viewing it as an aspect of academic socialization, and, finally, by regarding it as a facet of academic writing.

METHODOLOGY

A case study design was used in this research. Since a case study is a technique for learning about complicated phenomena in a context, it is a good choice for this research because it allowed for an exhaustive exploration of a single unit, a detailed evaluation of a single location, a single topic, or a particular

occurrence Meltem (2007). Because colleges vary and have diverse communication skills curricula, the researcher narrowed her emphasis to one particular institution. There may not be similar difficulties at other colleges as there are at TTC Kirambo.

The study was carried out over two terms. Students of three different intakes participated in the study (year one, two and three). Six lecturers in the languages department were selected.

Population

500 students at TTC Kirambo and 33 lecturers constituted the population for the study.

Sample

Thirty (30) students from first, second- and third-year college students were randomly selected from all subject areas on the basis of the students' studying the Communication Skills course (English). Four lecturers who taught these students English were selected from ELCPE (Early Childhood Primary Education), LE (Language Education), SSE (Social Science Education) and Science Mathematics Education (SME).

Data collection

Data were collected through document analysis, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.

Document analysis

One hundred and sixty-three essays written by one hundred and sixty-three students in the Communication Skills course (English) were analyzed by the four Communication Skills lecturers who carried out this study. The aim was to gain insights into the nature of the students' academic writing weaknesses. In each essay, the researchers' focus was on graphical, grammatical, rhetorical, organizational and other skills falling outside these categories, such as tenses, parts of speech, clarity, and citation of sources and referencing. The essays were written in English, which is not the language of instruction in Rwanda.

In-depth Interviews

Four lecturers who were offering courses to first, second- and third-year undergraduate students were interviewed so as to find out their perceptions of the students' academic writing. Each interview lasted about fifteen minutes. The interviews were recorded down by the researcher. Common themes were identified and noted down.

Focus group discussions

Barbour (2014) claim that a focus group is a conversation between four and ten participants about a particular study topic. 30 chosen students were divided into 3 focus groups of 10, and focus group talks were utilized to elicit data in order to obtain a basic picture of the difficulties surrounding the importance of communication in developing academic writing at teacher training institutions. Focus group interviews enabled the researcher to collect data from the participants in one session in a setting where they felt comfortable and at ease Atta-Obeng & Lamptey (2013). Focus group discussions were used by the researcher to gather information and to pinpoint problems as they would be raised in the group.

FINDINGS

Findings from document analysis

An analysis of the students' essays revealed that numerous aberrations made students' academic writing

weak. The findings show the major categories of weaknesses observed in the students' essays, the frequency of recurrence of each weakness, examples and the frequencies expressed as a percentage of the weakness corpus. Students also had problems with spelling. Students' essays also revealed general confusion of homophones and misuse of parts of speech. Also, evident was lack of subject-verb agreement (concordial agreement) in students' written academic pieces. Poor punctuation, especially that involving separation of ideas and of complete sentences was evident. Students' weaknesses in the use of prepositions accounted for of the weaknesses noted. Students' weak word division skills caused some of them to either fuse separate words or to split words. Failure to cite sources and an arbitrary choice of attributive verbs, failure to achieve cohesion through inability to use connectives or through using in appropriate ones, and use of wrong tenses or inadvertent tense shifts were further weaknesses noted. Other weaknesses involved wordiness which often resulted in tautology or redundancy, inconsistent and wrong pronoun reference that distorted meaning, weak paragraphing where entirely different ideas could be mixed in one paragraph or alternatively having undeveloped single sentence paragraphs, and the use of articles where none are necessary or the use of the wrong articles altogether. The last weakness noted, but by no means least important, is that of ambiguity. The above percentages are quite significant in that they show that the students' academic writing challenges are varied because each class is represented. Therefore, lecturers of Communication Skills, together with all other lecturers, should draw their students' attention to such writing challenges so that the students could improve and produce better pieces of writing. However, it is rather the overall effect of these weaknesses on students' essays than the percentage recurrence of individual weaknesses that impacted on the quality of the students' academic writing. For example, while poor spelling was the most frequent weakness, followed by confusion of key parts of speech, lack of agreement, poor punctuation and so on, and while ambiguity was the least recurring weakness followed by wrong use of articles, weaknesses in paragraphing and so on, all these weaknesses taken together made students' academic writing weak. Academic writing challenges, therefore, cannot be solved overnight but through conscious, consistent and persistent practice over time.

Findings from in-depth interviews

The assorted responses from interviews with 4 lecturers tended to agree in many ways. There was total agreement in the following responses:

1. Students struggle with their writing, especially lack of clarity, uncertain or ambiguous expressions that obscure meaning.
2. Students' answers show weaknesses that indicate inadequate planning and carelessness on the part of students. Such weaknesses range from misspellings, tense errors, confusion of lexical items to poor citation and referencing.
3. Students' answers lack cohesion and sustained development as evidenced by weak/inappropriate use of connectives/discourse markers or by their entire absence, resulting in answers that lack emphasis, contrast or a balanced discussion.

Student one (S1) had this to say,

"Some of my students' essays are presented in muddled writing, ideas picked and dropped here and there without logical development and answers presented in hurriedly and carelessly arranged language structures some of which lack concordial agreement. Imagine also, a college student confusing 'their' for 'there' and not being able to check his or her spelling of basic vocabulary items. Really, I sometimes have to grope for meaning".

Of the lecturers interviewed, all of them acknowledged that their emphasis had been on course content coverage and presentations and thus basic writing was taken for granted, since submission of coursework is a prerequisite. They also expressed that by the time they are through with marking of the first assignments,

students' second assignments would normally be due and therefore it becomes difficult to attend to individual writing problems. The four tutors, suggested that students should be assisted in the following manner: encouraging peer correction before submission, thoroughly revising their (many) drafts, consulting dictionaries and having constant practice. Their feelings and views can be summarized in the words of one of the participants (Lecturer 1):

"We should urge our students to treat writing more seriously. Their writing could improve if it was well planned, written and revised for errors before the draft for submission is written again, much more carefully. Students should be in a position to scrutinize their assignments from a third person's point of view or invite a friend to check on the errors before passing these on to Tutors. I also call upon English tutors to devote more time to teaching these students writing skills. The importance of these skills to the students cannot really be overemphasized. Our national high school system seems to churn out raw products, raw in the sense of inability to produce cohesive and coherent pieces of written discourse..."

Findings from Focus Group Discussions

Data from both students and tutors show that students encounter a number of difficulties when writing academically. The results reveal some overlaps and some disparities between tutors' and students' opinions of the difficulties that students have with academic writing. Themes that arose from the data was used to briefly illustrate these difficulties.

Grammar usage is a concern, according to interviews with both students and tutors. The results showed that students have difficulties with grammar concepts such as parts of speech, tenses, logic, and cohesiveness. The findings unambiguously demonstrate that tutors believed that students have significant challenges in nearly every area of grammatical usage. The interviews with tutors found that students struggle to follow basic grammatical conventions including starting proper nouns and sentences with capital letters and writing lengthy sentences without punctuation. Examining the previously graded essays, the results reveal that students struggle with a number of grammatical issues, including subject-verb agreement, proper punctuation, and sentence form. The findings also revealed a lack of coherence in how the students' thoughts were presented.

Students' difficulties with academic writing are primarily centered around referencing, which lead to plagiarism, according to both students and lecturers. Students should use references to show that they have read the relevant background literature and can cite sources for their assertions (Atta-Obeng & Lamptey, 2013). The interviews provided evidence that even after receiving instruction in academic writing conventions and skills, students still struggled to stop from copying and pasting ideas from textbooks and struggled to properly cite their sources. In the interviews, lecturers went into great detail about how common plagiarism is among students. They claim that students submit assignments for assessment by simply copying and pasting information from textbooks without making any changes or making the necessary citations. Students acknowledge that they frequently do not even try to reward information owing to time restrictions, but they also believe that they are not given adequate instruction on how to use sources without plagiarizing.

Data from the student essays verify that, as indicated by the other data, students are actually struggling with academic writing. In order to support what is written and prevent plagiarism, referencing is crucial in academic writing, according to the literature. Students should therefore recognize the influence other writers have had on their own writing. Academic theft, which is a crime, results from students failing to cite the sources they used when writing their assignments (Cornwell, & Robertson, 2011, Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2001). This finding is consistent with prior research that revealed that even after two terms of a communication skills program, most students still had trouble using academic standards for citing, paraphrasing, and summarizing information from various sources (Dudu et al., 2013; Holmes, 2004).

Students also revealed in the interviews that academic writing is more challenging at college than at secondary schools and that is the reason why they are achieving low marks. The findings from the students' responses also revealed that adapting to college life as far as writing academic essays is concerned, is difficult because of their non-academic writing background from secondary schools and using English as a medium of instruction seeing that Rwanda is a Kinyarwanda, Kiswahili and French speaking country. Furthermore, lecturers also revealed in the interviews that students experience writing difficulties because they are not familiarised and properly prepared at secondary school level about what to expect at college. As a result, students find life tough because they have to begin from scratch with English basics which is supposed to have been done at secondary schools. This finding is similar to one study which revealed that some students' academic writing challenges are due to the fact that the ordinary essays which students used to write at secondary school level were quite different from formal academic writing at college (Tardy, 2010). Similarly, another author corroborates the findings that academic essays are complex and quite intimidating to someone who has not done much writing previously, as he or she would be overwhelmed by the new formats and writing styles when writing. In addition, students find it difficult to differentiate between written and spoken words and phrases (Al Fadda, 2012). The finding is also supported by literature which reports that on entering college, students find themselves inundated with work that is not only greater in volume but also more difficult than they were used to at high school. At college there is a new disciplinary epistemology which requires students to discuss competing literary theories and harness evidence to support what is written (Dysthe, 2001).

In the interviews, both students and lecturers highlighted the difficulty of learning in a new language other than their native tongue. The majority of students' responses indicate that they rarely used their English because they mostly spoke their native tongue. Because the language of instruction was foreign to many students, they had difficulty meeting institutional literacy norms. This result supports Gentil's (2005) claim that conducting difficult research in a second language makes the problem of expertise worse since students are unsure of their research and writing abilities in their L2. It is also supported by the views of one study that, when students do not use the medium of instruction effectively, they may not produce effective academic writing texts. Therefore, students should master the language of instruction before they enroll at college (Archer, 2010; Bacha, 2002; Leibowitz, 2000 & Moyo, 1995, cited in Mpepo, 2009; Tshotsho, 2006)

The lack of time management is also a challenge which both students and lecturers revealed in the interviews. Both groups resonated that students did not honor the time allocated for writing assignments and relaxed until close to the due dates. As a result, students struggled to find relevant sources and often plagiarise. In addition, students write their assignments during the lesson, in a different subject area and miss what is taught during that time. Lecturers revealed that students come up with numerous, invalid excuses for not adhering to submission dates. These findings are similar to what was reported in the literature that most students fail to produce academically crafted work because they just produce one draft in the last minute and submit for assessment with the aim of beating the submission deadlines (Dudu et al., 2012; Leibowitz, 2000).

Page limit or not sticking to the required number of words was revealed by students in the interviews as a challenge. According to students, they were expected to write several pages on a single question. This made their writing difficult since they ran out of ideas and eventually repeated the same ideas or just copied and pasted without acknowledging sources. This finding corroborates one study which reports that because students miscalculated the time allocated for writing essay assignments, they consequently struggle to meet the required length of tasks and do not follow the required processes of writing (Dudu et al., 2012; Leibowitz, 2000).

According to Nightingale (2000), effective and relevant writing instruction enables students to see writing as "a complex process composed of many different kinds of activities that eventually result in that product". In

the interview’s students indicated that they were finding it difficult to comply with these processes and stages of writing, and they typically would submit their first drafts for assessment. This finding resonates with some studies that reveal that students do not see writing as a process; the majority never plan their work or write more than one draft and they also never edit their work. However, those students who attempt to use process writing find it difficult at the planning and drafting stages (Barker, 2000; Dudu et al., 2012; Leibowitz, 2000; Mutwarasibo, 2011; Shulman, 2005). The findings derived from the lecturers’ answers in the interviews also reveal that students are unable to follow the structure of an academic essay. Lecturers’ responses showed that students are writing in a non-academic essay style without providing a good introduction, a body, which is divided into several paragraphs preceded by subheadings, and conclusions. Data from the student essays confirm that indeed some of the students’ essays are written in a non-academic format with no subheadings, such as an introduction, body and conclusion or a table of contents. This is confirmed by literature which reveals that many students’ academic papers is fragmented with no structural connection between the introduction, body and conclusion, as well as paragraphs that are illogical and often not well developed (Pineteh, 2012).

Plagiarism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cut and paste of ideas from sources without acknowledgement • Sources acknowledged
Language usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Punctuations • Sentence construction • Subject verb agreement • Incorrect use of tenses • cohesion and paragraphs
Structure of academic essay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Table of content • Introduction, Body with subheadings and conclusion

Analysis of lecturers’ responses on the contribution of Communication Skills in students’ academic writing

Lecturers’ response regarding students experiencing challenges with academic writing
Academic writing challenges:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parts of speech • Tenses • Spelling • Prepositions • Logic sentences • Academic vocabulary • Punctuation • Cohesion • Discourse markers • Paragraphs • Clear and coherent essays • Paraphrasing • In text referencing

Lack of cohesiveness, failure to use discourse markers, and absence of coherent paragraphs are the specific areas where all lecturers are either substantially or somewhat affected. Interviews with lecturers revealed that language usage is a significant challenge for students. When writing academic essays, students reportedly face a variety of grammatical difficulties, according to the instructors. As a result, when composing the necessary academic writing texts, pupils are failing to follow a number of academic standards and mechanics. For instance, many students were writing lengthy phrases without the proper punctuation, such as commas or semicolons. They use small letters to start sentences and proper nouns, among other things. Similarly, teachers emphasized this as a significant difficulty for students during the interviews. Lecturer one(L1) said,

“Students don’t understand the beginning and end of one paragraph before beginning the second. There are numerous grammatical faults in, including the use of semantic relations, the mixing of tenses, and the absence of subject-verb agreement. Without even pausing, students began composing essays at random. There are times when a paragraph with four lines is actually only one sentence since no punctuation is utilized. They also have a relatively limited vocabulary, which is inappropriate for academic students.”

In the interview, lecturers also identified the framework of an academic essay as a difficulty. Some lecturers claim that students’ academic essays resemble non-academic ones. Lecturers claim that students couldn’t follow the format of an academic essay, which requires them to produce strong introductions, a body with multiple paragraphs, followed by sub-headings, and conclusions. Another issue raised by lecturers throughout the interview was that students are unable to recognize the essential terms that guide their responses. As a result of not comprehending what was expected, students always end up writing outside of context.

In the open-ended questions, lecturers also noted that students are not taking ownership of their own learning. The lecturers claim that students want to be prodded into learning, reminded of written assignments they had been given, had their work revised, and are told to visit the library. Students believed that the college ran in the same manner as high school, where they were used to having a bell ring for everything they had to do. As a result, individuals had a hard time accepting responsibility for deciding when to complete their work. Similar to this, L2 stated in the interviews:

“Students don’t take ownership of their education; they don’t want to advance in their learning; all they want is to get a grade, even if their work isn’t good.”

The interviews with lecturers also suggested that students are having trouble distinguishing professional writing from informal writing. Even in the production of academic materials, students are impacted by the SMS writing style. For instance, students are utilizing informal language, contractions, and abbreviations in their texts.

Lecturers’ perceptions on the causes of students’ academic writing difficulties

The potential causes of the students’ struggles with academic writing were questioned by the lecturers. In order to gauge the degree of agreement and disagreement among the lecturers, a preset list of reasons why students struggle with academic writing was presented. The issues outlined by the six lectures on communication skills are listed in the table below.

Lecturers' responses on the causes of academic writing challenges
Causes of academic writing challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of practice at tertiary institutions• Underprepared at high school• Teachers unprepared writing lessons• Lack of reading resources• Reluctance of teachers to teach writing• Ineffective feedback on students writing• Socio-economic factors of students

Academic writing difficulties at the college level are being brought on by the under preparedness of high school pupils, all six lecturers who were interviewed agreed wholeheartedly. This was verified by the lecturers' responses to the interview question, which indicated that they saw lack of preparation as both a problem and an opportunity. Lecturers believe that before enrolling in college, students are not exposed to academic writing in high schools. Students believe there was no difference between writing done in secondary schools and college when they entered college. They have numerous issues as a result of their inability to quickly adapt to the environment. The interview also found that it is difficult to persuade students that there is a difference between how they wrote in secondary school and how they should write in college because they are experiencing academic writing for the first time at college. Therefore, despite being penalized during grading, students continued to write in an unprofessional manner. In the interviews, lecturers elaborated on this tactic. For instance, L1 stated:

" English proficiency from secondary school may be the root of most problems."

Regarding the lack of introduction at high schools, lecturers elaborated in the interview that all students at college were not trained to understand what academic writing was. No orientation session, according to lecturers, introduced academic writing and explained how it differed from non-academic writing. They claim that numerous issues arose as a result of failing to convey this crucial aspect of college academic life before the students enrolled in formal lectures.

The lecturers concurred that writing difficulties may be due to a lack of academic writing practice at postsecondary institutions. The interview with the lecturers also revealed that students lack self-directed writing practice and were unaware of the necessity to put in significant effort in their studies. L3 noted that:

"Students just want to learn in lectures, and they don't practice academic writing outside of class. They fail to review the handouts on reference provided along with their notes, and in the end, they believe lecturers should complete the work for them."

The difficulty students have with academic writing is also a result of lecturers' reluctance to teach writing, according to academics. All the six lecturers who participated in the interviews acknowledged that their management of the academic writing assignments contributed to students' difficulty. Some of the lecturers, particularly those who taught academic subjects, were not actively involved in assisting students with their academic writing. Additionally, when students sought assistance from such instructors, they are turned away and constantly sent to lecturers in communication skills for issues pertaining to academic writing mainly

because they are comfortable with their mother tongue which is Kinyarwanda, Kiswahili and French. It also becomes evident that language lecturers demand that all lecturers possess strong communication skills so they could inform students of the standards for academic writing.

There would be a lot of issues if college lecturers do not assist the students in any way. Other lecturers believe that because some lecturers teach communication skills, they are the only ones qualified to instruct students in academic writing, according to L1. They overlook the fact that all lecturers ought to be familiar with the conventions and mechanics of academic writing as well as the preferred referencing style.

Another lecturer(L4), also said that

“Students sometimes claim that lecturers fail to explain how they should write assignments because they either believe they already know everything from first year coursework or are too busy learning to do so. Lecturers often overlook the fact that people who instruct students in English for Academic Purposes are merely clearing a path for them and the pupils. Other lecturers should fill in where they’ve left off.”

Another issue raised in the review was that some lecturers do not discipline students who do not adhere to academic writing rules. Some lecturers simply assigned grades to their pupils, regardless of errors. Students believe they were acting correctly when this occurred. For instance, some lecturers may overlook improper punctuation and other grammatical mistakes. Additionally, while evaluating students’ written work, content-only lecturers failed to take academic writing etiquette and mechanics into account. Similar to this, L5stated in the interviews

“lecturers who were not experts in teaching languages or communication skills were hesitant to handle some other issue such as those they were not comfortable to teach.

The interviews with lecturers also revealed that there was no reading culture among college students. L6 claims *“Students weren’t using the library for study purposes, but if they had developed the habit of reading, they would have learned a lot about academic writing.”*

In the interviews, lecturers expressed concern that students are neglecting to utilize dictionaries to check their spelling and word choices, particularly when writing academic writings. Additionally, lecturers said that the majority of college students did not own dictionaries. Lecturers concurred that students’ difficulties with academic writing were a result of their receiving insufficient feedback from lecturers. As a result, lecturers were also questioned regarding the comments made to students after grading their assignments. The following are responses from lecturers:

Lecturers’ responses to the methods of feedback given on academic writing
Method of feedback given to students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback is given in class after the tasks are marked • feedback given to individual students after marking the work • Feedback is given via written comments and remarks on students’ scripts for improvements • use of questions as part of feedback to prompt students develop awareness of their errors

In an interview, some academics admitted that other lecturers have failed to provide students with insightful feedback on their marked work. Additionally, lecturers noted that students fail to read the comments made after their academic texts are graded. L4 stated in the interviews:

“Students don’t read the remarks or comments when lecturers provide written feedback on papers after grading them in order to correct the mistakes. They consequently keep making the same errors.”

The following issues—English as the language of instruction; the use of SMS style writing in formal settings; failing to provide students with meaningful feedback; and students’ lack of background knowledge in academic writing from secondary schooling—were also taken into consideration as potential causes of academic writing challenges.

What possible intervention strategies can promote students’ academic writing?

Additionally, lecturers were asked to discuss their opinions of potential intervention tactics that might be employed to address the difficulties that students are having with academic writing. Below are how lecturers delivered their responses:

Lecturers’ views on possible intervention strategies to address students’ academic writing challenges	
Intervention strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecturers should be offered workshops on how to enhance students' academic writing seeing that it’s a French, Kinyarwanda and Kiswahili speaking community. • Introduce a writers’ club at TTC Kirambo where students can practice writing • Lecturers to use effective feedback to show strength and weaknesses of students • Lecturers to use constructive feedback after marking either per individual or in group • All academic lecturers to be involved in teaching academic writing • To introduce research symposiums for students where they can practice presentation skills • Students to communicate in English so as not to have problems with the language when presenting • Exposing students to other scholars’ research and academic writing i.e. allowing the students to go through other written pieces • Access to the electronic library should be unlimited • Motivating them by engaging them in academic writing with students from other institutions and learn to do peer editing • Academic should not be left for the communication skills department. All lecturers should be involved. • Engage students in competitions and expose students in models of good work • Showcase good work to give students confidence • Have writers invited to college so they could talk to students as this will give them the confidence they need • There is a need to set a stand-alone department for Communication Skills • There is a need for the subject to be examined because as it is, students present a negative attitude towards communication skills 	

Lecturers said that receiving training on how to help students with their academic writing would be very helpful. In-service training for lecturers and workshops were both confirmed to be highly effective interventions that could address students’ academic writing difficulties. In the workshops all the lecturers, including content subject lecturers, should be taught academic writing skills and showed how to guide students to write academically. Furthermore, in the workshop’s lecturers would collaborate with one another and peer-coach themselves regarding students’ lack of academic writing skills. During the interview’s lecturers expanded on those strategies that they had already indicated in the interview as being important or very important. L5 said,

“The English language departments should be in charge of organizing workshops on academic writing. Collaboration and joint planning amongst lecturers could play a significant role in these workshops”.

In the same way, L2 said,

“All lecturers, even those who do not teach languages, should help students with their academic writing by modeling and instructing them in the process during workshops”.

L4 also said,

“If lecturers are not well versed in handling academic writing for students, there should be planned seminars to teach both students and lecturers occasionally.”

The formation of a writing club at the college received approval from the six lecturers during the interviews as well. There was a need for such a club because the lack of a writing club where students could go and improve their writing abilities made the writing issues worse. Additionally, lecturers stated that if this club was in operation, it would assist both students and lecturers who were having difficulties with their academic writing. L4 further elaborated on this strategy during the interviews by saying,

“The writing club can assist students by utilizing both other students and lecturers who are skilled in dealing with academic writing issues. Additionally, the club offers students an opportunity to write in their free time”.

All six lecturers agreed that it would be advantageous to address students' difficulties with academic writing by providing insightful and constructive criticism while marking their papers and by highlighting their individual and collective strengths and limitations. The interviews provided evidence that this is a wise course of action. To prevent repeating errors, lecturers recommended giving pupils constructive criticism. L5 elaborated on the information from the questionnaire during interviews by stating:

“Following the assessment of students' academic papers, lecturers should compile a list of the most frequent mistakes, underline them, and go into great detail about them during class feedback sessions to ensure that they do not happen again. If at all possible, it is best to identify weak students and set up tutorials with them using both general and individual feedback. Additionally, lecturers must urge students to read their comments and implement advice to their writing in order to develop throughout feedback sessions”.

Communication Skills lecturers also indicated that it would be useful if all lecturers would be involved in teaching academic writing to students. This was also confirmed in the interviews. Lecturers revealed in the interviews that, if all academic lecturers were involved in teaching academic writing skills to students, the problem would be minimised. Similarly, in the interviews, the involvement of all the lecturers in assisting students with academic writing related matters was expanded and emphasised. For example, L1 said,

“All the lecturers even those who are not teaching Communication Skills should be involved in, showing students how to write and do their assignments.”

Similar to that, L4 mentioned,

‘I think all lecturers should stand up together towards helping students on how to write academically. Academic writing should not be seen as the responsibility of those who are teaching it as we all learnt about it during our tertiary education.’

In the interviews, lecturers were also encouraged to provide more details regarding the approaches they believe could help students who are having trouble writing. The techniques that were already highlighted in the interviews were built upon by the lecturers, who also came up with a few fresh ideas that would be useful to the students. The interview also made it clear that students should receive the same training as academics do, as opposed to workshops and training for lecturers. Lecturers believe that there is need to have more training sessions for students in academic writing because of the ongoing difficulties that students were having.

“In order to make academic writing in college easier, students should have a strong foundation in English by the time they enter secondary school. I wish secondary schools offered an academic writing preparation course in English so that students would be familiar with the differences between academic and non-academic writings by the time they entered college.” (L1)

In the interviews, lecturers also advocated for making the communication skills subject compulsory for all year levels. As an alternative, academic writing should be a part of every academic subject so that lecturers in the relevant fields would start to value it highly and start helping students with written tasks. Exposing students to multimedia materials was another strategy that was addressed in interviews. The documents ought to be created to provide guidance on academic writing that might aid students in improving their writing abilities. The internet, journals, and newspapers and novels were a few examples given by lecturers. L4 supported this assertion in the interview by saying,

“students should be exposed to multimedia where recommended books on academic writing would help because they will look at a variety of writing activities and different styles of writing.” (L4)

Specific academic writing problems and how to overcome them

Each group of students was asked to work with another group, swap essays, carefully read them, and then present to the class what might be broadly viewed as unique concerns for their group’s writing in order to understand more about the specific issues that students have with academic writing. The most common issues with academic writing, as identified by the students themselves, generally involved language interference (thinking in Kinyarwanda or Kiswahili and writing in English), structure and organization (how to divide and order paragraphs), cohesion and coherence, content and focus (developing convincing arguments supported by examples), and grammatical errors. Some groups saw the following from their peer groups and highlighted some of these issues: “In the introduction, there is no clear focus on the subject to be explored. You cannot distinguish between the many paragraphs as the article advances. In this case, structure is a huge issue. Additionally, invisible are the paragraph transitions. The topic is well developed, according to another group. However, considering how frequently this occurs, it appears that students were translating from their original tongue while thinking in English.

Students provide a variety of solutions to their issues with academic writing, mostly focusing on the lecturers and, to a lesser extent, on their peers’ roles in the process. Students especially ask for extra time to practice process writing with coaching from their teacher. Along the lines of the process writing model, the lecturer should create a variety of writing activities, closely monitor student progress, help them out when necessary, evaluate their final work, and offer comments.

Concerning the evaluation, students bemoan the fact that they frequently do not receive feedback from the numerous writing assignments they are required to complete.

“Those who teach writing should avail themselves of the corrections of the written projects we are frequently asked to work on so that we see the outcome of our efforts,” was one of the issues made in the feedback by L1.

“I would kindly ask the lecturers to offer criticism on our writing so that we can improve. Otherwise, we will keep making the same errors.” (L2)

The students’ tone changes as they describe the part, they should play in helping their peers become more proficient in English writing. Their only obligation in terms of academic writing is to agree to collaborate, which they commend as “a reliable technique of generating ideas rapidly, structuring them appropriately, and producing a coherent written article.” Students also understand that taking part in formal discussions can help them learn new concepts that they can use in their writing:

“Joining debate clubs is another thing that can help us develop our views. We may use this as a chance to converse while also learning new ways of thinking”. (L5)

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate students’ perceptions of process writing as a tool for enhancing the caliber of their academic writing. To accomplish this goal, it has been crucial to first grasp what students mean when they refer to academic writing before exploring their experiences with the approach itself, the difficulties it presented, and the potential for new insights it could provide. Starfield (2007) asserts that in order to build on students’ prior beliefs and presumptions about writing and assist them in becoming familiar with the demands of disciplinary discourses, lecturers must learn about their students’ prior beliefs and presumptions about writing.

The cognitivist method of teaching and learning can be applied when considering writing as a structured and thought-provoking activity. This method views writing as a thinking-intensive activity since it includes retrieving concepts from long-term memory. However, these thought processes constantly engage with the task environment, or the social setting in which a written text will be employed as well as the prevailing discursive norms (Tynjälä et al., 2001). In actuality, the writing processes entail gathering thoughts and turning them into words that eventually make up a whole book. These procedures can’t be finished all at once; instead, they take place over the course of several iterative stages including planning and organizing, drafting, revising, and editing. As a result, writing encourages reflection and thinking, which in turn support learning (Boscolo & Mason, 2001; Tynjälä, 1998).

The second misconception that students have about writing has to do with how iterative it is. In fact, writing engages in a number of recursive processes, some of which necessitate the assistance of experts if the final work is to be more meaningful. The social nature of writing is conferred by this outside influence on an individual’s writing processes, which is related to the social constructivist and socio-cultural theories of learning. Both theories (Starfield, 2007; Tynjälä et al., 2001) place a strong emphasis on the importance of learners’ social interactions and their involvement in cultural discourse practices. Students will be able to place themselves into particular academic discourse communities depending on how they interact with and participate in the writing activities (i.e., students’ third assumption about writing). In a nutshell, the three presumptions made by students regarding the writing assignment support the activity’s complex and multifaceted nature as influenced by personal, social, and institutional discourses.

This study’s main goal was to determine how process writing techniques can increase students’ academic writing abilities. According to the students’ responses, the planning and organization phases of process writing were the most challenging for them while also being the most crucial. Students also said that they were unsure of how to address the concerns of content, cohesiveness and coherence, and language after finishing their work. The aforementioned statistics do not actually portray a bleak situation, according to writing scholars and practitioners, because more experienced writers typically spend a significant amount of time planning and arranging what they are going to write and what to include. The same academics and

writers advise against overly worrying about grammatical precision unless it has an impact on the meaning of the text (Coffin et al., 2003; Fernsten& Reda, 2011; Ivani, 2004). In reality, the reviewing, rewriting, and editing stages—which were deemed the easiest by virtually all students—are when all errors with grammar, spelling, and language use are addressed in the process writing model.

Students' assertions that the lecturer bore all responsibility for helping them with their academic writing problems was an unexpected discovery. Although the lecturer's function as a facilitator in the learning process cannot be disregarded, process writing approach is strictly learner-centered. Because of this, students should be primarily responsible for finding solutions to their own academic writing issues. In order to improve their thinking and learning, students committed themselves to working more closely with others and speaking up during group discussions. Because in real life "we do not learn only contents but also modes of action and social and cultural practices," this resolution appears to support Tynjälä et al. (2001) assertion that incorporating writing with other forms of discourse like reading, classroom talks, and group discussions is an authentic way to learn.

Although its stated purpose seemed to be difficult for students to understand, the lecturer still used it in class to help students overcome their writing challenges. After completing the writing assignment, groups of students were asked to read each other's essays and report to the class any persistent writing issues they had encountered. Additionally, by explaining what they were doing, they were forced to employ process writing terminology and defend their positions, which increased the impact of their work. This supports Dysthe (2001) assertion that reporting in class is important because "student learning is boosted by hearing the spectrum of similar and different views," in addition to groups of students being understandably interested in what other groups have determined. Since they are designed to help students express their ideas clearly, defend their positions, learn more about themselves, understand the process of writing, and gain more confidence while navigating the variety of literacies required in the academy and beyond, Fernsten and Reda (2011) preferred to refer to group writing as "reflective exercises."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher offers the following recommendations:

- More time should be spent on teaching writing at secondary school than is currently the case. Teachers who are teaching English as a Second Language(ESL) students at high school level should approach writing as a critical and core aspect of students' education where they expose learners to intensive writing activities throughout their high school years in preparation for college.
- All lecturers at TTC Kirambo should undergo rigorous and ongoing training in academic writing skills to equip themselves fully with the necessary skills for teaching and assessing students' academic writing assignments.
- An Academic Writing Forum should be introduced at college through the Language department to cater for students' academic writing needs in various ways.
- Peer tutoring should be done by fellow students who are knowledgeable in academic writing techniques and can teach those techniques to peers. Likewise, this could also be done by lecturers themselves who collaborate to alleviate students' writing challenges by finding ways that can contribute to the successful teaching and learning of academic writing.
- Developing students writing skills should not be left to Communication Skills or language lecturers alone. Rather, all lecturers across the curriculum should be determined to improve these skills. This should not only be done during the students' first year but until students have completed their courses.
- The researcher would also like to urge college students to conceptualise writing as a process which should go through stages of prewriting, drafting redrafting, revising and proof reading or editing.
- The college needs to provide relevant, up-to-date resources and materials in the library and increase the number of available computers. Furthermore, the internet services need to be upgraded

CONCLUSION

More needs to be done in preparing ESL students at this college to cope with writing at college level. The findings clearly show that students at this college face various academic writing challenges. The challenges that were identified in both students and lecturers' results were referencing, grammar structures, time management, lack of resources, English as a medium of instruction, the role of content subject lecturers and adapting to college writing styles.

Furthermore, both students and lecturers indicated the gaps that existed between secondary schools and college, background from secondary, a lack of resources, feedback, SMS writing style, a lack of reading culture and not practising the writing skills as the main causes of the students' writing difficulties. On the other hand, the college was also causing writing challenges of students because it had not yet introduced an academic writing forum that could provide intensive writing skills to students. It was also found that since students were the centre of learning, they also caused their own academic writing challenges. It was revealed that students did not take ownership of their learning by adhering to time frames and attending classes regularly; they were also using the SMS, informal writing style in academic writing. Therefore, there is need for more intervention strategies in order to address the students' academic writing challenges. Both lecturers and students agreed that feedback was an important part of teaching academic writing in ESL contexts. Lecturers should give students individual, as well as general, feedback to remedy their writing difficulties. Finally, the findings showed that all academic students should take ownership of their studies, especially in writing, and all lecturers need to become involved in assisting students with academic writing.

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