

Academic Literacy and Research Supervision of Teacher Trainees in Luanda/Angola

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The teaching and learning process of any group or level of students is always dynamic and can change its characteristics depending on the context in which it takes place. Accordingly, the process of training teachers is also characterised by several changes which are dictated by the process itself and the context and conditions inherent in the same process. McLeod & Reynolds (2007: 1) contend that “... *we are teaching and learning in times of overwhelming change – changes in the way we know, changes in the way we teach and changes in what is expected of us as teachers and learners*”.

This article is grounded in the researcher’s long years of teaching experience at different levels, especially, at ISCED/Luanda, one of the teachers’ training Institutes in Luanda where she has been working for more than eighteen years. As a former student, lecturer, and supervisor, she has been constantly reflecting on the high dropout rates of students in her and in other Departments. However, she has been unable to get a plausible response to the question regarding the high drop out rates and this is the reason why she decided to undertake a study that could probably help find answers to the problem, and also assist in finding some possible ways to improve the situation.

This being so, it is important for the lecturers at, to equip students with the skills they need in order to cope with the changing demands of the society in general and education in particular.

It is the researcher’s conviction that it is important to consider the quality of the lecturers available before one considers the quality of students. Therefore, the discussion in this article focuses on the academic and research literacy practices of a group of Teacher Trainees-TTs. In trying to discover the reasons for the students’ failure to produce their research reports, the study also looks at the assessment procedures and the curriculum in use to see whether there is alignment between course work assessment and the writing of the research reports (Biggs, 1999). Therefore, the theoretical framework for this article is based on Biggs, (1999) 3P Model and Constructive Alignment.

Research Background

The major aim of this study was to examine the academic and research literacy practices of TTs at ISCED-Luanda. Within an academic community of practice literacy practices do not only mean reading and writing habits. These practices have a broader meaning based on social and cultural contexts (Street, 1993; Ballard & Clanchy, 1988). To this end some academics suggest that literacy is best examined through looking at its social practices (Street, 2007; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009). These writers view literacy as ‘multiple’ and social and believe that it can be best understood in the domains in which it is practiced.

Focusing on the multiplicity of literacy practices means, recognizing the plurality of reading and writing practices for different purposes, within different socio-cultural contexts, values and practices. (Ivanic et al., 2009; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000). Thus, we believe that in selecting a particular group of students and examining their situated practices through a socio-cultural construct, the current study should be able to identify and reconstruct the academic research literacy practices of these TTs and their lecturers.

The overarching problem: the high failure rate of TTs

Lack of adequate preparation at previous levels of education, and the students’ difficulties in dealing with academic literacy skills are among the many reasons for students’ high failure rates, and delayed conclusions to projects in many higher education institutions. These problems are not unique to the Angolan TTs mentioned in this study. In fact, the present study has a transversal character, since students from other departments in the same institution, and, perhaps, in several institutions at national level have faced, are facing this problem. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 below, provide the statistical data that represent the percentage levels of students who managed to complete their studies, by orally presenting their research reports, in all specialization disciplines. In general, forty-five (45) new students are enrolled in each course every academic year, but not all of them complete their studies. The figures in the percentages were provided by the Deputy Director of the Academic Affairs Department (DDAAD), where all the statistical data of students in relation to their academic progress are preserved, from the moment of their enrolment until the end of the course. The figures in the first table refer to the period from 2009 to 2013. These figures were used by the researcher during the period she was attending her Ph.D. program at the University of Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg, in South Africa. The figures in the second table refer to the following period from 2014 to 2018, a period that corresponds to the five years following this study. These statistical data were acquired in order to check if there had been any changes after the study was completed, but, as can be seen in the specific case of the English language, the improvements recorded cannot be considered as being satisfactory and significant enough, considering that every year 45 new students are enrolled in the course; so the number of students who complete their studies each year does not correspond to even one third of the global annual number of students who are admitted to this specialty.

Table 1.1 Data from the Academic Affairs Department (2009-2013).

Nr.	MAJORS	2009		2010		2011		2012		2013		Total	
		Nr.	%	Nr.	%	Nr.	%	Nr.	%	Nr.	%	Nr.	%
1	Philosophy	31	68,8	17	37,7	23	51,1	05	11,1	10	22,2	86	38,2
2	French	44	97,7	25	55,5	29	64,4	13	28,8	11	24,4	122	54,2
3	History	15	33,3	12	26,6	32	71,1	16	35,5	25	55,5	100	44,4
4	English	8	17,7	17	37,7	7	15,5	7	15,5	9	20	48	21,3
5	Mathematics	110	244,4	45	100	27	60	38	84,4	17	37,7	237	105,3
6	Pedagogy	234	520	134	297,7	69	153,3	34	75,5	48	106,6	519	230,6
7	Portuguese	15	33,3	6	13,3	26	57,7	22	48,8	23	51,1	92	40,8
8	Psychology	127	282,2	141	313,3	116	257,7	75	166,6	72	160	531	236
9	Sociology	19	42,2	12	26,6	23	51,1	22	48,8	35	77,7	111	49,3
10	L. & African Literature	2	0,44	–	0,00	6	13,3	3	0,66	7	15,5	18	8
	Total	605	134,4	409	90,8	358	79,5	235	52,2	257	57,1	1.864	82,8

Globally speaking, as the table above reads, of the two thousand two hundred and fifty (2,250) students enrolled in the various courses, within a period of five (5) years, only 82.1%, corresponding to one thousand eight hundred and sixty-four (1.864) students were able to complete their research reports. Row four (4) of

the table summarises the results of English students in the same period (2009-2013). Of the two hundred and twenty-five (225) students enrolled in English, in a period of five (5) years, only 21%, which corresponds to forty-eight (48) students, managed to complete their studies successfully. The number forty-eight (48), which represents the total number of students who successfully completed their studies after a period of five years, almost corresponds to the number of new students entering each specialty at the beginning of each academic year. After the calculations, we could speculate that, in the English language specialty, it took five (5) years to get a class of forty-five plus three (45+3) students finishing their studies. It should be noted that in all the subjects, the number of students completing the research report does not include students who should write their research reports in that same academic year; in other words, the grand total of students who complete their studies in each academic year is made up of students who completed the coursework, not only in that year, but also in previous years. According to the Head of the Department of Academic Affairs (AAD), ‘there is still no data available to determine the year in which students completed the coursework’. Therefore, the groups are heterogeneous and they include students who have completed the academic part of the course in different previous academic years too. The present study is, therefore, the author’s first attempt to search for the reasons behind the high dropout rates of students and the failure of many of them to produce their research reports within the stipulated time. As mentioned above, due to the seriousness of the situation, after another five (5) years, we again requested statistical data on students’ achievement in the subsequent five years in order to verify if any improvements had occurred in the training system. The table below shows the results obtained from the AAD in this second survey.

Table 1.2 Data from the Academic Affairs Department (2014-2018).

Nr.	Majors	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		Total	
		Nr.	%	Nr.	%	Nr.	%	Nr.	%	Nr.	%	Nr.	%
1	Philosophy	–	–	8	17,7	13	28,8	9	20	11	24,4	41	18,2
2	French	4	0,8	5	1,1	25	55,5	16	35,5	8	17,7	58	25,7
3	History	13	28,8	15	33,3	29	64,4	38	84,4	18	40	113	50,2
4	English	8	17,7	19	42,2	17	37,7	22	48,8	16	35,5	82	36,4
5	Mathematics	19	42,2	35	77,7	59	131	23	51	21	46,6	157	69,7
6	Pedagogy	87	275	159	353	121	268,8	92	204	91	202	550	244,4
7	Portuguese	11	24,4	33	73,3	35	77,7	36	80	39	86,6	154	68,4
8	Psychology	74	164,4	77	171	89	197,7	63	140	63	140	366	162,6
9	Sociology	18	40	40	88,8	22	48,8	27	60	34	75,5	141	62,6
10	L. & African Literature	10	22,2	7	15,5	9	29	5	11	12	26,6	43	19,1
	Total	391	86,8	410	91	63	14	331	73,5	313	69,5	1.705	75,7

This table presents the results on students’ achievement in the various training subjects in the period from 2014 to 2018. Contrary to the general percentage of achievement in the previous table, and as it can be seen in the table, of the two thousand two hundred and fifty (2,250) students enrolled in the various courses, over a five-year period, 75,7%, corresponding to one thousand seven hundred and five (1,705) students, were able to successfully complete their research reports. We cannot deny that some improvements were noted, mainly in the Portuguese, History, Pedagogy, Psychology and Mathematics courses. Regarding the English course as shown in row four of the table, which summarises the results obtained in the same period (2014-2018) the number of students completing their studies has substantially increased. Of the two hundred and twenty-five (225) students enrolled in English, about 36,4%, which corresponds to eighty-two (82) students, managed to complete their studies successfully. Although the results might sound very positive, they are still not satisfactory, because, although the number of finalist students has gone from forty-eight (48) to eighty-two (82) compared to the total number of students enrolled, (225), this result corresponds to only

36,4% improvement, so it is still very far from the desired results. It is worth mentioning that the total number of students completing their studies from the ten existing Departments has gone down from 1.864 to 1.705 students, in other words, from 82,8% to 75,7 %. This phenomenon deserves special attention and led us to think that some of the problems prevail and need to be urgently addressed not only in the Modern Languages Department but in other Departments too. Thus, our next research will consist of finding the main reasons that make some Departments more productive than others by comparing the academic and literacy practices that are taking place in them. Lack of adequate preparation at previous levels of education, and students' difficulties in dealing with academic reading and writing skills, are among the many reasons for students' high failure rates, and delayed conclusions of the research projects. These problems are not unique to the TTs at ISCED. They are felt in many institutions and we therefore need to find ways of minimising the problem.

Research Questions

In terms of the problem that needs to be investigated we decided on the following research questions. The first of these is the main one:

In what ways do academic and research literacy practices contribute to the successful completion of a research report?

- In what manner do TTs acquire academic and research literacies?
- In what ways do TTs deploy academic and research literacy practices in the production of research reports?
- To what extent does curriculum alignment affect the production of the research reports? (Biggs, 1999).
- In what ways do supervision practices enable and /or constrain the successful completion of research reports?

In the context of this study, academic literacy can be construed as TTs ability to read and write within the academic context with a degree of independence, understanding and a high level of engagement with the learning (Biggs & Tang, 2007). Academic literacy in this study refers to what Ballard & Clanchy (1988: 7) refer to as '*functions of and demands upon language in a particular social cultural context*'. An appraisal of the students' academic literacy practices requires an investigation into the manner students acquire and deploy the explicit and implicit conventions and methods of inquiry in their specific disciplines for the production of research reports (Leibowitz, 1995: 34). An overlap becomes unavoidable with research literacy understood as the students' ability to locate, understand, evaluate and appropriately utilize resources needed for the production of their research reports. Research literacy also involves the ability to design and successfully carry out a research project (Achilles & Dreyden, 2002: 13).

Aims and of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the academic and research literacy practices of final year TTs at ISCED-Luanda, and the challenges they face in writing their research reports. In addressing this purpose the intention in this study was two-fold: to explore issues related to the academic writing and research literacy practices within a foreign English language teaching context and to understand the drop- out rates of large numbers of final year students. The study also sought to understand the reasons why some students (although very few) succeed in producing their research reports within or before the time limit whilst others (*although very few*) do not. Special attention was devoted to the writing process, perceptions of writing as well as the academic and research literacy practices of students. Additionally, an examination of the whole course was conducted to investigate the connection if any between coursework assessment and research report production.

The principal idea was to identify whether all the elements in the system were aligned by looking at them

from a critical point of view; as a way of making a comparison to what is actually happening at ISCED at the moment, how it is happening, and what could be done to improve the situation Biggs (1999) principle of constructive alignment was used as a basis to understand the situation. Therefore, the main aim of the study is:

- To understand students' academic and research literacy practices and identify possible challenges.

The sub-aims are:

- To identify which parts within the teaching learning system may not yet be aligned (Biggs, 1999).
- To raise all subject lecturers' awareness for the need to expose students to more specific academic and research literacy practices and experiences.
- To identify strengths and weaknesses of supervisory practices and their impact on the production of research reports (Dysthe, 2002; and Grant, 2010).

The study was limited to final year TTs in the English section in the Modern Languages Department-MLD as well as their lecturers.

Rationale of the study

This study has a strategic importance since it constitutes the first one to be carried out with a twofold objective. On the one hand, it looks at the academic and research literacy practices of TTs at ISCED and the extent of the alignment between the components in the system (Biggs, 1999). On the other hand, it looks at the assessment procedures in place to see whether there is an alignment between the assessment procedures throughout the coursework and the final assessment which is the production of the research reports.

Prior to the early 1990s, students used to be selected from the best teachers' training college. The teaching and learning process seemed to work well in terms of coursework, because most of the students had basic knowledge in teaching skills. After the admission of students from other intermediate institutions rather than EFP, the institution moved into a situation whereby classes are not only larger (from 25 to 45 students), but also quite diversified in terms of students' motivation and educational background. The institution is now enrolling students from different secondary schools regardless of the type of course they had in the previous level. As a result, it could be claimed that there are some difficulties in maintaining good teaching standards which are translated into students' high drop-out rates in completing their studies.

However, if one regards good quality teaching as "*...encouraging students to use the higher order learning processes that academic students use spontaneously*", standards need not to decline (Biggs, 1999: 5).

As Biggs (1999), posits, depending on their attitudes towards the teaching/learning process(es) teachers [and lecturers] can create conditions which are conducive to students' attainment of desired academic literacy skills. According to Biggs (1999), in order to get students performing tasks that require using higher order level skills, teachers and lecturers need to go through a process of reflection so as to discover which parts of their work needs to be improved or developed. Biggs (1999) emphasises that "*Reflection in professional practice, [contrary to reflection in a mirror], gives back not what is, but what might be, an improvement on the original*" (1999: 6). Moreover, he posits that teachers and lecturers elsewhere, need to be reflective practitioners in order to create an "*improved teaching environment suited to their own context*" (1999: 2). In addition to that, Morell (2008: 222), states that, "*Nothing is inevitable as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening*". He emphasizes that:

Contemplation is important because it forces us to think carefully about our conditions and then to think deeply about alternatives to those conditions. Once we imagine alternatives, we begin to understand the possibilities for transformation, for making the world anew, even if in our cases we are talking about the

world of the classroom (ibid.).

If one looks at the academic and research literacy practices as complex and contextually situated there are issues that need to be addressed separately because of the complexities of each and every context like the one under study. Therefore, the researcher sees herself playing an important role within the institution by trying to ascertain the existing situation and discern possible ways to promote academic growth and teacher development among English Foreign Language TTs and lecturers in the Department of Modern Languages, and perhaps in other departments and institutions, too.

Definition of some key concepts

In order to understand the discussion here presented, it is important to define some key terms first: literacy, academic literacy, research literacy, and constructive alignment. Other key concepts from the conceptual framework will be defined as they appear in the text.

Literacy

When people talk about literacy, they are implicitly talking about reading and writing as a central aspect of literacy; therefore, literacy is viewed as a learnt ability from formal education, which resides in people's heads and which facilitates logical thinking and active participation in the roles of modern society (Hyland, 2002: 53). Baynham (1995: 1) offers a broader conception of literacy: "*Investigating literacy as practice involves investigating literacy as concrete human activity, not just what people do with literacy, but also what they make of what they do the values they place on it and the ideologies that surround it.*" Street (1995) emphasises the complexity of literacy and argues from a social point of view that there is no single literacy, no dominant literacy: what exists is a wide variety of practices relevant to and appropriate for particular times, places, participants and purposes, and those practices constitute an integral part of the individual identity and the social relationships among specific community members (Street, 2007; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009). Barton & Hamilton (1998: 7) provide a useful summary of what literacy as social practice means:

Literacy as social practice

- Literacy is a set of social practices which can be inferred from written texts.
- There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
- Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.
- Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in wider social goals and practices.
- Literacy practices change through informal learning and sense-making.

Literacy is specific to particular historical times. (Barton & Hamilton, 1998: 7).

The social role of literacy shows how complex the meaning of writing can be as people can take different roles and identities in different literacy events. It also shows that writing can be situated in unequal social relationships of generation or gender within the home or community, (Street, 2007; Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009).

Academic literacy

It is generally believed that language is not simply a neutral carrier of our understandings but it is fundamentally implicated in the construction of meaning. Reading and writing are basic educational resources for constructing our relationships with others and for understanding our experience of the world, and as such they are centrally involved in the ways we negotiate meaning, construct and change our

understanding of our communities and ourselves. Leki (2007) defines academic literacies as “membership in communities of academic readers and writers” and goes on to relate academic literacies to the activity of interpretation and production of academic and discipline-based text often within important social contexts such as group-work project or written report, which rely profoundly on students’ experience with the text. However, TTS at ISCED seem to be facing problems in adapting themselves to the new dominant literacy, with its own norms, nomenclature, sets of conventions and modes of expression which are dictated by the new academic community (Bartholomae, 1986).

Every time a student sits down to write for us, s/he has to invent the university for the occasion- invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like History or Anthropology or Economics or English. S/he has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that defines the discourse of our community. (Bartholomae, 1986: 4).

Because academic ability is frequently evaluated in terms of students’ competence in a given written register, TTS find it sometimes very difficult to produce and see their own writing practices marginalised and regarded as being useless and meaningless by their lecturers. As a result there is lack of motivation and fear to try to produce a text which is approximate to the ones required within the academic community (Bartholomae, 1986).

Research literacy

Research is generally defined as a detailed study of something in order to discover new facts, especially in a university or scientific institution (Macmillan Dictionary, 2002: 1204). Research literacy involves the ability to design and successfully carry out a research project (Achilles & Dreyden, 2002: 6). Research Literacy is generally considered as part of Academic Literacy because its core function is the ability to engage critically with academic texts and produce a specific type of academic texts, i.e. a research report, a dissertation or a thesis. In this study, Research Literacy is understood as the ability to design and carry out research as well as the ability to successfully produce academically acceptable texts.

Constructive alignment

Constructive alignment is primarily concerned with what the student does with what is learnt and how well he does that, rather than with what the student learns. “*The alignment in constructive alignment reflects the fact that the learning activity in the intended outcomes, expressed as a verb, needs to be activated in the teaching if the outcome is to be achieved in the assessment task to verify that the outcome has in fact been achieved.*” (Biggs & Tang, 2007: 52). The alignment is constructive because it is based on the constructivist theory which postulates that students use their own activities to construct their knowledge, their world, or other outcomes.

This article is divided into five Parts. Part one presents the introduction and rationale for the article, the research questions and the definition of some key concepts. In Part two the theoretical framework underpinning the study is partially presented and discussed. In Part three a brief explanation of the research methodology is provided. Part four consists of data presentation and the main results. Part five provides the conclusions of the study and some recommendations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Biggs idea of Constructive Alignment

Biggs’ (1999) constructive alignment and the 3P Model was selected to support the conceptual framework

in this study because it is suitable to the reality on the grounds. Biggs' idea (1999) of constructive alignment came about as the result of an experiment with portfolio assessment in a bachelor programme with Psychology students. Students were used to being evaluated through the typical academic assignment in which the main aim was to see how well the theory and the relationship between the content of the subject matter and education were understood. It was then realised that although the assignment was academic, it had nothing to do with the experience and working space of the students. After all the ultimate goal of any professional education course has to do with the experience of the students and help improve their professional competence (Biggs, 1999: 50-51). However, this was far from happening.

In 1994, Biggs returned from a study leave in Canada to teach the third year of part-time Bed in-service teaching programme, where he had been very impressed by the use of portfolios in the assessment of elementary students. Therefore, he thought that such a type of assessment would be ideal for the course and bring up better results. At the beginning students felt quite apprehensive as they did not know what exactly the teacher wanted them to do and what items to select. Biggs (1999) suggested some item types and tried to exemplify them for the students to get an idea on how the process was meant to be. When the students submitted their portfolios, Biggs was astonished with the results that came up. The portfolios were so rich and exciting that most of the marks that the class received were characterised mostly by A and B grades.

As the author states, by that time he did not know that he was implementing a new way of assessment based on outcomes-based teaching and learning. It is only when he came to realise this new type of assessment that he started calling it "*constructive alignment*" (Biggs, 1999: 51). But why did the experiment with portfolio assessment work so well? Biggs answers this question in the following way:

...because the learning activities addressed in the intended outcomes were mirrored both in teaching/learning activities the students undertook, and in the assessment tasks. This design of teaching was called 'constructive alignment' (CA), as it was based on the twin principles of constructivism in learning and alignment in the design of teaching and assessment. (Biggs, 1999: 52".

The alignment is constructive because it is based on the constructivist theory which postulates that students use their own activities to construct their knowledge, their world, or other outcomes. This idea in its turn aligns to (Shuell, 1986: 429) statement that what students do is more important than what teachers and lecturers do. The intended outcomes are dictated by the type of learning activities that students are asked to perform as well as the level of engagement required from them. These in their turn depend on the content of the activities, the tasks designed by the teacher in relation to the intended learning outcomes as well as the learning environment where the process is likely to take place. The learning environment is an important factor in the teaching/learning process in that it encourages students to perform the learning activities at a higher level of thinking and then facilitates the assessment procedures which will dictate the learning outcomes while at the same time checking if they match with those.

Constructive alignment is primarily concerned with what the student does with what is learnt and how well he does that, rather than with what the student learns. To quote Biggs & Tang,

The alignment in constructive alignment reflects the fact that the learning activity in the intended outcomes, expressed as a verb, needs to be activated in the teaching if the outcome is to be achieved in the assessment task to verify that the outcome has in fact been achieved. Biggs & Tang, (2007: 52).

Thus, what counts most in the teaching and learning process is not what students learn but what they do with what they learn.

Research Supervision

Everywhere in the world, research should be viewed as playing the central role towards the development of

individuals in particular and the Society in general. Research supervision is an integral part of any higher teaching context and it has to do with the transference of the academic reading and writing skills into the research. Despite differences in detail in the supervision processes, most of the principles involved in research supervision are nearly similar across the world (Deuchar, 2008). There is a lot of research dealing with the issue of research supervision and most of that research has been from the supervisors' perspectives. To take an instance (Belcher, 1994; Hockey, 1996; Deuchar, 2008) look at supervision styles; Delamont et al. (2000) and Cryer (1997) offer some "guides to success" for supervisors; (Pearson & Brew, 2002; Manathunga, 2005) focus on supervisor training and development; and Dysthe (2002), Lee (2007), Makinnon (2004) and Grant (2010) provide models of supervisor-student relationships.

There is also a group of researchers who look at the gender and race issues as elements of autonomy and dependency (Johnson et al., 2000; Boud & Lee, 2005; Goode, 2007), which according to (Holligan, 2005) need to be interrogated and placed within a wider political context of govern mentality.

Furthermore, there is another group of researchers who focus on supervision as a form of pedagogy applying different models of learning-adult and peers (Haggis, 2002; Boud & Lee, 2005; Watson, 2000); and those who look at it as learning, as well as studies that examine specific aspects of the pedagogy that may or may not take place within supervision (Kamler & Thomson, 2004; Norton et al., 2005) and doctoral examination (Burnham, 1994; Hartley & Jory, 2000; Morley et al., 2002; Tinkler & Jackson, 2004). Those studies offer important insights with which lecturers and supervisors may reflect upon and analyse their own contexts and experiences of supervision.

As stated in the introduction, most of the students are taking a relatively longer time to get their work completed. Belcher (1994: 25) studied three graduate students' relationship with their supervisors within different disciplines and I concluded that while there are some students who succeed in becoming full-fledged contributors to their research communities without too much support from their mentors, the cases in her study pointed to the determinant factor that the student/supervisor relationship plays in the academic and professional success of the students. One of the major problems with research supervision is, perhaps, the fact that it is considered as an aspect of research rather than of teaching. Therefore, research supervision is often not given a formal timetable, classroom, or a specific programme to work on. Thus, it becomes something that supervisors have to carry out in their own time, rather than in properly allocated time as in the case of teaching. This in its turn can result in students being given inadequate supervision time, and place.

The fact is that for classroom practices there is observation and multiplicity of participants, who in this case are the students. As for supervision practices, none of the above-mentioned aspects applies. There is no specific classroom and the process is based on one-to-one interaction (Malfoy & Webb, 2000: 117). Therefore, as Delamont et al. (2000: 134) put it in the following way:

[T]here is ... a continuing lack of observational data on the actual conduct of the most private supervisory relationships. The data that are available, and that have been reported in recent years, consist almost exclusively of accounts, collected under the auspices of qualitative interview studies.

This makes research in research supervision somehow complex and difficult to understand. As a result, students tend to take longer to get their research reports finished on time and for most of the TTS at ISCED never get started. It is generally believed that the longer a student spends on doing research, the greater the possibility of not completing it; Therefore, "If completion within a given time is accepted as an aim-and most universities apparently do accept this since their regulations impose a maximum time within which the thesis must be completed- it follows that both the student and the supervisor must have some rudimentary timetable in their minds from the start

” (Rudd, 1985: 80).

Planning ahead is a key aspect in research supervision and setting up an action plan constitutes the main organisational point of start. However, this is not happening at ISCED. Thereafter comes the setting up of a timetable and place to meet. The relationship between supervisors and students also plays an important role within the process.

Some observational studies have been put in place to show the supervisor-student interactions within the supervision meetings and they are beginning to show some sort of evidence. However, there have been problems such as students failing or refusing to take turns in talk and fear to express themselves freely. Observational studies are therefore needed to help uncover what actually happens in supervisory meetings, and to build a clearer picture for understanding what “*doing supervision*” means in practice and how students survive the system from their own point of view. The reality shows that students need to be active participants in the research supervision sessions, not only in managing their time, tasks, and availability but also their supervisors’ and their interactions with them.

Below are Malfoy & Webb (2000: 134) suggested roles for supervisors:

- *Facilitator (providing support, advice and monitoring progression)*
- *Intellectual catalyst (supporting energy and motivation, developing mutual rapport)*
- *Mentor (distant but available, comfortable and supportive)*
- *Partner (an equal participant in the research project, a collaborator)*
- *Friend (a role characterised by trust, as of a “foster parent”).*

However, some supervisors at ISCED seem to be ignoring those roles. In most of the cases they do not seem to know how much advice and help to provide. As Rudd (1985: 115) postulates, “*Some supervisors, not through incompetence or neglect, but through genuine conviction, are adopting procedures for supervision with which most of their colleagues would disagree and which decrease the likelihood of the student completing*”.

Some supervisors believe that leaving students at their own responsibility is the best way of ensuring that they learn to do research. There are certainly many things that students cannot be told or taught. However, some sort of guidance is required if one wants students to learn something from the experience of doing research and the usefulness of that guidance depends primarily on the way the content subject in the Academic Reading, Writing and Research Methodology is addressed to students. Boote & Beile, (2005: 14) seem to be reinforcing my idea by assuming that graduate students are introduced into the research community through the reading and writing they do, through instruction in research methodology, and through interaction with faculty and their peers. Literature on supervisory practices has shown the potential difficulties encountered in the student-supervisor relationship. Mackinnon (2004: 399) provides an overall overview of the literature on post graduate supervision and posits that:

Much of the literature relating to postgraduate supervision has focused on its complexity, highlighting issues such as unclear, differing and sometimes incompatible expectations of students and supervisors, problems with interpersonal relationships between supervisor and student, diversity in the roles required of supervisors, lack of institutional policies or guidelines to support postgraduate students and the sense of isolation experienced by postgraduate students.

Good supervision should start from a good relationship between supervisor and student, based on mutual respect and humbleness. According to De Gruchy & Holness, (2007), supervising, in a broader context, can be defined as the ability to provide scientific and theoretical advice to students, as well to create and maintain the conditions for a good working atmosphere, based on a good relationship between the

supervisor and the student.

Good supervision will set the student on the road to solving problems or difficulties on his/her own, and this type of apprenticeship will be provided by the supervisor; however, there are some instances when the supervisor is not a well disciplined and organised person. To this end, Rudd (1985) argues that there are very few supervisors who feel that there is a need to make a plan and therefore are unable to convey that idea to their students as they do not see the need to do that. In order to meet the supervision demands, Dysthe (2002) and Lee (2007) propose models of supervision, and Grant (2010) provides a map where the supervisory relationships are described.

Biggs’ Constructive Alignment and the 3P Model

As previously stated, constructive alignment is primarily concerned with what the student does with what is learnt and how well he does that, rather than with what the student learns.

“The alignment in constructive alignment reflects the fact that the learning activity in the intended outcomes, expressed as a verb, needs to be activated in the teaching if the outcome is to be achieved in the assessment task to verify that the outcome has in fact been achieved.” (Biggs & Tang, 2007: 52).

By presenting the principle of “*constructive alignment*”, Biggs (1999: 11) state that in order to enhance optimum learning to students from impoverished learning backgrounds, opportunities should be given to them in order to enable them to perform higher order activities that otherwise only “*highly competent*” students would be able to do. Biggs (1999) suggests what he calls “*The 3P Model*” of teaching and learning which consists of *Presage*, *Process* and *Product* where all the components support each other and cannot work alone. This model illustrates the three main points in time at which learning related factors are placed: *Presage* (before learning takes place), *Process* (during the process of learning) and *Product* (the outcome of learning).

Biggs’ (1999) *3P Model* helped us understand better the teaching and learning system at ISCED, and to spot which parts in the system are not yet aligned and what might need to be done in order to get all the components in place. Following is an illustration of Biggs’ constructive alignment and the *3P model* of teaching and learning.

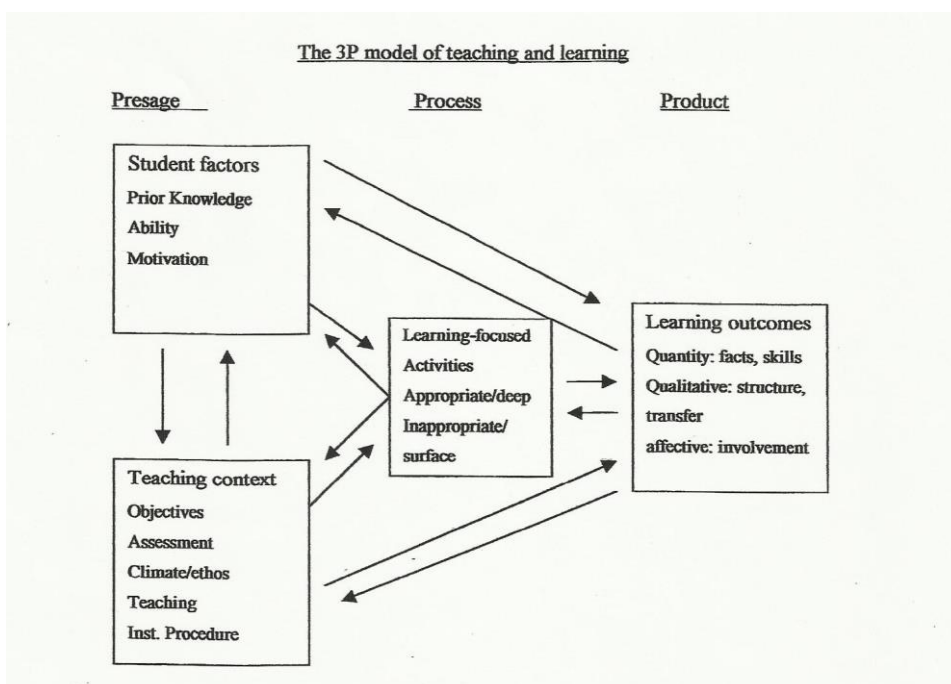


Figure 2.1 The 3P Model of teaching and learning[1]

As the table shows, *Presage factors* are of two types:

- **Student based:** the relevant prior knowledge and motivation the students bring to the new environment of study as well as ability, interest and commitment to study at a higher level.
- **Teaching context based:** the content to be taught, the way it will be taught and assessed, the teachers' level of knowledge of the discipline and ability to teach, as well as the classroom atmosphere and the institution's environment. These components are intrinsically connected to each other, in such a way that, if one component fails to support or collaborate with the others, there will be an imbalance within the teaching and learning system.

Process factors include the learning-focused activities that students are asked to perform throughout the course, and the type of approach they adopt to learning. The type of approach students adopt to learning is directly influenced by the type of approach lecturers adopt to teaching.

Product factors are translated in the intended learning outcomes (ILOs), in this specific case, the quantity and quality of students one gets at the end of each academic year and at the end of the four years of coursework. In principle, the students' learning outcomes at the Product stage should enable them to embark in a new teaching/learning stage, which is the writing of their research reports within the allocated time. The alignment in this model derives from students' background knowledge and abilities, and the teaching context (*objectives an institutional procedures*), which in turn will determine the level of cognitive processes that students are required to engage in (*recognising, relating, applying generating and reflecting*); and the result will be the learning outcomes (*students being able to complete their research proposals and/or research reports*). However, this does not seem to be happening at ISCED. For example, the students' prior knowledge and motivation when they join ISCED and the type and degree of difficulty of classroom tasks that students are exposed to during the four years of coursework, do not seem to prepare them for the final assessment which is writing the research proposal, followed by the writing of the research report; moreover, there is a tendency of students adopting surface approaches to learning in detriment to deep approaches.

The intended learning outcomes should be translated into the academic level achieved by the students after four years of coursework as well as the ability to write the research proposal and the final research report. Taking Biggs & Tangs (2007) example of driving instruction, the intention is that the learner learns how to drive a car, not receiving lectures on car driving. Therefore 'car driving' is the verb to take into account in all components of instruction (the intended learning outcomes, the teaching/learning activities and the assessment procedures). "The alignment is achieved by ensuring that the intended verb in the outcomes statement is present in the teaching/learning activity and in the assessment task" (Biggs & Tang, 2007:52). With regards to education, the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) are always translated in a helpful verb (e.g. reflect, apply theory on...), that guides the teacher to achieve the outcomes. Specification of these verbs help clarify the kind of tasks to design, in Biggs & Tang's, words, the type of teaching learning activities (TLAs) that students should be engaged in and determine what students need to perform in the assessment tasks (ATs).

As Biggs & Tang (2007) point out, in a teaching and learning system, the teaching and assessment procedures need to be aligned to the learning objectives, and all the components should support each other in order to achieve a common goal. "*As a system, if any component fails to corroborate, it is the whole work that gets jeopardised. Such a failure in teaching and learning situation, leads to, poor teaching and surface learning*" (Biggs & Tang, 2007: 14). Surface approaches to learning are based on students' strategies to get the task done with minimum effort, using low cognitive levels when higher level activities are required to perform the same task properly. Examples of surface approach to learning in an academic environment are: rote learning, listing points instead of addressing the argument, quoting secondary sources instead of primary ones

etc. When teaching and assessment methods are not aligned, surface learning can likely occur.

According to Biggs & Tang (2007: 23), the presence of surface approach to learning is always a sign that something is ‘out of kilter’ in our teaching or in our assessment methods.

When students use surface approaches to learning they tend to focus on what Marton & Booth (1997) call “*signs of learning*”. They use isolated facts, pre-selected words and items are treated independently of each other. This fact prevents students from seeing what those signs mean and store knowledge in a structured way. As the proverb says, students cannot see the wood from the trees, and learning becomes a burden in their lives, something to avoid whenever possible. Anxiety, cynicism, and boredom are some the adjectives that Biggs & Tang (2007) use to describe students’ feelings. Biggs & Tang (2007: 9) provide a comprehensive account of the route that students have to follow towards engaging with higher-order cognitive activities that are compatible with developing academic reading and writing skills.

It is worth mentioning at this point that the idea of aligning assessment tasks with the intended learning outcomes dates from many years ago and it was very obvious; it is referred to as “*criterion-referenced assessment*” and it translates the assessment procedures that anyone outside educational institutions does when teaching anyone else anything. However, educational institutions became more interested in determining the role of the assessment tasks in the teaching/learning process, to see “*who learnt better than whom*” (Biggs & Tang, 2007: 53). This was just helpful in situations whereby people were trying to select people to occupy a specific job or post or allocating a scholarship to a number of people. For educational institutions, the aim of teaching is more than deciding who is learning better than whom; what educational institutions are looking for is better ways of teaching, to allow students to learn the content of the subjects at an acceptable level, aligning the learning activities with the assessment tasks to the learning outcomes.

The theory in any given course is not only meant to be understood and learnt by students but mainly to change the way they see the world and their behaviour within and outside the learning community (Biggs & Tang, 2007: 53). It is generally assumed that all ‘good teachers’ have some implicit idea on how they want their students to change on the basis of their teaching methodology and techniques, and all other teaching instruments at their disposition that they use to make their teaching as effective as possible. Thus whatever lecturers do in the classroom will be oriented towards achieving that change. To sum up, a constructively aligned teaching system systematizes what teachers have to do: to state beforehand the intended learning outcomes, but with a room for new outcomes to emerge although they were not anticipated. After all constructive aligned system does not only focus on what is pre-determined, it also focuses on the unintended but desirable outcomes.

The main difference between a constructive aligned system and other outcomes-based approaches lies in the fact that the connections between the intended learning outcomes (ILOs), the teaching/learning activities (TLAs) and assessment tasks (ATs) are so intrinsically aligned that the missing of one will make a gap in the system and change the intended outcomes. Biggs & Tang (2007: 53) postulate that in most of the outcomes-based models; the alignment exists only between the ILOs and the ATs, not additionally between the ILOs and the TLAs. Constructive alignment is therefore “*a marriage between a constructivist understanding of the nature of learning and an aligned design for teaching that is designed to lock students into deep learning*” (Biggs & Tang, 2007: 55). With regard to the issue of an aligned system the most important components within a teaching learning system are: the curriculum, the learning or instructional objectives and the assessment procedures.

The curriculum

The term curriculum is a very broad concept and, in this study, it refers to the whole content that students acquire in schools. The history of curriculum design in language teaching started with the notion of syllabus

design, which is one aspect of curriculum development but is not a synonym of curriculum development. A syllabus is a specification of the content of a course of instruction and lists what will be taught and tested over a period of time, generally for an academic year (Hyland, 2001). To this end, a syllabus for a writing course might specify the kinds of writing skills that will be taught and practised during the course, the different stages of writing, the processes to be practised, such as quoting, paraphrasing, referencing, and editing, and the order in which they will appear in the course.

Syllabus design consists of the process of developing the syllabus, while curriculum design looks at a more “*comprehensive process*” (Hyland, 2001). Curriculum design includes processes that are used to determine the students’ needs and develop aims and objectives for a programme to address those needs; also, it determines the type of syllabus to be used, the course structure and content, the teaching methods and materials, as well as it evaluates the results from the whole process. To paraphrase White et al. (1991), a curriculum covers not only the content but also the goals of the teaching programme as well as the activities which will form part of the learning experiences and practices of a given group of students. To show the dimensions of the term curriculum, Rodgers, (1989: 26) comments that

Curriculum is all those activities in which [students] engage under the auspices of the school. This includes not only what [students] learn, but how they learn it, how teachers help them learn, using what supporting materials, styles and methods of assessment and in what kind of facilities. (Rodgers, 1989)”.

A curriculum is concerned with objectives, methods and content, and the matching up of outcomes with objectives involves evaluation that will help determine whether the teaching learning system is aligned or not.

The specification of the learning objectives followed by a plan on how to achieve them using the human and material resources available constitute key aspects in evaluating a curriculum. The outcomes are evaluated by comparing the achievements with the pre-established objectives. In the specific context of this study, the curriculum model will be based on the content to be taught throughout the four years of course work with special regards to the core course subject areas (Academic Reading, Writing, and Research Methodology I and II), the kind of methodology in use in order to transmit the knowledge to students, and the main objectives for teaching that content; all those elements together will lead to a stage of evaluation of the product (TTS at the end of the course) and their competence to produce the research reports on time.

Learning objectives

Felder & Silverman (2002) regard learning or instructional objectives as statements of specific observable actions or behaviours that students should be able to act and demonstrate as an evidence of having accomplished the objectives. They argue that:

Well-formulated instructional objectives are more than just an advance warning for your system to students. They can help you to prepare lecture and assignment schedules and to spot course material that the students can do little with but memorise and repeat. They also facilitate construction of in- class ... [and] out-of-class [activities] (2002: 78).

Most of these instructional objectives, rather than being clear detailed statements of observable actions that students are supposed to act on i.e. objectives that give students guidance in reading, expressing themselves in writing in a variety of genres, will be more like what they (lecturers) *have to do*, or what they have to do about writing. For instance, it would be important to know which abilities or what level of thinking (comparing, analysing, synthesising and evaluating, to cite a few) students are required to engage in each task or year of the course.

Detailed instructional objectives can help stratify the goals within each course and among other courses. This, in turn can help avoid both unwanted duplication of materials and gaps in the curriculum as well as assisting lecturers of subsequent courses to be aware of what their students should have learnt previously.

However, Biggs & Tang (2007) call our attention to the need to differentiate between **“learning objectives”** (LO) and **“intended learning outcomes”** (ILOs). To them, the term ‘intended learning outcomes’ is more complete/ broader than ‘learning objectives’ because it “emphasises more than does ‘objective’ that we are referring to what the student has to learn rather than what the teacher has to teach” (2007: 70). Intended learning outcomes refer to what students are able to perform after the teaching that they could not perform before it; it also has to do with what students can do after teaching even though it was not intended in the outcomes. Therefore, rather than just looking at the behavioural objectives, the ILOs are seen from the students’ perspectives, skills and abilities acquired from the learning process. They go further to argue that verbs such as *to comprehend*, *to be aware of*, *to understand*, are not useful as they do not translate the level of performance required to meet the demands of the ILOs. Even the verb ‘to demonstrate’ does not convey the level of students’ performance within the ILOs perspective, as it leaves answered some questions. With the ILOs we need to make a statement about what students’ learning would look like after they have learnt (‘expectancy-value theory’), to the acceptable learning outcomes; defining that the outcome of learning is important” (Biggs & Tang, 2007).

The table on the next page shows the complexity of the ILOs. The more ILOs a programme has, the more difficult it will be to align them with teaching /learning activities and assessment tasks. Unlike the learning objectives, the ILOs go beyond the stage of asking students to memorise and reproduce the information, they ask students to explain, interpret, analyse, justify, and make their own judgement about the information learnt.

Table 2.2 From learning objectives to intended learning outcomes[\[2\]](#)

Learning objectives	Intended learning outcomes
<i>1. To provide an understanding of the three stages in writing</i>	<i>1. To describe the basic stages that writers go through in order to produce a text</i>
<i>2. To develop an analytical understanding of the way texts are structured</i>	<i>2. Using different samples of texts students have to identify the way texts are structured</i>
<i>3. To make students aware of the danger of using plagiarism</i>	<i>3. To identify and explain instances in a text where plagiarism is</i>
<i>4. To find authors arguments in a text</i>	<i>4. To find and provide counter arguments to those of the writer.</i>

In most of the teaching situations, students are required to learn the subject matter content and express that knowledge in the written tasks designed by the lecturers. In doing so, lecturers are just checking how well students have learnt the content of a subject rather than how well students can apply that content to different situations (i.e. problem solving). As a result, lecturers are likely to assess their students at the level of the teaching/learning objectives using **“surface approaches”** to teaching/learning, but not with the ILOs in mind- **“deep approaches to teaching/learning”**.

Students in general and TTS in particular need to be exposed to new teaching situations of the type of deep approaches to learning, and face new problems and interact with them along the teaching/learning process, reflectively and thoughtfully. Skills such as, predicting, reflecting, diagnosing, explaining, and solving real-life problems need to be activated. Lectures at higher levels of schooling ought to be aware of this. Building

such performances of understanding into the ILOs, aligning teaching to them and designing assessment tasks that confirm that students can or cannot carry out those performances, is a good way to start with (Biggs & Tang, 2007: 73).

Assessment procedures

Once a curriculum is in place, before we start looking at the assessment procedures as they were, a number of important questions emerge and need to be asked:

- *Is the curriculum achieving its goals?*
- *What is happening in the classrooms?*
- *What kind of teaching methods are being used?*

Curriculum evaluation is concerned with answering questions such as the above mentioned, and it focuses on collecting information about different aspects of a language program so as to understand how the programme works, how productive it is, leading to a stage of decision making. Issues such as whether the programme is responding to the learners' needs, if further teacher training is needed for those who are involved in the process and the overall students' outcomes are also addressed. Hyland (2001: 287) enumerates the main aspects to consider in evaluating a curriculum. Among those, the most important are:

- ***The syllabus and program content:*** for example, how relevant and engaging it is, how easy or difficult, how successful tests and assessment procedures were;
- ***Classroom processes:*** to provide insights about the extent to which a programme is being implemented appropriately;
- ***Materials of instruction:*** to provide insights about whether specific materials are aiding student learning;
- ***The teachers:*** for example, how they conducted their teaching, what their perceptions were of the program, what they taught;
- ***The students:*** for example, what they learnt from the programme, their perceptions of it, and how they participated in it;
- ***Learner motivation:*** to provide insights about the effectiveness of the teachers in aiding students to achieve goals and objectives of the programme;
- ***The institution:*** for example, what administrative support was provided' what resources were used, what communication networks were employed;
- ***Learning environment:*** to provide insights about the extent to which students are provided with a responsive environment in terms of their educational needs;
- ***Staff development:*** to provide insights about the extent to which the school system provides the staff opportunities to increase their effectiveness;
- ***Decision making:*** to provide insights about how well the school staff-principals, teachers, and others-make decisions that result in learner benefits. (Hyland, 2001: 287).

Perhaps it would be better to distinguish between two important terms: evaluation and assessment.

The most confusing words often discussed by authors are assessment and evaluation. They are occasionally used interchangeably. In fact, it is difficult to discern the difference between them, as different authors talk about them in a synonymous way. While Hyland & Hyland (2003: 30), for instance, describe evaluation as being "*The systematic gathering of information for purposes of decision making*", and state that "*The evaluation of individuals involves decisions about entrance to programmes, placement, progress and achievement*", Ur (1991: 33) presents assessment as being used "*...to decide whether he or she (testee) is suitable for a certain class*". On the other hand, Hyland & Hyland (2003: 30) assert that, "*In language teaching programmes, evaluation is related to decisions to be made about the quality of the programme itself, and decisions about individuals in the programmes*".

”, stating, at the same time, that “*Assessment is the measurement of the ability of a person or the quality or success of a teaching course, etc*” (1992: 23).

Despite the fact that most definitions of evaluation and assessment overlap, it is possible to make a clear and more accurate distinction between these terms. Then, it can be asserted that *assessment* has to do with the students through the learning process, that is, how well they are doing, how far they are, etc, whereas *evaluation* has to do with checking the materials and programmes used to make the learning process happen. In other words, assessment corresponds to “*...learner performance*” and evaluation corresponds to “*...innovation or change in, for example, school organization or a course syllabus*” (Ur, 1991: 244).

Assessment is a multi-faceted concept that links together all the elements in a teaching-learning process. “It is the means by which students’ language learning development and achievements are monitored over time” (Hedge, 2000: 376).

Assessment can be applied for different purposes. From the pedagogical purposes, *formative assessment* is usually applied to help teachers gain information about the students’ progress for further classroom work and improvement. The second purpose of assessment is to measure students’ level of achievement in a specific subject, this is *summative assessment*. Summative assessment has to fit into the administrative requirements of an institution, for example a school curriculum in which all the subjects have to be assessed. Sometimes the results from schools and institutions may be compared at local, national or international level, to set up standards. (Hedge, 2000) presents a table which summarises some of the distinguishing features of *formative* and *summative assessment*. Please refer to table 2.3 below.

Table 2.3 Differences between formative and summative assessment[\[3\]](#)

<i>Formative assessment</i>	<i>Summative assessment</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is prepared and carried out by the class teacher as a routine part of teaching and learning.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It is necessarily prepared and carried out by the class teacher.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Is specifically related to what has been taught, i.e. content is in harmony with what has been taught.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Does not necessarily relate immediately to what has been taught.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The information from the assessment is used diagnostically; it is focused on the individual learner’s specific strengths and weaknesses, needs, etc.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The judgement about a learner’s performance is likely to feed into record-keeping and be used for administrative purposes, e.g. checking standards and targets.</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It is frequently externally imposed, e.g. by an institution or a ministry of education</i>

It should be emphasised that contrary to summative assessment, formative assessment is mainly focused on the learning process and it is concerned with the students’ progress as it happens and identifying ways of helping them (students) along the process. For the summative assessment, the main focus is on the results of learning, e.g. identifying overall levels of students’ achievement and measuring what they do against them.

It can therefore be inferred that, while formative assessment has to do with students' performance along the learning process, evaluation has to do with the curriculum implementation and results, development of school organization, course syllabus and materials.

–What aspects of language proficiency are assessed in short form tests as opposed to essay writing such as the end-of-course research reports?

Most of the short form tests are generally contextualised exercises. These types of tests, it is believed, require relatively less cognitive effort for students to answer them. If this is the case, it could be possible for students to go through up to the fourth year without actually developing the academic aspects of language proficiency. The real challenge comes at the end of the four years of course work when students who have always been assessed through short tests, are asked to write the research report. Faced with the real task of identifying a problem, designing the research proposal and, reading, gathering information, analysing it and writing up the whole research report, most students, as already stated, just cannot do that.

It could then be claimed that this type of ongoing assessment does not build up student writing competence and confidence so that they are able to write the final research projects successfully. Instead, it could be said that it promotes surface learning strategies such as memorisation and reproduction, which aims to gather marks rather to help students master the skills (Biggs, 1999). A student studying in a deep teaching/learning environment will certainly employ some of these strategies depending on the learning moment. However, on their own, these strategies fail to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the task, which is likely to make it difficult for students to apply what they have learnt in real life situations.

Learning by doing, which has become lecturers' common-sense principle particularly in writing over the last few decades, has now attracted attention and changed the assessment direction. As Kutz et al. (1996: 83) put it,

The more students write as part of their learning and working with others, the more effectively they will engage in the process of discovery, struggle, and intellectual growth and the more they will be able to articulate what they take out of this process.

Some traditional assessment practices have led students to a dependency on the lecturers in making decisions about what they know, preventing them from judging for themselves. Therefore, we need to find ways of giving students opportunities to assess themselves and to learn from their own and their colleagues' mistakes. We need to make a move from *norm referenced* to *criterion referenced* assessment (Knight, 1995). As Knight (1995: 39) maintains,

Students must leave University equipped to engage in self-assessment throughout their professional lives. They need to be able to make reliable judgements about what they do and do not know and what they can and cannot do.

Students need to be exposed to learning activities that train them to become more autonomous and interdependent learners, and this is only possible if lecturers provide them with a lot of practice and feedback. The main goal of assessment should therefore be to develop better assessment practices in order to answer questions such as: to what extent is what we thought to be effective is really effective and what we intended to happen is really happening?

The problem is that the credibility of our work depends to a large extent on the adequacy of the assessment procedures we have in place. The challenge is therefore to ensure that teaching does not focus only on lower cognitive levels but also at the higher cognitive levels of thinking. These skills must be assessed and not just written in document papers. We need to start practising '*good assessment*' which translated in Knight's

(1995: 42) words “...is that which both closely reflects desired learning outcomes and on which the process of assessment has directly beneficial influence on the learning process.” Knight calls our attention to the fact that

Assessment is a critical focus of attention in any programme for university teachers, not simply because of the considerable time and effort it demands, but also because of the dilemmas it posits in trying to reconcile the tension between the summative purposes of assessment-for-grading and formative purposes of assessment-for-learning (Knight, 1995: 126).

Biggs & Tang (2007: 169) state that while teachers and lecturers see the intended learning outcomes as the central pillar of an aligned teaching system, students do not. From the students’ point of view, assessment defines what the curriculum is about and they will only learn what they think they will be tested on. Thus, “...assessment may determine what and how students learn more than the curriculum does” (Elton, 1987: 92). Therefore, as with the ILOs, assessment needs to be aligned with the content of the lessons and the lecturers’ methodology, in other words, assessment has to be aligned with what students should be learning and the activities they are engaged in.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the study was to examine the academic and research literacy practices of Teacher Trainees at ISCED and investigate the difficulties they experience when undertaking research and writing their final research reports. The major question that guided the study was “*In what ways do academic and research literacy practices contribute to the successful completion of a research report?*” Therefore, the research design needed in order to carry out the study is discussed and the research instruments and the procedures of data collection and data analysis are presented and discussed.

Research Design

As the study was mainly exploratory, I decided on a phenomenological approach. Drawing from Thomas (2009: 76) assumption that “...*there is no clear or disinterested knowledge*”, that people have feelings and understandings that affect the way they see and interpret their world we have decided to take phenomenology as an approach to undertake this research. According to Thomas (2009), phenomenology attempts to get insightful descriptions of the ways members of a specific living community see and interpret their world on the basis of the lived experiences. Phenomenology as a research approach helped understand and interpret the meaning of the phenomena being studied, from the participants’ points of view and to look at the way they interrelate; it also helped in considering what participants think and how they form ideas about their world; in other words, how they construe their own world (Holliday, 2007: 16). It is therefore assumed that each and every participant has his or her own experiences which might be similar or different from other participants’ experiences.

There are two major assumptions that underlie phenomenology:

First- what counts most for phenomenology is the individual’s lived experiences. Human life can only be understood from within a social living context and the ways individuals interact and interpret that world.

Second- social life is with no doubt a distinctively human product. People can only make themselves understandable within their own contexts. By studying individuals in their own context, the researcher was in a better position to understand the participants’ perceptions and the way they perform their activities. In this study it is believed that there is no single truth that can explain the world, but people can always approximate to the real truth by moving from the simple to the complex, from particular to general.

Although the study is mainly qualitative, in a loose sense, a combination with quantitative data is used as a starting point for the discussion. Therefore, questionnaires served as a basis for analysing data together with classroom observation and some textual analysis (students' research proposals and reports).

Research Site and Research Sample

This research was carried out at ISCED in Luanda, Angola. The research sample of the study includes the Deputy Director of the Academic Affairs Department (DDAAD), five lecturers and eighteen TES from the English Department. As for the interviews, six (6) general subject lecturers, four (4) content subject lecturers and 18 Students composing three different groups participated in the focus groups interviews. For the focus group interviews, Students were grouped into three categories comprising six students each:

- Type 1 Students – *who have successfully completed their research reports (6 students)*
- Type 2 Students – *who are currently writing their research reports (6 students)*
- Type 3 Students – *who have not succeeded in writing their research reports (6 students)*

For the questionnaires all Year Four TES (35 students), were selected and all lecturers from the English section.

Research Instruments

As stated before, the main data collection methods were interviews. Interviews were chosen as the main research instrument because they allowed me to tap into the experiences of both lecturers and TES. Interviews can provide rich and valid data if well designed, implemented and interpreted by the researcher. According to Charmaz (2006), obtaining rich data means seeking thick descriptions through compilation of detailed narratives from transcribed interviews. Interviews were basically focus groups with the exception of the interview with the DDAAD which consisted in a semi-structured interview. The informants were to some extent free to express their views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as suggest some solutions to solve the problem; they could take different directions under the researcher's guidance and I tried not to interfere and influence their responses. The interviews and questionnaires were tested before the actual study took place. Among all the research instruments the interview was the one that provided more thoughtful and informative answers on sensitive issues especially from students about their lecturers. As the process of interviewing went on the researcher not only got explanations about issues raised by students but I also could read feelings and emotions expressed by them. To this end the interview provided a complete and more in-depth picture than any other instrument.

The interviews

According to Hyland (2002: 181), interviews enable informants to discuss their understandings of the world and express themselves freely on how they see the problem(s) from their own point of view. Consequently, in qualitative research, they can be a valuable source of information. In this research the main reason for using interviews was to fulfil the three main purposes they play in education research as:

1. *The principal source of information;*
2. *A means of listing hypothesis and generating new ones;*
3. *A means of triangulation and cross-checking data.*

Data from the interviews was collected under specific categories, as referred to earlier. With the exception of the interview with the Deputy Director of Academic Affairs Department, the interviews were basically informal in order to create a more relaxed environment and get more information from the participants. Both lecturers and TTs were organised in focus groups, not only to save time but also to create conditions that

would facilitate participation in the discussion and so would generate more varied and solid data. Because the main research instrument was based on qualitative research participants were helped to express their views of the phenomenon in their own words, with the researcher's indirect participation (Gall et al., 2007: 245). The role of the researcher was to guide participants in their interaction and not to interfere or speak on their behalf.

Classroom observation

Any study that examines how teaching and learning takes place in context, uses classroom observation as the one of the research instruments. Wragg, (1999) describes classroom research as a key research instrument in understanding teachers and lecturers' behaviours during the teaching and learning process. Classroom research dates from 1920s to 1930s, in the United States of America, with researchers seeking to understand the effectiveness of teacher behaviours and teacher talk. Modern classroom research, however, started much later in the 1950s, as part of the teacher training courses when trainers decided that they needed proper observation instruments and quality teaching in order to evaluate their TES' performance in the teaching practice sessions.

With the emergence of the so called "*methods comparison studies*" by Nunan (2005) that consisted of comparing different teaching methods, for example the Direct Method to more traditional approaches in the language teaching area, classroom research became one of the commonest used research instruments in educational research. From that time on, a salient move from teacher training to more basic research was noticed. This resulted in a refinement of the instruments used for classroom observation. Observation schedules and schemes which were primarily descriptive were replaced by more elaborate checklists that served descriptive purposes and a number of standardized observation schemes were published. The most famous scheme published was Flander's Interaction Analysis Categories (FIAC) (see Alwright & Baley, 1991).

The observation was mainly structured, based on a classroom observation scheme to fill in. However, there were some instances where the researcher combined it with unstructured observation based on field notes.

Textual analysis

Textual analysis constitutes an important source of information. Rather than relying on what participants say, textual analysis allows us to see what participants actually do in their real world. Qualitative data is typically textual, and the qualitative categories used in textual analysis are "*not pre-determined but derived inductively*" from the data analysed ((D?rnyei, 2007).

Textual analysis has recently become associated with qualitative research and we can therefore easily forget that it actually originates from a quantitative analytical method of examining written texts that involves the counting of instances of words, phrase, or grammatical structures that fall into specific categories (D?rnyei, 2007: 245).

However, for the purposes of this study we are using a combination of the two. As mentioned before, the texts that were analysed were samples of students' research proposals and research reports. In order to analyse these documents, it was necessary to set up some criteria. As textual analysis is mainly based on non-numeric data, we applied a content based analytical process. Apart from the content of the documents, the general organisation of the Parts and layout of students' research proposals and projects were analysed at both the *sentence level* to check the syntactic, morphological and lexical problems that students had (Kroll, 2001), and at the *discourse level* to check their ability to display features of organisation and coherence.

At the sentence level every syntactic, lexical and morphological error was identified and grouped into

categories such as verb noun collocation. In order to decide whether an error was made Kroll's (2001) criteria in analysing her students' compositions was used. The procedure to determine whether an error was made, consisted of identifying what lexical or grammatical items deviated from the Standard English norm (Kroll, 2001); then errors were classified under categories. For the specific purposes of this study the analysis at the sentence level were left out and the study concentrated on the discourse level analysis which is typically qualitative.

At the discourse level the analysis was based on the ability of students to display features of organisation and coherence in their papers. The criteria for analysis were based on Connor's (1990) topic analysis. This analysis was considered in two different instances: the global coherence (what the essay is about) and the local coherence (how sentences build meaning in relation to each other and to the overall topic). This concept was adapted to include Kroll's (2001) scoring guidelines and resulted in the following assessment rubric:

- *Focus on the topic*- the ability to address the essay question.
- *Stressing the main idea*- the ability to tell the reader what the issue is about.
- *Supporting the main ideas*- the ability to provide evidence to support the main idea/s.
- *Logical sequencing of ideas*- in Connor's words (1990), "*local cohesion*", the ability to look at the way sentences build meaning in relation to each other and the overall text.
- *Identifiable schematic structure*- to check whether the structure of the text is compatible to the genre in use. See (Kroll, 2001: 144).

Textual analysis helped understand TES' academic writing and research practice problems as well as the core subject lecturers and supervisors' assessment procedures.

Data Analysis

The process of data collection is followed by data analysis. Data was analysed under the same categories as in the questionnaires and interviews using the main aspects discussed in the literature review. Using the phenomenological approach to qualitative data analysis, the analysis was based on the interpretive philosophy to understand and interpret the content of the data. In an effort to understand participants' perceptions, attitudes, knowledge, values feelings and experience, an attempt was made to approximate respondents' reality to the existing observable reality.

This was best accomplished through the use of '*inductive analyses* of qualitative data where the main purpose is to allow the dominant and significant themes to emerge from the overwhelming raw data. That means that as we were using a qualitative paradigm as the main research instrument, we were fully aware of submitting ourselves to emerging patterns of data and we were free to engage with realities that went beyond our pre-established themes (Holliday, 2007: 92).

Since this is a qualitative content analysis, the qualitative categories applied in the analysis were derived through induction process while the process was occurring, rather than predetermined, as in quantitative approaches. D'nyei, (2007: 245) reinforces this idea by stating that "*...unlike their pre-conceived quantitative counter parts, the qualitative categories used in content analysis are not predetermined but are derived inductively from the data analysed.*" This explains the need to allow room for the emergent themes.

D'nyei (2007: 246) also provides a clear distinction between quantitative and qualitative content analysis by referring to the former as "*manifest level*" analysis because it is an objective and descriptive account of the surface meaning of the data, and the latter as "*latent level*" analysis, because it concerns a second-level, interpretive analysis of the underlying deeper meaning of data. By using latent content analysis, all the collected data was dealt with using a multi-level coding system to allow the analytical process to occur

efficiently. Furthermore, memos, vignettes and interviews profiles were produced throughout the process to help the next stage, i.e. interpretation, reflection, run smoothly (Dörnyei, 2007: 245-55).

In order to help organise data Holliday's (2007:90) thematic approach to data analysis was used. He argues, and we follow his line of reasoning, that "... *taking a purely thematic approach, in which data is taken holistically and rearranged under themes which emerge as running through its totality, is the classic way to maintain the principle of emergence.*"

What follows is a brief presentation of part of the results from the study.

DATA DESCRIPTION AND MAIN RESULTS

Acquiring Academic and Research Literacy Skills

From the information gathered it was noticed that students are acquiring academic and research literacy skills under inadequate conditions such as lack of an updated library and a proper computer lab. Although lecturers might have a sound academic of the subjects they teach, it was noticed that they are making very little effort to improve the quality of teaching; in most of the lessons observed, they are using the one-way transmission model, where students are expected to just listen to the lecturer and react only when required by the lecturers. This fact is confirmed by the participants who state that very few lecturers use discussion in their classrooms and pair and group work activities are rarely set up. The teaching of the core subjects is also another problematic issue that participants discussed; lecturers tend to teach rules, to teach theory instead of presenting students with practical activities. From the observed lessons for instance, I noticed that students were not encouraged to become active makers of meaning, to think critically, to argue, to compare, to develop their own positions and value different points of view.

With regards to teaching writing, the kind of tasks that were set up in the observed lessons did not engage students in tasks that required more analysis, synthesis, research, and critical thinking skills to extend their writing abilities.

Writing as a skill is listless, endless and flat. Therefore, students need to be engaged in tasks that require synthesis and analysis in order for them to understand the language features of academic language. Students need to learn the differences between spoken and written English and move from what Cummins (1996) calls less cognitively demanding tasks to high cognitively demanding ones. The other problem that was found in both interviews and questionnaires was the provision of feedback. The provision of feedback on students writing is central to the teaching methodology in higher education. Feedback practices may take the form of oral or written feedback but as stated before, feedback practices of the kind of corrective feedback were quite scant and in all the lectures observed and it was noticed that lecturers did not provide proper feedback to students. Feedback plays an important role in the teaching and learning process and it has been proved through research that it enables students to assess their performances, modify their behaviour, build and develop critical thinking skills and transfer their understandings to the various facts they see in the World around them. (Brinko, 1993).

For learning to take place students need to receive feedback on their language problems and be allowed time to reflect and correct their mistakes either in pairs or individually. Reflection and feedback go hand by hand and they are the key features in education especially at higher levels of education.

Deploying Academic and Research Literacy Skills in the Production of Research Reports

In higher education what matters most is not what students can reproduce but what they can produce and construct by themselves. Looking at the samples of students' research proposals and research reports it was

noticed that students have great difficulties in deploying academic and research literacy skills. Actually, it has to be admitted that students have serious difficulties with academic writing, more precisely in critical thinking and it can be inferred that it is their weak writing skills that are preventing them from writing their research proposals and/or reports.

From students' document analysis it was learnt that students show great weaknesses in writing an academic piece of paper; for example, they have problems in selecting the correct vocabulary, they have problems in using correct grammar and punctuation, and they also have serious problems in spelling. Summarising ideas or information from other sources is something that they hardly can do and they also have problems in structuring their work in a logical sequence. Quoting and paraphrasing are also other signs of weaknesses in writing and they do not seem to be aware of the dangers of practising plagiarism; they copy chunks of texts from several sources without referencing to them. Apart from the above-mentioned aspects it was felt that critical thinking skills need to be introduced in the academic and research literacy practices of these TTs.

Students need to know what constitutes plagiarism, what is common knowledge, when to use quotations, when to paraphrase, and how to cite sources appropriately. Lea & Street, (2006) maintain that the problem for many students in different areas of professionalization is lack of knowledge of how to argue and how to support their arguments with evidence and not properly lack of general knowledge in essay or research report writing techniques. According to Lave & Wenger, (1991) learning should not be seen as matter of replicating the performance of others or acquiring knowledge through instruction and reproducing it as it was delivered; to them, learning should occur through a process of active participation in the 'communities of practice', where students are encouraged to do some peer-feedback, 'through centripetal participation in the learning curriculum of the ambient community'.

The teaching of writing should therefore focus not only on text production processes and language forms and structure (genre), aspects that students lack already, but also focus on the requirements of an academic community of practice which are beyond knowledge and individual text production of a particular genre. As we discussed before, there is a need to differentiate between '*learning objectives*' (LO) and '*intended learning outcomes*' (ILOs) (Biggs & Tang, 2007: 70). The 'intended learning outcomes' in a course programme carry a broader meaning than the '*learning objectives*' because they place more value on what the student learns and not what the teacher has to teach. Intended learning outcomes refer to what students are able to perform after the teaching that they could not perform before it; it also has to do with what students can do after teaching even though it was not intended in the outcomes. Therefore, rather than just looking at the behavioural objectives, ILOs are seen from the students' perspectives, skills and abilities acquired from the learning process. Apparently, the teaching and learning programme seems to be placing more attention on the learning objectives rather than on the intended learning outcomes as it is translated in the students' difficulties to produce their research reports. Once again, it should be emphasised that lack of a writing centre or even a students' club where students would go and socialise, are, among many factors, some of the main hindrances that are preventing students from completing their studies.

Curriculum Alignment and the Production of the Research Reports

As stated before, the term curriculum is a very broad concept and, in this study, it refers to the whole content that students are acquiring from the coursework. Curriculum design includes processes that are used to determine the students needs and develop aims and objectives for a programme to address those needs; also, it determines the type of syllabus to be used, the course structure and content, the teaching methods and materials, as well as it evaluates the results from the whole process. To paraphrase White et al. (1991), a curriculum covers not only the content but also the goals of the teaching programme as well as the activities which will form part of the learning experiences and practices of a given group of students.

As previously stated, the course components (the curriculum, the objectives, methods, the learning activities

and the assessment procedures) that constitute the teaching and learning system at ISCED are not yet aligned (Biggs, 1999). For instance, the exit assessment of the course is a research report comprising between 45 to 65 pages while students would have been assessed during the entire course mostly through short form individual tests and a few short essays (2-5 pages). In other words, there is no alignment between the formative assessment and the final assessment which is writing the research report. In the case of ISCED one can probably speculate that as most students join ISCED courses with very limited background knowledge, and although there might be some lecturers who adopt deep approaches to teaching, students will unlikely use deep approaches to learning, and as a result most students adopt rote learning. Rote learning can help students get good marks in the tests but it does not help in succeeding in other forms of assessment, for example writing essays or book reports. Rote learning can help students complete the four years of course work but it will not help them write their research reports. That is probably one of the reasons that makes students succeed in the four years of course work and fail in the production of their research reports.

Therefore, curriculum alignment is needed in order to enhance the teaching/learning process and empower students with the academic skills they need to write their research reports. However, apart from curriculum alignment lecturers need to change their attitudes to teaching and regard the weaknesses of students in writing their research reports as a joint responsibility and not only of the students. Surprisingly there is a tendency of lecturers/supervisors blaming teachers from the previous academic levels as if they did not belong to the group. In the observed lessons, lecturers seemed to be more concerned with turning students into academic writers, regardless the type and content of texts they wrote, then simply support them to produce reasonably better academic texts.

Supervision Practices and the Successful Completion of Research Reports

Research supervision is an integral part of any higher teaching context and it has to do with critical thinking and the transference of the academic reading and writing skills into the research. Research supervision is an area that was not so deeply explored in this study although it constitutes the main topic in this investigation. The process of training scholars in any research area of knowledge is central to research supervision and this requires more demanding researcher skills from our students. Barnett (2000) posits that in this world of fast development and complexity of facts and events where frames of reference change rapidly, an interdisciplinary response to the complex problems that the society presents is required and the most probable tool that we can give our students to confront those challenges is knowledge on how to investigate, conceptualise and find possible solutions to the problems they will encounter on a daily basis.

One of the main concerns of this study was the high drop-out rates of students resulting in the non-completion of their final research reports. Additionally, many students are taking a relatively long time to get their work completed. Prior to this study it was thought that one of the major problems with research supervision was, perhaps, the fact that it is considered as an aspect of research rather than of teaching. It was also thought that some of the reasons for students' failure to produce their research reports included challenges such as under-prepared students, non-qualified or non-motivated supervisors, and lack of students' motivation among others. These pre-investigation assumptions were confirmed but after collecting and presenting data some other reasons were found. It was found that some of the reasons for students' failure to produce their research reports are, poor background knowledge, poor working and learning conditions, lack and/or shortage of resources, lack of a good library and computer lab, lack of good and knowledgeable supervisors, lack of academic and research literacy skills, bad relationship between lecturers and students, long periods of retention of students' work. All these aspects are contributing to the students' failure to produce their research reports and they are addressed and discussed in answering the main question that led the whole research.

Starting from Biggs' (1999) constructive alignment and the 3P Model it was found that there are some factors hindering the system at the level of the 3P Model namely, *Presage* (before learning takes place), *Process*

(during the process of learning) and **Product** (the outcome of learning). With regards to Presage factors, it was found that from the students' side, the relevant prior knowledge and motives that they bring to the new environment of study as well as ability, interest and commitment to study at a higher level are not the desired ones. Students are joining the English course with a very low language competence and they are driven by extrinsic motivation that is not oriented towards the goal of becoming 'teachers' of English. Also, the learning environment which is an important factor in helping students to perform the learning activities at a higher level of thinking is not contributing to this end. In other words, the kind of facilities provided is not of good quality. On the other hand, the lecturing mode being used by most of the lecturers especially the content subject lecturers are not contributing to students' development and acquisition of knowledge; some lecturers' level of knowledge of the discipline they are teaching and their ability to teach, posits some doubts about their competence. The classroom atmosphere and the relationship between lecturers and students is also another aspect that seems to be contributing to students' impediments to learn.

Process factors are teaching based and they include the lecturers 'teaching methodology', the learning-focused activities that students are asked to perform throughout the course, and the type of approach lecturers and students adopt to teach and learn. In other words, the type of approach students adopt to learning is directly influenced by the type of approach lecturers adopt to teaching. It was found that the type of learning activities that students are asked to perform as well as the level of engagement required from them does not encourage deep approaches to learning, as a result students are taking the easiest way to survive throughout the four years of coursework which is surface learning. Surface learning is an approach that does not allow students to think critically and make their own meanings from the content learnt. Unfortunately both lecturers and students in general seem to favour surface approaches. Thus the need to change lecturers attitudes to teaching and learning and implement better practices that would facilitate the attainment of better results not just in terms of quantity but also in terms of quality.

Product factors are translated in the intended learning outcomes (ILOs), in this specific case, the quantity and quality of students one gets at the end of each academic year and at the end of the four years of coursework. The ILOs should be translated into the academic level achieved after four years of coursework as well as the ability to write the research proposal and the final research report. After all the students' intended learning outcomes, should enable them to embark in a new teaching/learning phase, which is the writing of their research reports. It was found that the number of students finishing their course work is quite reasonable, about 90%, although the quality might be not so good; this is translated in the fact that very few of those students can manage to complete their research reports on time and some others even give up writing the same research reports.

Another aspect that needs special consideration in this discussion is the alignment in the system. Biggs & Tang (2007: 53) postulate that in most of the outcomes- based model, the alignment exists only between the ILOs and the assessment tasks -ATs, not additionally between the ILOs and the teaching and learning activities-TLAs. Although the system at ISCED may not be based on an outcomes-based model, the problem at ISCED seems to more critical as although the ILOs might be well specified and might seem to be clear, there is no clear connection between the ILOs and the TLAs and additionally to the ATs. The ATs need to be aligned with the content of the lessons and the lecturers' approach to teaching, in other words, assessment has to be aligned with what students have been taught and learnt and the activities they are engaged in.

As the above-mentioned components are not corroborating with each other, the whole system is unbalanced. As a result, the teaching and learning situation is resulting in poor teaching and surface learning (Biggs & Tang, 2007: 14). In the lessons observed, it was noticed that students were adopting surface approaches to learning; the majority of them tried to get the tasks done with minimum effort, using low cognitive levels of engagement; they only reacted when required by the lecturers and they hardly initiated a talk or asked

questions.

As mentioned before, constructive alignment is primarily concerned with what students do with what they learn and how well they do that, rather than with what students learn. The main difference between a constructively aligned system and other outcomes-based approaches lies in the fact that the connections between the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) the teaching/learning activities (TLAs) and assessment tasks (ATs) are so intrinsically aligned that the missing of one makes a gap in the system and change the intended outcomes

Most of the short form tests that students write are generally contextualised exercises based on short answer forms. These types of tests require relatively less cognitive effort for students to answer them. This is one of the reasons that make students go through the whole course without actually developing the academic aspects of language proficiency. In addition, there are some parallel issues such as identifying a problem, reading, gathering and analysing information, designing the research proposal and /or project, and writing up the whole research report.

In Higher Education, learning involves adopting new ways of understanding, interpreting and organising knowledge; in Lea & Street's, words (2006: 158), it involves engaging students in academic literacy practices. From a holistic point of view academic literacy encompasses the skills of reading, writing, listening, speaking, critical thinking, use of technology, and habits of mind that foster academic success (Lea & Street, 2006). However, the teaching of these skills is still quite superficial in ISCED from the very few lessons observed; we noticed that the reading and writing skills are not being addressed to students in a way that would enable them to activate their critical thinking skills.

Critical thinking as a skill is one of the most neglected skills by the majority of the lecturers at ISCED. Quite often, lecturers do not engage students in tasks which are context reduced and cognitively demanding, which require, identifying sources, describing facts ad processes, comparing, contrasting, analysing, interpreting and evaluating, abilities that require higher order mental processes. Lecturers tend to adopt surface approaches to teaching where students are asked to perform tasks that require lower order cognitive challenges such as memorising and describing (Biggs & Tang, 2007). As a result, students are hardly able to apply critical thinking skills in their academic practices. Lea & Street (2006) suggest a possible solution to the problem. They posit that students should be exposed and helped to move from independent study skills to a stage of academic socialisation and finally to an academic literacy's stage.

The study skills model focuses on the surface approaches to learning (Biggs, 1999) as well as the transfer of knowledge from one context to another.

Moving to the central part of this discussion, research supervision practices, it was learnt that the practice of the traditional five-paragraph essay which discourages critical thinking is not contributing to the writing of the final research reports. Students are not being encouraged to express their personal opinions in what they write, and position themselves within the academic field they are entering and belong to. Another important aspect regarding students' academic skills attainment and development is the provision of feedback. Students are not receiving corrective feedback on their language problems, they are not being told what is right and what is wrong. On the top of all these aspects, students and supervisors relationship is also not contributing very much to the production of the research reports.

Also, the retention of the student's drafts for an unlimited period of time is preventing students to do further work and making them forget about the content. Students hardly complain about this as they most of the time feel that a complaint will do more harm than good, and as most of the time the lecturer/supervisor is the only person with a sound knowledge in the students' area of work the student has no alternative but to wait until feedback is provided. Good supervision should start from a good relationship. The relationship

between supervisors and students is one of the key elements in research supervision. Sayed, Kruss & Badat (1998: 16) state that in general, most of supervision problems have their origin in the supervisory relationship rather than in the research topic itself. As In addition to that, Mouton (2001: 16) holds that when the relationship between a supervisor and a student gets spoiled, the student feels unattended and insecure. As a result, there are always delays and in more critical cases students' withdrawal from the studies.

Most of the time, the relationship between students and supervisors is affected by what Grant (2010) calls the unconscious desires which derive from the relative intensity and privacy of supervision, where both parties make unconscious responses to each other based on mutual respect and humbleness. Both supervisors and students need to work together to accomplishment of a general and common aim which is the production of a document which is formal, original and academically acceptable. The relationship between 'real' people is a complex process whereby individuals always try to impose their power on each other. That power can take both directions (supervisor/student or student/supervisor). When the student feels more powerful than the supervisor, it can lead to other intricacies such as delay in producing the research report or at some extremes the change of a supervisor.

In order to prepare students for universities courses students need to be exposed to teaching and learning practices which are conducive to the attainment of the academic literacy skills that they are going to find at that level. It can be inferred that academic literacy is an obligation at higher level institutions. Thus, greater coordination of literacy education among subject lecturers in high schools is needed. Just as the focus of teaching at ISCED is shifting from amassing knowledge to learning how to find and apply knowledge, academic literacy can also be progressively introduced as an experiential learning process and gradually find its place within the teaching/learning process at ISCED and not only (Lea & Street, 2006). In so doing lecturers will be preparing students to read, write, think critically, and communicate not just in their learning community but also in the larger world for which they are being prepared to become educated citizens and problem-solving agents.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

From the results of the present study, it was found that there are different types of problems students face in producing their research reports and in this respect the results show that the main reasons for students' failure to meet their own and their lecturers' expectations are weak academic and research literacy skills and lack of a good command of the target language in carrying out the tasks successfully.

First it was found that the course components (the curriculum, the objectives, methods, the learning activities and the assessment procedures) that constitute the teaching and learning system at TTI nr. 200 do not seem to be aligned (Biggs, 1999) and there are some aspects missing in the system.

It was also found that some of the reasons for students' failure to produce their research reports are, poor background knowledge, poor working and learning conditions, lack and/or shortage of resources, lack of a good library and computer lab, lack of good and knowledgeable supervisors, lack of academic and research literacy skills, bad relationship between lecturers and students, long periods of retention of students' work. Another finding of the study is that there is a need for an alignment between the ongoing assessment and the final assessment which is writing the research report. Apart from the above-mentioned aspects it was felt that critical thinking skills need to be introduced in the academic and research literacy practices of these TTs. In higher education what matters most is not what students can reproduce but what they can produce and construct by themselves.

Another relevant finding was that although the Intended Learning Outcomes-ILOs might be well specified and might seem to be clear, there is no clear connection between the ILOs and the Teaching and Learning Activities-TLAs and additionally to the Assessment Tasks-ATs. The ATs need to be aligned with the content of the lessons and the lecturers' approach to teaching, in other words, the assessment procedures have to be aligned with what students have been taught and learnt and the activities they are engaged in.

It was also noticed from the classroom observation that students have great difficulties in deploying academic and research literacy skills most of the time due to lack of proper feedback provision from the lecturers. Good feedback can play an important role in the students' levels of performance and engagement in the tasks set up. Good feedback can also improve the critical thinking skills and the academic and research literacy skills. Good feedback is a synonym of new ways of teaching, new ways of contributing to students' academic and professional development.

Recommendations

It is hoped that this research will provide readers with insight for developing and improving their own academic and research literacy practices within Departments. According to Hyland (2007), writing is learnt not taught; and the teachers/lecturers' best methods should be support and flexibility. Thus, lecturers should first of all take into consideration the particular context in which they are teaching, the students age, their first language, the language experience and practices, their community of practice and the writing purpose. They should provide extensive encouragement in the form of community belonging, peer involvement, useful and corrective feedback, and most of all corrective feedback throughout of the process of writing. Writing needs to be regarded as a culturally based activity whereby lecturers and TTs bring their own sets of culturally defined and prescribed criteria to writing classrooms, even in cases when they belong to the same culture (Leki, 1992). It should be recognised that just like any other students, TTS have their own ideas of what means good writing based on their previous learning social and cultural experiences and they are likely to transfer those writing patterns to new teaching contexts. Therefore, it is not enough to determine what is expected of L2 and FL students in university and give them models of what lecturers want them to produce; According to Biggs & Tang (2007: 21) "Education is about conceptual change, not just the acquisition of information." Students prior learning experiences are a key factor in determining which approach to teaching should be selected. Successful writing instruction departs from an awareness of the importance of cognitive and motivational factors (Leki, 2007) and students should be provided with cooperation with peers in planning and writing tasks as well as providing feedback. Peer support is of great importance as it provides opportunities for students to talk about their writing in progress with more skilled and attentive colleagues promoting in this way academic writing development.

The recommendations from the present study are not intended to act as an all-encompassing list of "to-dos" for educators, lecturers, and administrators in higher education institutions such as TTI nr. 200. Rather, these recommendations may serve as a starting point for further research or action in the following areas: improvement of lecture delivery and assessment practices; teaching skills development; staff development issues; and research supervisory practices, as a way of enhancing the quality of teacher training pedagogy. Thus, as with any qualitative study, the here made recommendations may vary in pertinence based on specific contexts. The recommendations are grouped into four categories, namely recommendations for a) the Institution; b) the Lecturers; c) the Educational Departments and d) the Teacher Trainees (TTs).

The Institution

From the institutional point of view, we recommend the following:

- The Institution should work together with the Educational Departments to update the existing

curriculum to meet the current demands of the New Angolan Educational System as well as the assessment procedures;

- There is an urgent need to re-examine the policy for the entry exam and put in place a policy that will govern the students' entry exams, in terms of their educational orientation and academic background;
- As the institution is primarily focused on the training of teachers, the entry exam should be structured in a way that it will assess students' level of proficiency in not just basic academic and research literacy skills as well as in teacher training matters.
- There is a need to align the teaching/learning system with regards to the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) the teaching and learning activities and (TLAs) the assessment tasks (ATs) in the educational teaching practices. There is a need to shift emphasis from teaching to learning; what Barr & Tagg, (1995: 14) refer to as a shift from an instruction paradigm to a learning paradigm. Students must be active discoverers and constructors of their own knowledge. McLeod & Reynolds (2007) postulate that in the learning paradigm knowledge is not seen as cumulative and linear like a wall of bricks, but as a nesting and interacting of frameworks. To this end, learning environments should be challenging, cooperative, collaborative and supportive.
- The actual curriculum should be revisited to conform with the new education system. As mentioned before, once a curriculum is in place, before we start looking at the assessment procedures, a number of important questions need to be asked:
 - *Is the curriculum achieving its goals?*
 - *What is happening in the classrooms?*
 - *What kind of teaching methods are being used?*

Curriculum evaluation is concerned with answering questions such as the above mentioned, and it focuses on collecting information about different aspects of a language program so as to understand how the programme works, how productive it is, leading to a stage of decision making. Issues such as whether the programme is responding to the learners' needs, if further teacher training is needed for those who are involved in the process and the overall students' outcomes are also addressed in curriculum evaluation and they constitute and are translated in the above improved version of Biggs Model which is referred to as the 4P Model.

- There should be a well-equipped Writing Centre for students to practice and develop their academic and research literacy skills.
- The Institution should provide students technological opportunities for students' research and presentation purposes. All students should have access to the computer centre. Technology is not in itself critical thinking or writing or research, but it is definitely a means to critical thinking and writing and research that is engaging and important.

Lecturers

Teachers and lecturers are key agents to unlocking the future and promoting change. Therefore, if one wants to implement some change then they must put some pressure and try to persuade local Education authorities, governors, and other decision-makers. What is needed is to show the courage and commitment to implement that change. However, it should be emphasised that educational change does not happen overnight; educational change is a very slow, social, hard and never-ending process (Head & Pauline, 2007). Taking into account the new Model here suggested on constructive alignment, the following recommendations for lecturers were proposed:

- Lectures in general and content subject lecturers in particular must help students develop effective critical thinking strategies to improve their critical reading competencies by setting up tasks that require students over time to re-read, review, reconsider, reformulate, reorder their work and the work of their peers (peer-feedback) and revise it rather than make small editorial changes. Writing and

learning are social processes and collaborative peer feedback helps students engage in a community of learning where they respond to each other's work, creating therefore an authentic social context for interaction and learning, (Hyland, 2000).

- Lecturers must work as a team and integrate other subjects' content in the content of the subjects they are teaching; they should also set up an atmosphere whereby constant communication should exist among them with regard to students' progress;
- There is a need to raise lecturers' awareness for the need to improve their teaching methodology and set up activities and tasks that are conducive to the process of writing a research report. They need to be more supportive and commutative with their students not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom.
- Lecturers need to revisit their assessment procedures in way that they would contribute to the final assessment which is the research report writing.
- Lecturers need to be aware of the role that corrective feedback plays in teaching contexts and see it as a way of teaching and learning. Feedback needs to be provided on time and promptly and practiced at different levels.

As Brookfield (1995) puts it,

“What we do as teachers makes a difference in the world. In our classrooms, students learn democratic or manipulative behaviour. They learn whether independence of thought is really valued or whether everything depends on pleasing the teacher. They learn that success depends either on beating someone to the prize using every available advantage or on working collectively. Standing above the fray and saying that our practice is apolitical is not an option for a teacher. Even if we profess to have no political stance, and to be concerned purely with furthering enquiry into a discrete body of objective ideas or practices, what we do counts. The ways we encourage or inhibit students' questions, the kinds of reward systems we create, and the degree of attention we pay to students' concerns all create a moral tone and a political culture”. Brookfield, (1995: 25).

Therefore, lecturers need to become researchers of their students' perceptions, designers of multifaceted assessment strategies, managers of the assessment processes and consultants assisting students in the interpretation of the world around them and the rich information acquired from learning (Ramsden, 1987:35).

Educational Departments

According to Ramsden (1987: 39), “Students must leave University equipped to engage in self-assessment throughout their professional lives. They need to be able to make reliable judgements about what they do and do not know and what they can and cannot do”. With regards to the English TTs the situation is the same, they must leave University with an ability to act and react to world around them and make fair judgements about their practices. Thus, Departments have an important role to play not just concerning administrative matters but also educational and instructional matters. After all, departments are the direct managers of TTs' academic and professional matters.

Thus, the following recommendations were set up for the Heads of Departments.

- The Academic Departments should provide information to students about their progress timeously, and at the beginning of each academic year there should be a meeting where new students will be introduced in the new community of learning and practice, and old students will be informed about their progress and academic status in the new year. This information should be provided on paper. At the beginning of each academic year students should also be introduced to the librarians through a visit to the premises where they will be informed about the organisation, the policy of borrowing

books and the working hours.

- Departments need to assess lecturers' engagement in the work they do. To this end, some classroom observation between lecturers teaching the same subject in different areas, and not only, should be implemented.
- Departments should educate their students about the structure, function and development of their disciplines.
- TTs programmes should help prospective teachers improve and use their Pedagogic Content Knowledge-PCK.
- Even prospective teachers with "high majors" in their disciplines often enter education programmes with "highly developed low literacy" in the writer's words. They know about lots of facts, definitions, but not very much about the relationships that they will need to master in order to teach well.
- Departments should follow-up students' progression by selecting a student or two from each class who will represent the group and report on students' progress and lecturers' performance.
- Supervisory processes should be monitored by the Heads of Department with a group of selected lecturers.
- Supervision is only one part of the lecturer's academic life and the balance between teaching, administrative duties, research and supervision is not an easy task to achieve. Therefore, lecturers must use a number of personal strategies to help maintain the balance that will help in the management of the students' academic life.
- There should be a deadline for students and supervisors to conclude the research reports, and supervisors should report on the students' progress at specific times.
- More attention needs to be paid to the research literacy practices which should be organised and controlled by a committee of members and short in-service training courses should be organised by the department to raise lecturers' awareness for the need to change their pedagogies not just for teaching but also for supervising students.
- A board of lecturers to proof read and edit students' Research Reports and Dissertations should be created to improve the quality of materials that will serve as references for future students.

Teacher Trainees- TTs

Teaching and learning in Higher Education constitutes a complex phenomenon. According to Ramsden (1987), in the process of teaching and learning in higher education, assessment constitutes the single most influential factor on students learning. To him, placing some responsibility of assessment to students constitutes the most feasible means of enhancing learning. Falchikov (1988) also posits that students' involvement in their own assessment can lead them in more modern ways of assessment like self-assessment, peer assessment and collaborative assessment and these in their turn will very much depend on the type of feedback provided by lecturers. Students can change their learning styles and strategies if given motivation and support to do so. It is therefore lecturers' responsibility to promote that change among students by getting closer to students and engaging them in written tasks that would lead them to the acquisition of the academic and research literacy skills, skills they need to become academically 'good writers' and write their research proposals with ease (Head & Pauline, 2007).

Following are some recommendations for TTs:

- TTs need more practice in academic and research literacy skills and greater exposure to the models of reading and writing that they will encounter during the research supervision practices. They need to be taught how to make meaning out of what they have read, and be trained how to think critically, to argue, to compare, and to express their own ideas and so on.
- TTs should be made aware of the governing rules of the Institution at the beginning of each academic year. They should also be made aware of the dos and don'ts of their departments.

- TTs must feel the responsibility they have within the academic community they belong to and feel free to report or any problems be them economic, social or personal. To this end there should report to the representatives of their classes.
- In order to be successful in their studies, TTs must enter TTI nr. 200 with basic technological skills that include word-processing, e-mail use, and basic knowledge in Web-based research, aspects which were purposefully left out as they need separate attention.
- There is a need for academic skills development, e.g. study skills, note-taking and making, critical thinking, essay writing, leading to research reports writing. In order to achieve that goal, the institution should set up a Writing Centre where students could go and exercise the above-mentioned skills.

It is hoped that by putting these recommendations in practice lecturers in particular and educators in general, will promote academic growth among students and encourage successful teaching and learning based on the Vygotskian notion of scaffolding whereby a more informed person or lecturer helps a less experienced one to learn to do a specific task, and become independent to do the task alone at some point in future.

Future Research

A great deal of research has been conducted with regard to academic and research literacy practices within different teaching and learning contexts. This study has been an attempt to understand Angolan TTs difficulties in producing their final research reports. Because one cannot discuss the research literacy practices without addressing the teaching and learning process, in order to determine what is happening and what still needs to be done, the first step that the study went through was to analyse and understand the academic and research literacy practices as well as the kind of assessment tasks TTs are exposed to.

The following step was to look at the supervision practices and see which aspects constitute the main hindrances to the system. Research supervision practices constitute a hidden agenda within the teaching learning process, and although they were presented and discussed in this work, we think that they deserve further investigation to help uncover the main hindrances that are preventing lecturers and students from doing their job properly. Because teaching contexts are different in a number of aspects, there is still considerable opportunities for further research in both academic and research literacy domains. The study therefore indicates a number of areas for further investigation.

In particular there is still much to learn about what supervisors and students do in different contexts of supervision, the influence of power relationships, the cultural background and the type of feedback provided. There is also a great need to know about the effectiveness of particular teaching approaches and the use that students make of various kind of feedback (whether in the classroom or during supervisory sessions).

A study based on research supervision practices alone should be carried out with a larger number of TTs and lecturers from different departments at the institution so as to get a broader view of the problem and a more generalisable solution. Another set of studies in this particular context would be focused on the curriculum. Here researchers will have to focus on what kind of materials students read independently, what materials they are asked to read, when, where, and how. The curriculum plays an important role in helping students acquire and develop higher levels of language proficiency.

The 4P Model here suggested constitutes a starting point in contributing to the research knowledge, and should be seen as an incomplete Model. It should therefore be extended and improved to better fit all educational levels. Therefore, more research is needed in this specific area.

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FOOTNOTE

[1] Adapted from Biggs (1999: 18).

[2] Adapted from Biggs & Tang (2007: 71).

[3] Hedge (2000).