

# Mature students' perceptions of academic writing experiences at Malawian undergraduate level

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# DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

'I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.'

Chimwemwe Magela

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### **ABBREVIATIONS**

EAP	English for Academic	Purposes
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FE Further Education

HE Higher Education

HEIS Higher Education Institutions

UNIMA University of Malawi

# Participants' pseudonyms

# Student interviewees

ASI	Accounting Student Interviewee
BASI	Business Administration Interviewee
ESI	Education Student Interviewee
IASI	Internal Auditing Student Interviewee
JSI	Journalism Student Interviewee
PLMSI	Procurement and Logistics Management Interviewee

Student questionnaire respondents

ASS	Accounting Student Survey
BASS	Business Administration Survey
ESS	Education Student Survey
IASS	Internal Auditing Student Survey
JSS	Journalism Student Survey
PLMSS	Procurement and Logistics Management Survey

### Lecturer interviewees

ALI	Accounting Lecturer Interviewee
BALI	Business Administration Lecturer Interviewee
ELI	Education Lecturer Interviewee
JLI	Journalism Lecturer Interviewee

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#### ABSTRACT

This study takes on a mixed-methods approach in exploring student and lecturer perceptions of academic writing experiences of final year mature-entry undergraduates at the Polytechnic College of the University of Malawi. A questionnaire was completed by 98 final year students of non-English-speaking-background who were enrolled in varied social science, four-year degree programmes. Thirty-five of these students attended retrospective semi-structured interviews. To enable students to talk about their specific experiences of writing different types of texts, several interview questions centred on samples of students' written work which they had brought along to the interview. Twelve lecturers from the same disciplines as the mature students also completed a questionnaire and attended an interview for further discussion of their questionnaire responses.

Several themes emerged from this study regarding mature students' academic writing experiences. These include gaps between students' and lecturers' understanding of writing requirements, ways through which students make sense or increase their understanding of writing requirements and lecturer expectations (e.g. lecturer feedback on written work, interaction and dialogue with fellow students, peer exemplar assignments), factors which exacerbate students' writing challenges (e.g. lecturers' assumptions about mature students' literacy competencies acquired from work and prior study, and mature students' difficulties in transitioning from professional to academic writing), and recommended support for developing mature students' academic writing (e.g. student-lecturer dialogue as "pedagogic space", explicit instruction in academic writing, and increased writing opportunities).

#### **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Globally, widening access is a common concern in many higher education (HE) contexts, including Malawi. Widening access initiatives of HE institutions are premised on the commitment to provide the general public, particularly under-represented groups in HE, with access to HE based on principles of inclusion and equity (Kasworm, 2003). In the Malawian context, the term 'widening access' in the HE sector generally means providing opportunities for all Malawians to participate in HE, whilst emphasising admission of under-represented groups such as female and special needs students, and learners from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2008). In the context of this study, the construct of 'widening access of HE' particularly applies to mature students and is based on the discourse of lifelong learning; that is, the recognition that HE should not be "confined to the young but needs to be spread out over the lifetime of individuals" (Schuetze & Slowey, 2000, p. 3).

Discourses of inclusion, equitable access, and lifelong learning have fostered a climate of openness to diversity in many HE institutions (HEIs) and have led to structural changes in these institutions' admission policies. Schuetze and Slowey (2000) identify several widening access initiatives which HEIs have undertaken. These include more flexibility in admissions criteria, for example, by recognising alternative entry qualifications and accrediting previous learning or work experience, as well as a flexibility in entry and exit points. Further, they point out that in order to accommodate particular needs of non-traditional students, such as those in paid employment and with domestic responsibilities, many HEIs allow for "flexible modes of study" which include "open or distance learning possibilities, modular courses, credit transfer, and part-time study" (p. 18). The consequence of these institutional changes has been both increased student intake and diversity in the student populations (Klinger & Murray, 2012), in terms of not only demographic characteristics but also educational backgrounds and entry qualifications. Among the groups of students who have gained access to HE through the widening access agenda are mature students, whose admission to HEIs is largely based on accreditation of their prior learning, specifically post-secondary school education, and work experience.

A diverse student population means, as Hyland (2009) explains, learners who bring with them different "understandings and habits of meaning making" (p. 4). Since students are required to have knowledge of disciplinary genres, literacy practices and the epistemologies underlying these practices (McKenna, 2004), the challenge which a heterogeneous group of students presents to universities is how to offer support to all students, including mature learners, which would ensure that they develop literacy competencies required in their disciplines.

The following section provides an overview of the initiatives undertaken by the University of Malawi (UNIMA), the context of this study, to widen the Malawian HE to non-traditional students. This will be followed by a brief introduction to the academic literacy support that the UNIMA, specifically the Polytechnic College, the immediate context of this study, offers to undergraduate students to support development of their academic writing. Attention will be on the possible assumptions underlying lack of provision of academic literacy instruction to mature-entry students who are the focus of this study. This section provides the context for the discussion of the rationale for this study. The remaining part of this chapter will be a discussion of the theoretical and personal rationale for investigating student and lecturer perceptions of academic writing experiences of mature-entry undergraduates in the UNIMA. The chapter concludes with an outline of the overall structure of the thesis.

#### 1.1.1 Widening HE access to non-traditional learners in UNIMA

The Malawi government's National Education Sector Plan (NESP) 2008-17 identifies broadening equitable access to higher education as a priority area (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST), 2008). As a response to this NESP goal, in its strategic plan, the UNIMA sets out to "expand student capacity" (University of Malawi Strategic Plan (UMSP) 2012-2017, p. 23). Specifically, it aims to "increase student numbers, widen student access," and "enhance student equitable access" (p. 23). In the UNIMA, an attempt at expanding student access to HE is reflected in the institution's diversification of entry qualifications. The accreditation of alternative entry requirements such as work experience and further education (FE) qualifications which include certificates and diplomas has meant that admission into UNIMA is no longer exclusive to those who matriculate directly from secondary school education and in possession of school leaving qualifications. The consequence of diversification of entry qualifications in UNIMA has been widening of

undergraduate studies to groups which were previously underrepresented. This underrepresentation can be attributed partly to a rigid admission policy which favoured students who had recently completed secondary school education, had not taken a prolonged break from formal education, were younger, and not engaged in full-time employment.

The diversification of entry requirements has translated into students gaining admission to UNIMA through different entry paths, namely, traditional and non-traditional. This study focuses on non-traditional undergraduate entrants who are officially identified as 'mature-entry students'. In the UNIMA, traditional students are officially known as 'normal-entry' or 'generic' students. In this thesis, the term 'traditional' will be used to identify this group of students. Those who enter university through the non-traditional route are referred to as 'mature-entry' students. Throughout this thesis, the terms 'mature student' or 'mature-entry student' will be used to refer to these students.

In the UNIMA, the minimum entry requirement for traditional students is a school leaving certificate at the 'O' level, typically taken at age 17, with at least six credit passes including English language subject, and obtained in the recent past three years. These students enter at year one of four or five-year degree programmes. To be admitted through the mature-entry route, students need to have an 'O' level school leaving certificate with at least four credit passes, a diploma qualification, and no less than two years of relevant work experience post the diploma qualification. The diploma qualifications which are equivalent to one or two years of HE are usually obtained from FE institutions. Details of entry requirements for degree programmes on which mature students who participated in this study were enrolled can be found in Appendix 1.

Mature students join degree programmes as 'direct entrants' or with 'advanced standing'. In this study context, entry into degree programmes with advanced standing means being exempted from the first and sometimes second year and thus commencing studies in year two or three. These students do not complete year one or two on the basis that previous learning at the FE level and relevant work experience are equivalent to first or second year degree qualifications. Eligibility for direct entry into degree programmes is based on assessment of the curricula offered on the FE qualifications which the students enter university with; that is, whether subject knowledge which is covered at the FE level is equivalent to year 1 or 2 syllabi of the degree programmes. Thus, the nature of the academic entry qualification and modules offered on that qualification will determine whether a student joins a programme in second or third year.

By exempting students from earlier years of their programmes, the assumption is that they already have prerequisite or foundational knowledge which would enable them to cope with learning demands in the subsequent years. However, the students are likely to enter university more conversant with subject knowledge of their fields than academic literacies. This is because mature students do not receive instruction in academic literacies on most of the FE qualifications which they use for entry into degree programmes. Matriculation into the second or subsequent year of degree programmes means that these students miss out on academic literacy instruction in a form of an obligatory and credit-bearing English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course which is offered to year 1 entrants. Commencing their studies in year two or three also means that, in comparison with year one traditional entrants with whom they are expected to be on a par with, mature students are less exposed to, and have a limited time to become familiar with, genres and literacy practices of their disciplines through instruction and assessment.

In line with the widening access agenda, the university has deliberately made admission conditions through the mature-entry route flexible. This flexibility is noticeable in the absence of certain restrictions which are imposed on qualifications of those who seek entry through the traditional route. Generally, there is no restriction regarding how recent matureentry students' academic qualifications obtained at both secondary school and FE levels should be. This means that students who have had a long break from formal education are still eligible to study for degree programmes at UNIMA. In order to qualify for most of the degree programmes, the number of credit passes for the 'O' level qualification which matureentry students need to have is less than the minimum six required of the traditional route entrants. In addition, for some programmes, the university allows multiple exit points. That is, students are offered opportunity to exit a programme at the certificate (2 years), diploma (3 years) or degree (4 years) level. In order to accommodate mature-entry students who choose to study whilst in full-time employment, the mode of delivery of some programmes is flexible. That is, students are offered flexible times for class attendance, such as evenings or weekends (see Appendix 1 for times of class attendance for programmes on which participants of this study were enrolled). These changes in the admission policy of UNIMA and modes of delivering programmes have led to an increased number of students opting to enter university through the mature-entry route.

A larger number of students who enrol as mature entrants at UNIMA are part of the workforce or have been in employment at some point. Owusu-Agyeman (2016) has identified 'industry-driven factors' as a major determinant of adult learners' participation in HE. Schuetze and Slowey (2002) have singled out "changing labour market requirements" (p. 312), such as the need for highly skilled personnel, as what has contributed to the 'heterogenization' of student population in HE. Therefore, mature students who are employed could be motivated to return to formal education in order to upgrade their knowledge and qualifications so that they can, as Tumuheki, Zeelen and Openjulu (2016) observe, increase their opportunities for career development and better employment.

#### 1.1.2 Provision of writing instruction at the UNIMA

The consequence of diversification of entry requirements in the UNIMA has been a more heterogeneous student body composed of groups of students from different educational backgrounds with more varied levels of academic literacy competencies and needs. However, the diversity of the student population has not translated into an appropriate response by the university in terms of accommodating academic literacy needs of diverse groups of students and supporting their academic literacy development. For instance, the academic literacy support that is offered in the UNIMA caters mainly to the needs of traditional-entry students. At the Polytechnic college of the UNIMA, academic literacy instruction to support development of students' academic writing is offered only to traditional students in the first year of their studies. An obligatory and credit-bearing EAP module is offered to groups of students in their respective disciplinary areas (for example, engineering or accounting). The adjunct subject is allocated four hours per week for lectures. Course work and an end of semester examination constitute modes of assessment for this course. The EAP subject is not offered to students who matriculate into second or third year of degree programmes. This is despite the expectation that both traditional and mature students should successfully engage in academic literacy practices and discourses of their disciplines.

The goal of the EAP course, which is mostly generic, is to introduce students to academic literacy practices and genres. However, attempts are made to tailor the EAP course to

requirements of specific disciplines. Some genres such as the report is subject specific. For instance, the laboratory or experimental and field reports are taught in science-related fields, such as engineering and environmental health. In addition, subject-specific texts are used in the teaching of written genres. Literacy lecturers based in a language and communication department are mainly responsible for designing and delivering the course. Subject lecturers provide some input in the design of the curriculum and such input is usually in a form of topic areas to be covered in the EAP course. The EAP course covers, among others, generic skills related to reading such as skimming and scanning texts for information, and paraphrasing, summarising or synthesising other authors' ideas, and referencing conventions. Argumentative and expository essays are common written genres taught on this course.

In year two or three, students on all programmes are offered a course on organisational and managerial communication. This is essentially a course on professional literacy practices which is offered in order to induct students into literacy practices and different genres specific to professional/workplace contexts. The aim is to prepare students for the professional writing demands they will encounter in the workplace. Like the EAP course, the professional communication courses are designed and delivered by literacy lecturers. Work-related written genres students are socialised into include memos, reports, business proposal, meeting-related documents (e.g. minutes, agenda, notices), and recruitment-related correspondence (e.g. covering letters, CVs, job advertisements). Emphasis is also on the qualities of writing valued in professional contexts such as coherence, conciseness, clarity, courtesy (audience consideration), and grammatical accuracy. Since they are credit-bearing and core modules, mature students on these programmes attend these courses.

By offering academic literacy instruction to traditional students only, the assumption is that these students need academic literacy support more than their mature-entry counterparts in order to cope with the literacy demands of their disciplines. Not offering academic literacy instruction to mature students could also be a consequence of the institutional expectation that based on their diploma training, mature students should be equipped with literacy competencies which would make their transition to disciplinary literacy demands seamless. Perhaps, the expectation is that mature students would be able to effectively apply academic literacy knowledge and experiences gained from prior study to meet disciplinary writing demands. Richards and Pilcher (2013) have noted that lecturer assumptions about literacy experiences mature students bring with them to university can lead to the expectation that they would be "more independent and require less guidance" (p. 144).

It is possible that these assumptions or expectations emanate from the institution's lack of understanding of, or inability to take into account, writing experiences and knowledge which students bring with them from previous learning and the workplace, as well as the appropriateness of these resources for meaning making in disciplinary writing. Also, underestimation of the "transitional shock" (Mallman & Lee, 2016, p. 689) mature students experience when they commence their studies is a possible factor which can account for assumptions made about these students' ability to make a smooth transition to disciplinary literacy practices without institutional support. Mallman and Lee (2016) have observed that because of their mature age, institutions expect that mature students would "hit the ground running" (p. 690) once they join university. That is, by virtue of their maturity, it is believed that mature students would be equipped with coping mechanisms to navigate the 'transitional shock' without much difficulty than their younger traditional counterparts.

#### **1.2 Rationale for this study**

A discussion of the theoretical and personal rationale for this study is offered in the following sections.

#### **1.2.1** Theoretical rationale for this study

The expectation in the UNIMA and elsewhere that mature students can cope with academic writing demands without or with minimal guidance seems to counter research findings which highlight the writing challenges which undergraduate students (both traditional and mature) encounter at university. These challenges are evident in a study by Itua, Coffey, Merryweather, Norton, and Foxcroft (2014) which investigated student and staff perceptions of barriers to students' successful academic writing. The findings were derived from focus group discussions with second year students (health studies) and their lecturers in a UK university. The results indicate that, on the one hand, students identified unfamiliarity with referencing (paraphrasing other authors' work, varied referencing styles, referencing correctly), complicated vocabulary and academic (subject) jargon, and complex academic writing structure, as barriers to successful academic writing. Staff, on the other hand, mentioned unfamiliarity with academic writing expectations, lack of extensive reading,

difficulties in understanding complex academic texts, inability to engage with the literature, and unfamiliarity with subject (technical) terminology.

Similar challenges are reported in Elliot et al. (2019). Their study which investigated first year undergraduate (education studies) experiences of developing academic literacies at one university in England reveal that students encountered the following difficulties with academic writing: identifying and selecting appropriate sources, reading efficiently and applying the readings effectively to support claims in their writing, and referencing accurately. Students also saw expectations of academic writing as mysterious and unfamiliar.

In other studies which have been done in the South African (e.g. Bharuthram & McKenna, 2012; van Schalkwyk, 2007) and UK (Lea & Street, 1998) HE contexts, students have highlighted their concerns with conflicting and contrasting requirements of writing on different courses and for different instructors. Students have cited experiencing difficulties in switching between diverse writing requirements and unpacking these requirements which are often not made explicit. For instance, students have reported that what may be considered as appropriate writing in one discipline or for one lecturer is deemed inappropriate in another field or another instructor. Students have also noted that these contrasting and conflicting requirements are reflected in conflicting advice about academic writing which lecturers offer students. In addition, these studies have revealed inability of students to articulate academic writing requirements despite being aware of their existence.

Other studies have established factors which exacerbate the challenges faced by mature-entry students in transitioning to academic literacy practices. Outcomes of these studies, mostly done in the UK HE context (e.g. Christie, Barron & D'Annunzio-Green, 2013; Richards & Pilcher, 2013; Tett, Hounsell, Christie, Cree, & McCune, 2012) reveal that cultures of learning which mature students bring with them to university can differ from those which are expected at university. For example, Tett et al. (2012) have observed that assessment forms and practices experienced by students at the FE level can differ from those of the HE. They also point out that there can be a mismatch between students' expectations about assessment practices which they enter university with and those which they experience at university. Mature students are also disadvantaged by commencing their studies with an advanced standing. This is because the period in which they must adapt to the university's culture of

learning is limited in comparison to that afforded to their traditional peers (Richards & Pilcher, 2013). As Barron & D'Annunzio-Green (2009) and Christie et al. (2013) have noted, mature students are expected to quickly adapt to the academic demands of their disciplines and be on a par with traditional year one entrants who have at least a year to make a similar adjustment by the time they are joined by their mature-entry peers. These research findings suggest that insufficient understanding of academic writing experiences of mature students at university can lead to misconceptions about their academic literacy needs, as well as institutional policies about provision of academic literacy support not befitting the needs and interests of these students.

The disjunction between expectations about the writing experiences and knowledge mature students bring with them to university and the students' realities referred to above points to the need for mature students' academic writing experiences to be made more visible at the institutional level. This necessitates investigating academic writing experiences of mature students from the perspective of both students and lecturers. Investigating perceptions of students can offer valuable insights which would otherwise be unavailable to their university teachers. That is, although students' texts can provide lecturers with useful information regarding students' writing, such as writing difficulties, certain aspects of their experiences are not noticeable in the written products their teachers see.

As a final product, the text may not reveal certain difficulties which students face during the writing process. Fukao and Fujii (2001) give an example of time constraints which, though may not be directly related to the act of writing itself, has implications for the quality of students' writing. These authors also note that some difficulties encountered by students when writing assignments such as time constraints manifest in different forms in the text. In the text, the problem of time constraints, according to Fukao and Fujii (2001), can be manifest as incoherence of text or grammatical errors. They argue that by simply analysing students' texts, it is possible to only attribute these challenges to students' limited grammatical or textual cohesion knowledge, and not to their inability to allot adequate time to the writing or revision process. Therefore, the text may not always allow lecturers to identify factors underlying students' writing challenges which would enable them to provide students with appropriate support to help them address the challenges. What this means is that information obtained from students' written work is not enough to enable HE institutions or

lecturers to devise appropriate ways of responding to students' writing challenges and supporting development of their academic writing. Hence, there is need to also examine what students say about their experiences of academic writing.

The present study, therefore, explores student and lecturer perceptions of academic writing experiences of final year mature-entry undergraduates at the Polytechnic College (UNIMA). The study focuses on students who, due to accreditation of their prior learning at the FE level and relevant work experience, commenced their studies at year two or three. These students were enrolled in varied fields that constitute the social sciences, and the duration of their degree programmes was four years. It is hoped that the outcomes of this study will contribute to making the academic literacy experiences and needs of mature students more visible. This is based on the expectation that increased visibility of these students' writing experiences is likely to lead lecturers and even the institution to pay more attention to the students' literacy understowed.

The students' writing challenges and, more importantly, the factors accounting for these challenges which this study highlights, could help lecturers and programme directors or curriculum designers to identify appropriate measures for addressing underlying factors of these challenges, as well as direct academic literacy support to areas where it is required the most. Highlighting the affordances of prior discursive resources which mature students draw on in their writing could help lecturers interrogate the appropriateness of their own expectations about what these discursive resources can afford students in their academic writing. Increased knowledge of the affordances of prior discursive resources can also help lecturers gauge the extent to which these resources are adequate for meaning making in their disciplines and would enable students cope with the academic literacy demands of their disciplines. More importantly, if considered, this knowledge could be used to inform lecturers' decision on which literacy competencies of students require developing further and how best to support development of such competencies. This study highlights areas of disagreements in student understanding and lecturer explanations of desirable attributes of student writing which feature prominently in assessment criteria and lecturer written feedback. Knowledge of gaps between student and lecturer understanding of what these

requirements involve in undergraduate writing is essential if lecturers are to be able to address any misconceptions students may have about these attributes and narrow such gaps.

Although the findings are specific to the context in which this study was conducted, namely, Malawi, the conclusions drawn from these findings have implications for HE institutions in other contexts which admit mature students with alternative qualifications such as an FE qualification and work experience, as well as students who straddle academic and professional discursive contexts. The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of mature students' academic literacy experiences in terms of the following: the challenges these students face and the factors underlying these challenges, the discursive resources from professional contexts they bring to and draw on in their academic writing, and the perceived affordances which these resources offer students for writing in the academic context, as well as the literacy support they need to receive to enable them meet disciplinary literacy demands. The study also explores a methodology, that is, a research design and data collection instruments, for investigating these issues which could be used in other similar studies.

As discussed in section 2.4.1, perceptions of mature students of their writing experiences are less visible in the literature, in comparison with those of traditional students commencing their studies in year one. This does not reflect the diversity of the student population in the current HE environment in countries where widening access of HE is a major ambition; and consequently, the literature does not provide HE institutions with vital information which could be used to identify and accommodate the academic literacy needs of diverse groups of students and support development of their writing. Therefore, outcomes of this study contribute knowledge to the under-researched area of academic writing experiences of undergraduate mature students especially in Malawian HE institutions, and the wider HE context.

#### 1.2.2 Personal motivation for this study

When mature students enter university, they are expected to transition to and engage successfully in the literacy practices of their disciplines. As Klinger and Murray (2012) observe, students' conversancy with disciplinary literacy practices enables them to successfully "negotiate the academic and professional demands" (p. 35) of their disciplinary

communities. My experience of teaching a research methods module offered to year three mature students enrolled on a business communication degree programme at the Polytechnic College of the UNIMA, provided me with a glimpse into the academic writing experiences of mature students. Through assessing their written work, I gained useful insights into the academic literacy practices which these students seemed to be unfamiliar with. Unfamiliar practices included, but not limited to, writing with source texts. For example, I noticed a tendency of students to simply list references at the end of their assignment without demonstrating in the actual text how or why these references were used. In other words, the challenge for these students was to show how they used other scholars' voices to support their own ideas or to construct an argument. Also evident in the students' texts was lack of conversancy with rhetorical knowledge of argumentation or persuasion in disciplinary writing. Their writing demonstrated that they were more familiar with rhetorical conventions for narrating or describing knowledge rather than those associated with argumentation. These challenges were experienced despite the students joining the degree programme in year two and having had exposure to academic literacy practices of their discipline through assessment for at least one academic year.

Anecdotally, some academic staff, with whom I have had informal conversations with, have expressed concerns about the quality of their students' academic writing. They have indicated that mature students enter university under-prepared for the writing demands of the university. Generally, the lecturers expected that students who enter university with a tertiary qualification and work experience and can matriculate to the second or third year of their degree programmes would be able to transition to the academic demands of their disciplines successfully. However, they found that students experienced challenges with academic writing. These challenges include lack of awareness of referencing conventions pertinent to their fields, plagiarism, lack of wide reading, inability to engage with readings on a given topic, and inadequate knowledge of technical aspects of writing (e.g. coherence, sentence construction, grammar). Therefore, the writing challenges which I identified in mature students' writing coupled with lecturers' perspectives on these students' academic literacy challenges.

#### **1.3 Overview of the remaining chapters**

Four chapters will follow this introduction. Chapter two situates the present study in the context of literature on academic writing of undergraduate students in higher education. It discusses the social practice perspective of literacy as the lens through which student and lecturer perceptions of undergraduate mature-entry students' academic writing experiences are explored. The notions of academic literacies and academic writing in higher education are also conceptualised. Empirical studies on academic writing experiences of undergraduate students including mature students are reviewed.

Chapter three is concerned with the methodological approach adopted in this study. It presents a discussion of the mixed-methods research design, including data collection methods and data analysis procedures. The chapter also presents an overview of the context in which the study was carried out, details of participants involved in this study and their recruitment, as well as ethical considerations of this study.

Chapter four presents the outcomes of data analysis and a discussion of the findings derived from questionnaire and interview data of both students and lecturers. The findings are discussed in relation to the research questions of this study and relevant literature. Conclusions derived from interpretation of the findings are also highlighted.

The final chapter provides a summary of the study. Pedagogical and theoretical implications, as well as suggestions for further research are presented. Limitations of this study are also identified.

#### **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

One of the noticeable consequences of discourses of life-long learning and equitable access to HE has been the opening up of alternative entry paths to HEIs. This has led to an increasingly diverse student body in HEIs, which includes mature students who transition from further education and enter directly into second or third year of degree programmes due to accreditation of their prior learning and work experience. Like students who progress to university through traditional entry routes, mature students are expected to transition to discursive practices of their disciplines which usually differ from familiar practices they acquire in other contexts.

This chapter positions the present study in prior research on academic writing experiences of undergraduate students in HE, in general, and mature students, specifically. Section 2.2 presents the tenets of the social practice perspective of literacy, as a theoretical lens for understanding mature undergraduate students' writing experiences in HE. This is followed by a discussion of how the notion of academic literacies, and specifically academic writing in higher education, have been conceptualised. This discussion focuses on Lea and Street's (1998) models of student writing in HE, the concepts of academic discourses, academic disciplines and discourse communities, as well as the role and value of writing in academic disciplines. Section 2.4 situates the present study within research on how non-traditional students in HE are defined. Attention is also drawn to undergraduate students' experiences of transitioning to unfamiliar academic literacy practices and discourses, including the challenges encountered, as well as ways in which students' academic writing is influenced by their discursive knowledge from prior writing contexts which they enter university with. Although mature students' writing experiences are of primary interest to this study, reference is made to studies which have investigated experiences of undergraduate students in general. Section 2.5 reviews literature regarding lecturers' perceptions of academic writing. Section 2.6 discusses three approaches to teaching of academic literacies. This chapter concludes with a summary of the reviewed literature and, in light of the literature, highlights areas which the present study seeks to address.

### 2.2 Conceptual framework: The social practice perspective of literacy

Literacy can be conceptualised as an autonomous or ideological activity (Street, 1984). When viewed from the autonomous perspective, literacy is regarded as a cognitive activity which is independent of the social/cultural context in which it is used and its learning or acquisition occurs (Street, 1984). On the other hand, the ideological model of literacy positions literacy as a social practice. Proponents of the ideological view of literacy (e.g. Barton & Hamilton, 2012; Baynham, 1995; Gee, 1992; Street, 1984) have argued for a shift from focusing attention on the cognitive aspects of literacy to its socio-cultural aspects. This means foregrounding the socio-cultural contexts in which literacy is situated and the "social relations of context" such as those between learners and facilitators (Street, 1997, p. 139).

As a departure from the autonomous model, proponents of the social practice perspective of literacy have identified the following assumptions underpinning the ideological view of literacy:

- Plurality of literacy: There are multiple literacies and their associated practices which differ according to domain of life or activity. Domains are "places (e.g. the home, workplace, school) and spaces (e.g. formal, informal, non-hierarchical) where activities occur" (Lillis, 2013, p. 81). Although distinct literacy practices are supported in different domains (Barton, 2007), domains "interact and overlap" (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 12). This may result in practices from one domain infiltrating other domains (Barton, 2007).
- The impact of social context on effects of learning a particular literacy and meanings participants attach to literacy practices: Participants' different meanings of literacy practices are not merely "cognitive" and "individual" but are influenced by social contexts in which literacy is learned and used (Street, 1997, p. 135).
- The contested nature of literacy: Literacy practices and their meanings are contested (Gee, 1996)
- Institutions create and support particular literacy practices: Particular literacy practices which are "sustained" by social institutions emerge as "more dominant, visible and influential than others" (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 12).

• Interconnection between literacy, discourses and identity: Acquiring a literacy, constructed by discourses of a particular community, involves adopting an identity and "underlying epistemologies" of literacy practices associated with the concerned discourse community (McKenna, 2004, p. 269)

Central to understanding the social practice perspective of literacy is the concept of practice. 'Practice' refers to both "observable behaviour" and "conceptualisations" about the use of literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2012, p. 6; Street, 1993, p. 12). Lillis (2013) has observed that when viewed this way, the notion of 'practice' can be conceptualised at both the concrete and abstract levels. At the concrete level are literacy events which are the observable elements of behaviour or activities mediated by literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2012). In the domain of education, writing an essay assignment is an instance of an academic literacy event, which is "textually mediated" (Barton, 2001, p. 93). When pitched at the abstract level, practice refers to socio-cultural context-specific ways of talking and thinking about, making sense of, and using literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2012; Street, 2003). In the context of higher education assessment, an example of a literacy practice is subject or discipline-specific ways of interpretation and usage of assessment task words such as 'discuss, account for, and critically evaluate'. These ways of using literacy are socially constructed and regulated by shared ideologies and power relations within communities, and when routinised, they become both individuals' and social institutions' implicit ways of using literacy (Lillis & Curry, 2010).

Although pitched at different levels, the notions of practice and event are inextricably related. This is because in any literacy event, participants draw upon practices of communities (Barton & Lee, 2013). For example, the literacy event of writing an essay assignment requires students to draw on their knowledge of a wide range of subject or discipline-appropriate practices such as those associated with source attribution, structuring of text, and argument development. Thus, through analysis of a literacy event such as essay writing and the text itself, it is possible to infer literacy practices (Barton & Lee, 2013) which were drawn upon and consequently 'shaped' production of the essay (Barton & Hamilton, 2012, p. 7). Viewed from this perspective, the notion of practice provides "a powerful way of conceptualising the link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape" (Barton & Hamilton, 2012, p. 6).

This study explores student and lecturer perceptions of academic writing experiences of final year mature-entry undergraduates at the Polytechnic College (UNIMA) through the lens of the social practice perspective of literacy. Working within the social practice perspective means that the major concern is to account for the ways in which students make sense of their academic writing experiences. From this perspective rather than merely focusing on individually situated aspects of literacy (such as cognitive and linguistic), what will be foregrounded is how the disciplinary and institutional practices are implicated in students' reported writing experiences. This includes factors beyond the academy such as students' writing experiences acquired prior to entry to university.

#### 2.3 Conceptualising academic literacies and writing

#### 2.3.1 Academic literacies

Although what it means to be academically literate is contested (Lea & Street, 1998), generally academic literacies can be understood as "the fluent control and mastery of the discipline specific norms, values and conventions for reading and writing as a means of exploring and constructing knowledge" (Jacobs, 2005, p. 485). In higher education, students' ability to communicate competently through writing depends on having several capabilities. According to Wingate (2015, p. 7), being 'academically literate' entails several competencies: (1) knowledge of a "discipline's epistemology", (2) understanding of a discourse community's genres through which a community's interactions are "manifested", and (3) knowledge of the "conventions and norms" which are used to "regulate" a community's interactions. In the following sections, several concepts that are crucial to understanding the nature of academic literacies in general, and academic writing in particular, will be discussed: (a) models of academic writing, (b) academic discourses, (c) academic disciplines.

#### 2.3.2 Models of student academic writing

Lea and Street (1998, 2000, 2006) have provided three overlapping explanatory models of student writing in higher education, namely study skills, academic socialisation, and academic literacies. What appear to differentiate these models are their underlying discourses which underpin ways of understanding academic writing and subsequent implications on the

teaching and learning of writing. Although the models are considered as distinct and sometimes conflicting, each one is considered as contributing to the understanding of academic writing to the extent that, in isolation of the others, each model is limited and would not succeed in explaining the complexity of academic writing in HE. Moreover, as Ivanič (2004) has observed, although there is usually a dominant discourse underlying academic literacies' pedagogical practices, a combination of several discourses usually informs such practices. Thus, in order to obtain a comprehensive view of academic writing, Lea and Street have pointed out that the models should be understood as not mutually exclusive; rather, each one should be viewed as embedded within another.

#### 2.3.2.1 Study skills

According to Lea and Street (1998, 2000, 2006), the study skills model, which embodies an autonomous and deficit view of literacy, is based on the assumption that writing is a set of decontextualised cognitive and technical skills which once acquired can be applied easily in other contexts. Pedagogically these assumptions are manifested in emphasis on developing students' metacognitive awareness of the processes which are involved in constructing texts, language usage such as grammatical knowledge, and mechanical aspects of punctuation, spelling, text organization, and citation conventions.

The study skills model has drawn criticisms in terms of its inadequacy to account for the complexities of academic writing in HE. Firstly, by assuming that competence in academic writing can be achieved primarily through learning a set of decontextualised and transferable skills, the model disregards the less transparent and contested nature of academic writing (Lea & Street, 1998). Secondly, the model pays much attention to the cognitive aspects of writing at the expense of the social-cultural contexts in which academic writing is situated (Lea & Street, 2006). Consequently, writing difficulties are attributed to cognitive deficiencies in individuals, rather than situating such difficulties in the practices of the institutional and disciplinary context in which student writing takes place (Lea & Street, 1998). In addition, the writing challenges and their solutions are deemed textual; that is, they are solely identified in the students' written texts and not "in any broader frame of reference which includes questions about contexts, participants and practices" (Lillis, 2001, p. 22). Therefore, remediating skills deficiencies is seen as the best approach of addressing students' writing challenges (Lea & Street, 1998).

#### 2.3.2.2 Academic socialisation

The main premise on which the academic socialisation model is based is that studentwriters develop ability to participate in written academic discourses through linguistic and social interactions with members who are more proficient in the discourses and practices of their communities (Duff, 2010). Therefore, the role of teachers as experts or more proficient members of their discourse communities is to "socialise novices and implicitly or explicitly teach them to think, feel and act in accordance with the values, practices, ideologies and traditions of the group" (Duff, 2007a, p. 311).

Central to the socialisation process is enabling novices to acquire discourses and genres of disciplines (Duff, 2010; Morton, 2009). As an abstract notion, a genre can be described as "conventional, culturally recognised grouping of texts based on general, external criteria such as intended audience, purpose, and activity type" (Lee, 2001, p. 38). Swales (1990, p. 58) has defined genre in terms of the following characteristics: (1) it is instantiated by a class of communicative events, (2) participating members of the events share some set of communicative purpose(s), (3) the purposes are readily recognised by expert members of a discourse community, but may be partly recognisable by apprentice members, (4) the purpose(s) provide the rationale behind a genre and the rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse, and influences and constrains writers' choices of content and style, and (5) a genre's exemplars, although varied in their prototypicality, exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, content, style, and intended audience. Genres can be distinguished from text types. The latter, whose examples include narrative, description, argumentation, and exposition, "cut across" genres and are defined by their "internal linguistic features" (e.g. lexical or grammatical) (Lee, 2001, p. 39).

Based on the assumption that students can draw from their knowledge of genres to successfully construct own texts, familiarising students with disciplinary genres entails explicitly drawing their attention to rhetorical patterns and functions of genres (Street, 2009). Nonetheless, socialising students into disciplinary discourses entails going beyond familiarising students with rhetorical or linguistic features of texts which instantiate genres. Students also need to become familiar with the often implicit assumptions about disciplinary ways of constructing and using knowledge (Dressen-Hammouda, 2008; Morton, 2009).

Despite its recognition of disciplinary differences in terms of genre and discourse, the socialisation model falls short if the process becomes prescriptive and normative. That is, pedagogically, there is a risk of presenting genres, and students accepting them, as "fixed" and "correct" (Hyland, 2015, p. 164) forms of writing rather than as a range of possibilities through which rhetorical goals can be achieved in specific social contexts (Morton, 2009). Duff (2007a) has observed that the socialisation process does not always result in students being fully socialised into their disciplinary community's discursive practices. Rather she identifies other outcomes of the socialisation process which are likely to be expected in situations where learners already have knowledge of discursive practices acquired from other communities. These include "hybrid practices, identities and values; incomplete or partial appropriation of discursive practices", resistance, or even "rejection of target norms and practices" (p. 311). Duff (2007a) offers three factors which can account for these possible responses of students to the socialisation process. Firstly, becoming fuller members of their academic disciplinary communities may not be deemed a necessity for their "future trajectories" and "goals" (p. 310). Secondly, learners may choose to be more actively involved in, and primarily identify with, other familiar discourse communities, such as professional ones, rather than academic disciplinary communities. Thirdly, novice writers may not always be fully accommodated and apprenticed within their new communities due to inadequate access to discourse practices they are expected to master, as instructors may not always offer students "explicit and appropriate scaffolding, modelling, or feedback" (Duff, 2007b, p. 5) to support development of their writing competence. These possible diverse outcomes, according to Duff (2010, p. 171), signify that academic socialisation is not necessarily "a mindless, passive conditioning" process that inevitably results in "homogeneous responses, competences, behaviours and stances" of novices.

Presenting disciplinary discourses and genres to students in a prescriptive way also implies that once students understand their characteristics, they should be able to reproduce them without difficulties (Lea & Street, 2006). It has been observed that such an assumption masks socio-cultural factors which have an impact on students' successful socialisation into their disciplinary discourses and genres. For example, Dressen-Hammouda (2008) has argued that being socialised into specialised disciplinary discourses and genres "presupposes taking on the discipline's identity" (p. 234). Moreover, students who are socialised into academic

practices which not only conflict with each other but also with their other social practices (for example work place) may have to assume and negotiate identities that are at odds with each other (Gee, 1996). However, Duff (2010) has argued that socio-cultural factors such as identity are unavoidable aspects of academic socialisation if the process is understood as occurring within socio-political/cultural contexts.

#### 2.3.2.3 Academic literacies

The academic literacies model "successively encapsulates" the other two models (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 158). For example, academic literacies and academic socialisation models overlap at theoretical and pedagogical levels. Both situate literacy activities and writing instruction within institutional and disciplinary contexts. For the academic literacies model, besides framing academic writing as a social practice, the point of departure is that non-textual aspects are implicated in the acquisition or development of academic literacies and text production, namely "epistemological issues" and "social processes" (Street, 2009, p. 4). Implicating these aspects in academic writing implies problematising claims about the transparency of academic writing and novices' induction into disciplinary discursive practices. This necessitates foregrounding the following aspects of student writing: the "impact of power relations" on student writing, the "contested nature of academic writing conventions" at both the broader institutional level and in more specific contexts, the "complexity of identity" in academic writing (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 12), as well as the "complexity of meaning making" in academic writing, and what "counts" as knowledge and how such knowledge is constructed in specific disciplines (Street, 2009, p. 4).

Whilst useful as a framework for critiquing the other models and approaches to teaching academic writing, the major limitation of the academic literacies model concerns the fuzziness of how its principles can be applied to writing pedagogy, and that instead it mainly serves as a theoretical research paradigm or framework for exploring student writing (Lillis, 2003, 2006; Wingate, 2012b; Wingate & Tribble, 2012). Nevertheless, attempts have been made in several studies to implement a set of principles Lea (2004, p. 744) has derived from the academic literacies model for course/curriculum design at both undergraduate (New Zealand: Hocking & Fieldhouse, 2011; South Africa: Paxton & Frith, 2014; UK: Wingate, 2012b) and postgraduate (UK: Lea, 2004) levels. To inform course/curriculum design, these

studies have used the following Lea's (2004, p. 744) principles of course design, which are based on the academic literacies model:

- Developing awareness of and paying attention to students' literacy practices which they bring with them to academic writing from other contexts (e.g. previous study and workplace). This involves understanding how prior practices shape students' present conceptualisations of academic writing practices and disciplinary knowledge and how they might constrain or facilitate students' learning of new knowledge. The intention is to raise students' awareness of how discursive/literacy practices they gain from other contexts relate to those required of them at university in order to enable them make sense of academic writing practices.
- Creating spaces for exploration of different meanings and understandings, for example by engaging in dialogue with students. The aim is to recognize, and attempt to bridge, gaps between students' and lecturers' understanding of literacy practices in order to identify appropriate means of explicating such practices.
- Enabling students to make sense of ways (rhetorical and linguistic processes) in which disciplinary knowledge is constructed (disciplines' epistemology) and how they can construct their own meaning (i.e. how students can integrate own voice with existing knowledge). This can be achieved through exploration of written genres and discursive practices students are expected to engage in on their course.
- Bringing to students' attention implications of academic literacy practices on their identity. For example, students can be made aware that engaging in discursive practices and genres of disciplines involves adopting and negotiating new and multiple identities, which at times are conflicting.

Notwithstanding the possibility of developing courses or curricular which are informed by the academic literacies model, there are constraining factors to implementation of its principles. Implementing its dialogic and critical aspects can be hampered by existing institutional assessment and instructional practices or procedures (Lea, 2004), and students' readiness or capabilities to assume a critical perspective of disciplinary discourses and participate in dialogue with their lecturers (Hocking & Fieldhouse, 2011; Wingate, 2012b). For example, in Wingate's (2012b) study, attempts were made to incorporate the dialogic aspect in individual

feedback sessions with students. During these student-tutor dialogues, students were offered opportunities to talk about their previous writing experiences, academic writing difficulties, and how the conventions they were writing within had affected them. Analysis of these dialogues revealed that rather than being critical of disciplinary practices and conventions, their major concern was on how they could increase their understanding of, and write in accordance with, disciplinary practices and conventions. Moreover, as evident in Lillis' (2001) study, the need to conform to disciplinary practices and conventions may mean that even if students are critical of conventional practices and desire to be afforded opportunities to draw on other ways of meaning-making, this may not be translated into their writing.

These kind of observations have led some scholars (e.g. Deane & O'Neill, 2011; Wingate, 2012b) to conclude that students need to acquire knowledge of their disciplinary discursive practices and conventions first if they are to be enabled to critique them; and that at the lower levels of higher education, much emphasis should be on developing students' ability to construct knowledge instead of critiquing disciplinary discourses (Hocking & Fieldhouse, 2011).

#### 2.3.3 Academic discourses

Generally, 'discourse' can be defined as "any instance of the use of spoken or written language to communicate meaning in a particular context" (Bhatia, 2004, p. 19). However, the concept is conceptualised differently depending on which aspect of discourse is foregrounded. From this perspective, Bhatia (2004, p. 20) has distinguished three nonmutually exclusive and complementary ways of making sense of discourse. At the micro level, discourse is seen as (1) text: emphasis is on "surface-level properties" of discourse (e.g. functional and structural aspects of language) necessary for construction of text, and a "narrow" meaning of context as "co-text" is adopted; (2) genre: includes a 'broader sense' of context, which includes discourse practices, to account for both how texts are constructed and "interpreted, used, and exploited" to achieve specific goals in particular contexts; (3) social practice: a broader and abstract meaning of discourse whereby focus of attention changes from texts to features of the context in which texts are produced and interpreted. For the purposes of this study, the broader notion of discourse as social practice is adopted as it encapsulates features which are critical to understanding the nature of academic discourses. Gee (1996, pp. ix, 132) has identified some of the features of discourses, namely:

- They are informed and shaped by implicit and explicit ideological positions.
- They are not valued equally in a given context, since more dominant, visible, and influential discourses and their associated values and beliefs are usually advanced at the expense of less dominant ones.
- They represent multiple identities of the people who participate in them; thus, learning several discourses and their associated social practices entails assuming identities that may be at odds with each other.
- They can conflict and oppose with each other as they may not represent compatible social practices; as a result, discourses become a "site of struggle and resistance" for participants who are members of multiple discourses (p. ix).

Based on the broader notion of discourse, academic discourses can be described as accepted "ways of thinking and using language" in the academy (Hyland, 2009, p. 1). These socially constructed and situated discourses are distinguished and recognised by their discursive practices which are evident in the rhetorical conventions of texts and "other modes of interaction and representation" (Duff, 2010, p. 175). In academic writing, discourses are central to the understanding of what is perceived as knowledge in disciplines, and how such knowledge is constructed and communicated (Hyland, 2000, 2009). It is also through discourses that new members are inducted into or excluded from their disciplinary communities (Starfield, 2001). Engaging in academic writing involves participating in specialised academic discourses. In order to successfully participate in academic writing, students need to gain access to specialised disciplinary discourses. This means that students have to develop an understanding of discipline-specific epistemology and literacy practices, and ability to use conventions and specialist vocabulary as means for representing disciplinary knowledge (Northedge, 2003a; Wingate, 2015).

Academic discourses are inextricably linked to identities they represent. Writer identity, as a social construct, is discursively constructed and negotiated (Hyland, 2012). Matsuda (2001, p. 40) defines identity as "the amalgamative effect of the use of discursive and non-discursive"
conventions available to writers in the social-cultural context of writing. Drawing on particular conventions, knowingly or inadvertently, to construct their texts positions writers with the "interests, values, beliefs, and relations of status and power" inscribed in such conventions (Clark & Ivanič, 1997, p. 137). In the text, discoursal identity is manifested through the writer's voice, which is expressed through a writer's "discoursal choices" (Clark & Ivanič, 1997, p. 151). Discoursal identity is distinguished from an aspect of voice which mainly emphasises how, and the extent to which, writers establish their "authorial presence" in relation to content (Clark & Ivanič, 1997; Ivanič, 1998). From this perspective, voice refers to the writer's own views which are distinguished from other authors' views or voices (Clark & Ivanič, 1997), and signals the writer's sense of "individuality" and participation in an academic discussion (Hutchings, 2014, p. 315).

It is through participation in community discourses that students can assume disciplinary identities (Hyland, 2012). Thus, "investing" in an identity of a particular discourse community, which involves "buying into" (Hyland, 2012, p. 15), and engaging competently in, its discourse practices (McKenna, 2004), is deemed a necessity if students are to effectively "think" and "speak" academic discourses of their disciplinary communities (Northedge, 2003b, p. 26). Despite identification being at the centre of participation in disciplinary discourses (Duff 2010), students may not always align themselves with identities of their disciplinary communities. Certain factors can determine the extent to which students identify themselves with academic discourses. For example, McKenna (2004) has argued that students can struggle investing in an identity which is based on literacy practices they do not understand and which they perceive as alienating. This suggests that how far students take on academic identities is likely to depend on the level of their socialisation into academic discourses. Moreover, academic identities students are expected to take on may threaten their other identities which they bring to academic writing (Hyland, 2012). This is likely to be the case if the discourses and practices representing these identities contrast and conflict sharply, to the extent that other identities are not valued or are deemed improper in the academic context (McKenna, 2004). When students' other identities are threatened, academic discourses become "sites of struggle" for students (Duff, 2010; Gee, 1996), which may lead to resistance or ambivalence about appropriating and engaging in academic discourses (Clark & Ivanič, 1997). This implies that the extent to which students align themselves with

identities of their disciplinary communities can have an impact on how far they become socialised into the discourse practices of their disciplinary communities.

### 2.3.4 Academic disciplines and discourse communities

In university, students' academic writing occurs within the context of disciplines. In simplistic terms, academic disciplines can be conceptualised as discourse communities (Northedge, 2003b). A discourse community can be described as a "group of people held together" by their distinctive ways of doing things and using language (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 10). Discourse communities have been characterised as entities with "a threshold level of members with suitable degree of relevant content knowledge and discoursal expertise", and whose members generally share a set of the communities' goals, genres, discursive practices and expectations, and specialised/ technical lexis (Swales, 1990, p. 27).

As discourse communities, academic disciplines are usually distinguished not only by their knowledge domains, but also by the ways in which their members construct and communicate knowledge (Costley & Flowerdew, 2017). Besides specialised knowledge, academic disciplines are distinguished by the genres that members of such disciplines engage with. These differences are highlighted in Nesi and Gardner's (2012) comparative study of genres of undergraduate and taught masters' student writing across several disciplines (arts and humanities, life sciences, physical sciences, and social sciences) in four UK universities. Their study is mainly based on an analysis of high scoring assignments (awarded a merit or distinction grade), interviews with students whose assignments were analysed and staff involved in the teaching and assessment of students' assignments. The interviews were aimed at obtaining students' perceptions of the type of assignment which they submitted, and staff's views on the written genres which students were required to engage with, the role of assignment writing in their respective departments, and their expectations of students' writing. Results of analysis of assignment texts indicate a variation in genres across disciplines in terms of their prevalence. For example, whilst in arts and humanities and social sciences, essays were more common than critiques, in the physical sciences, critiques slightly outnumbered essays. Another dimension in which the disciplines varied is linguistic/ lexicogrammatical features of texts. For instance, the use of first person 'I/me' was relatively frequent in texts written in the arts and humanities, and social sciences, especially philosophy and English subjects, but was mostly avoided in science subjects such as engineering and

biological sciences (Nesi & Gardner, 2012). These differences are partially attributed to differences in disciplinary culture.

The concept of discourse community is valuable as it provides a "rich contextual framework" for understanding social practices that shape students' writing in disciplines (Woodward-Kron, 2004, p. 158). Discourse communities and their associated discourses are viewed as sites of "legitimate knowledge" which is acquired through participating in the discipline's specialist discourses (Northedge, 2003b, p. 19). The discursive practices and conventions of discourse communities not only influence ways of constructing and communicating knowledge, but also restrict participants on the kinds of "rhetorical resources" they can bring to their writing from other contexts (Hyland, 2009, p. 65). In other words, writing as "meaning-making" is enabled and constrained by the discursive resources which discourse communities offer and sanction (Lillis, 2013). In addition, by foregrounding the socially situatedness of discursive practices (Hyland, 2009), the notion of discourse community can illuminate both how students are inducted into and excluded from participating in the specialised discourses and genres of disciplinary communities (Starfield, 2001; Woodward-Kron, 2004).

Notwithstanding the value of the notion of discourse community in illuminating the nature of academic disciplines, the concept has its limitations. These limitations mainly concern what constitutes membership of and participation in these communities, as well as how to delineate boundaries around discourse communities. Firstly, as observed by Hyland (2012), portraying a discourse community as homogeneous obscures diversity of its membership; for example with regard to level of knowledge of, subscription to, and participation in its goals, genres, practices, and expectations, as well as the extent to which members "identify with its values" (p. 37). This limitation is highlighted in Woodward-Kron's (2004) longitudinal study which explored the extent to which experienced disciplinary members can use feedback to socialise students into the discursive practices of a discipline. The results, which were derived from analysis of education undergraduate students' essays, marker feedback, and interview data in an Australian university, reveal that students' participation in discipline-specific writing is likely to differ depending on the extent to which they have been socialised to the discipline's discursive practices. In this study, markers' feedback did not play an extensive role in socialising students into their disciplinary writing; as a result, students' participation in the

discipline remained peripheral. This is mainly because the feedback was merely prescriptive and did not explain discursive practices of the discipline whose knowledge students were expected to demonstrate in their assignments. Thus students were not enabled to understand how the disciplinary context is an environment in which meanings are negotiated and knowledge is contested, as well as how the disciplinary context shapes students' writing practices.

Woodward-Kron's (2004) findings reinforce Northedge's (2003b) observation that there are 'multiple levels of participation' in discursive practices of communities. Northedge distinguishes between established members' and novices' levels of understanding of and participation in discourses, as well as their ways of contributing to disciplinary knowledge. He notes that unlike more established members, new comers, especially in the early stages, usually have limited capacity to contribute directly ("generatively") to knowledge construction (p. 21); rather, they tend to participate in the discourses peripherally and "vicariously", for example through reading scholarly texts. However, Northedge (2003b) considers vicarious participation essential to students' learning of academic discourses since they can begin to understand how specialist discourses work and how "meanings are framed within" these discourses (p. 30). Northedge further notes that depending on prior experience with academic discourses specific to their communities or disciplines, new members are likely to vary in the extent to which they participate in these discourses.

Secondly, disciplines are regarded as non-monolithic communities with fluid and permeable boundaries which can "merge, overlap and split along new lines" (Ivanić, 1998, p. 80). This fluidity is evident in the interdisciplinarity of degree programmes which results in students crossing discourse boundaries when producing academic texts. Students also cross boundaries of different discursive worlds that they straddle (Northedge, 2003b). For example, students switch between academic, every day, and professional worlds and their respective identities and practices. As a result, students may draw on the discourse and genre knowledge they have acquired in other domains in order to meet writing demands in unfamiliar ones (Michaud, 2011).

The foregoing discussion of the constructs of discourse communities and academic disciplines suggests that rather than viewing disciplines as monolithic, homogenous, and non-conflicting entities, they need to be understood as complex and characterised by multiple and

conflicting discursive practices which members engage with to varying degrees. In addition, as Swales (1990) has noted, students can belong to multiple discourse communities within and outside of their academic institutions, and may command, to varying degrees, several genres and practices associated with these communities. Therefore, recognising the fluidity of disciplines can enhance understanding of how students negotiate the crossing of boundaries of multiple discourse communities and meaning making and discoursal practices of these communities. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, whilst taking into account the constraints of the notion of a discourse community, a discipline will be viewed as a "constellation of overlapping communities with somewhat blurred boundaries" (Northedge, 2003b, p. 19).

### 2.3.5 Writing in the disciplines: The role and value of writing

In higher education, academic writing is a "high stakes" activity as it remains a dominant form of assessment (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 9), which usually determines students' success or failure (Nesi & Gardner, 2012). Most importantly, writing plays an "epistemic role" of mediating the construction and communication of disciplinary knowledge (Marinkovich, Velásquez, Córdova, & Cid, 2016, p. 98). In other words, writing is regarded as a resource which is used to "construct and represent meaning" (Lillis, 2013, p. 67). In addition, there are several potential learning outcomes of the writing process. For instance, some studies (e.g. Carter, Ferzli, & Wiebe, 2007; Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Taylor, & Drury, 2005) have established that besides learning about the writing process itself and becoming familiar with features of discipline-specific written genres, students can engage with content knowledge through such processes as interpreting, synthesising, and reflecting about what is being written about. Besides academic genres, through producing texts which simulate professional writing, students can be trained for the kinds of genres they will be expected to produce in the professions they will enter (Nesi & Gardner, 2012).

Moreover, the potential of writing to facilitate development of students' written language has been established in studies such as Hyland (2011) and Manchón and Roca de Larios (2011). In these studies, development of students' linguistic resources such as grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure was linked to students' ability to monitor their language use and experiment with new and complex language forms (vocabulary and structures) during the act of writing. In addition, in these studies, through form-focused feedback, students' attention was drawn to gaps in their linguistic resources, and this enabled them to become conscious of language aspects which they had made progress in and those which required modification.

Since at university students are generally expected to write from sources, reading plays a central role in students' academic writing. The role of reading in academic writing is captured in the concept of 'reading to write' or 'reading for writing' which Hirvela (2004) has theorised in two ways, namely: 'reading to learn about writing' and 'writing based on reading'. On the one hand, when viewed as 'reading to learn about writing', Hirvela (2004) explains that source texts are regarded as models of writing which could facilitate students' understanding of rhetorical and linguistic features of academic writing and which students can draw on in their own writing. From this perspective, source texts are also regarded as exemplars of literacy practices which inform knowledge construction in disciplines (Paxton, 2007). On the other hand, when conceptualised as 'writing based on reading', Hirvela (2004) notes that attention focuses on the activity of constructing texts or generating content on the basis of source texts read. This necessitates learning how to use disciplinary sanctioned ways of appropriating content material from source texts.

Paxton (2007), however, has problematised the role of reading in developing students' disciplinary writing on the basis of the nature of reading material students are exposed to. Paxton (2007) has singled out course textbooks as a type of reading material which is likely not to offer students the best exemplars of literacy practices of their disciplines. Paxton's critique of textbooks as tools for students' learning about academic writing is based on the observation that textbooks tend to be "single-voiced" or "monologic", and thus mask and contradict the contested nature of disciplinary knowledge which is reflected in the multi-voicedness of academic texts.

### 2.4 Non-traditional students in higher education

The concept of a 'non-traditional student' in HE is subject to diverse interpretations as it is context specific. For the purposes of this study, and as characterised in the literature, non-traditional students are distinguished from their traditional counterparts. Traditional students are characterised as those who progress to year one of a degree programme immediately upon completion of secondary education with school leaving qualifications (Richards & Pilcher, 2013; Warren, 2002). This is the definition of traditional students which is adopted in this study. Whilst there is some form of consensus on how traditional students are conceptualised 28

in different contexts, there is a variation in the characterisation of non-traditional students. This variation depends on the framework which is used to characterize non-traditional learners. Schuetze and Slowey (2002) have identified two frameworks within which non-traditional students can be defined, namely, 'life-cycle discourse' and 'equality of opportunity discourse'. The 'equality of opportunity discourse' framework positions non-traditional learners as those from social and ethnic groups who have limited access to, and are underrepresented in, higher education, such as the educationally and socio-economically disadvantaged and ethnic-minority groups of the population (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002; Warren, 2002). Within the 'life-cycle discourse' framework, which is relevant to this study, non-traditional students are generally portrayed as mature-age students with "a vocational training and work experience background" or "unconventional educational biographies" (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002, p. 313). As indicated in section 1.1.1, in this study, the terms 'mature student' or 'mature-entry student' will be used to refer to non-traditional students defined within the 'life-cycle discourse' framework, and who are typically described using criteria such as the following:

- Age: older students, typically aged 25 and over on entry to university (Kasworm, 2003; Richards & Pilcher, 2013).
- Educational 'biography': usually they have a "winding path to higher education" (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002, p. 315). For example, they do not have a "continuous transition" from secondary school or college of further education to university because they have taken a break from formal education (Tumuheki et al., 2016, p. 104).
- Entry routes and qualifications: access university education through alternative qualifications such as a diploma from further education institutions and work experience rather than the conventional school leaving certificate (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002; Tumuheki et al., 2016). Also, due to recognition and accreditation of their entry qualifications which are equivalent to first or second year of university education, and work experience, they are likely to progress to second or third year of a degree programme (direct entry) (Christie et al., 2013; Richards & Pilcher, 2013).
- Interaction of study and outside commitments: most students enter university with work experience and are likely to combine studying with adult life responsibilities

(e.g. work, family, community) (Kasworm, 2003; Schuetze & Slowey, 2002; Tumuheki et al., 2016).

#### 2.4.1 Transitioning to academic discourses and literacy practices

When mature students enter university, they are expected to transition to and engage successfully in literacy practices of their disciplines. Notwithstanding that there are different perspectives about what the notion of transition entails, for the purposes of this study, student transition is understood as the students' "capability to navigate change" (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 737) as they are moving "within and through formal education" (p. 734). Rather than a "one-off event" which students experience at the point of entry into university, this change is an "on-going process" which continues throughout the duration of students' study programmes (Tett, Cree, & Christie, 2017, p. 389). Drawing on Gale and Parker's (2014) typology of student transition in HE, students' transition to academic discourses and literacy practices of their disciplines can be conceived using the concepts of "induction", "development", and "becoming", each of which is considered as having a distinctive influence on HE institutions' policies and practices for supporting and managing student transitions.

### 2.4.1.1 Induction and development approaches

According to Gale and Parker (2014), the induction approach conceives transition as "sequentially defined periods of adjustment, involving pathways of inculcation, from one institutional and/or disciplinary context to another" (p. 737). The transition process is also regarded as a "linear, chronological, and progressive movement" which involves "navigating institutional norms and procedures, culture shock, and fixed institutional structures and systems" (p. 738). Gale and Parker (2014) consider the priority of the induction approach to be student first year experience at university, particularly at the point of entry, rather than their experiences prior to commencement of their studies. The induction orientation to transition is evident in institutional processes which are aimed at familiarising newly recruited students with "campus facilities and significant staff", as well as institutional "procedures, curriculum content, and assessment requirements" (p. 738).

When transition is framed as development, it is understood as "qualitatively distinct stages of maturation involving trajectories of transformation, from one student and/or career identity to

another" (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 737). When envisaged in this way, successful student transitioning in HE entails navigating institutional "sociocultural norms and expectations" in a "linear, cumulative, and non-reversible" manner. It is expected that the successful transition culminates in student transformation "from one life stage to another" (p. 741) and an identity shift. The developmental transition approach is manifested in activities for supporting transition of individual students such as mentoring by peers and staff, "field placements" (internship), and "career development activities" (p. 738).

Gale and Parker (2014) have identified features which are shared by induction and developmental approaches as well as their differences. Firstly, for both approaches, students' transition is conceived as a linear process. Another feature shared by the induction and developmental approaches is that student transition is characterised as universally experienced and normalised. Gale and Parker (2014) also describe both transitional approaches as mainly "system-driven and system-serving" (p. 747); that is, they lead to institutional transitional policies and practices which prioritise "student orientation to institutional expectations" (p. 735), rather than HE institutions adapting their transition practices to accommodate students' diverse transition realities. Gale and Parker (2014), however, think that what distinguishes the induction approach from the developmental approach is that the former sees student transition as taking place along pathways which are determined by HE institutions, whilst for the latter, transition happens along life trajectories or stages of individual students. Hence, the two approaches largely differ in terms of their "psychological orientations" (p. 743) to how student transition should be managed. For the induction approach, student transition is regarded as best managed at the institutional level. Managing transition at the individual and group level is deemed as most appropriate for the developmental approach. Another difference is that whilst the induction approach presumes that students' transition progresses smoothly along institutional established pathways, with the developmental approach, the process is seen as "stilted" or "discontinuous" (p. 742). Despite these differences, both induction and development are considered inadequate as frameworks for conceptualising student transition in HE mainly due to their emphasis of "assimilation and integration" of students into academic culture (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 746) and lack of recognition of the heterogeneity of transition experiences of students (Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018).

### 2.4.1.2 The becoming approach

When conceptualised as 'becoming', the student transition process in HE is described as flux and is envisioned as a "perpetual series of fragmented" and rhizomatic movements in "lived reality or subjective experience" (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 737). Unlike the frameworks of induction and development which represent student transition as linear and normative (Gale & Parker, 2014), the notion of becoming frames student transition experiences in HE as diverse and heterogeneous (Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018). Student transition is also characterised as an "entangled, nonlinear, iterative and recursive process" (Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018, p. 1256) in which students' "lived realities" (e.g. work and social life) are implicated (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 745). Moreover, unlike the induction and developmental perspectives to student transition, transition as becoming is seen as a framework which presents "the most student sympathetic account" (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 734) of their transition experiences in HE as it foregrounds the need for HE institutions to adjust their "systems and practices" (p. 746) in order to accommodate different "realities of students" lives" (p. 735). In addition, Taylor and Harris-Evans (2018) have noted that when transition is understood as becoming, the priority is not to fit students into "pre-existing (and often inflexible) institutional goals and established academic practices" (p. 1256), as well as preestablished identities of particular disciplinary areas. Gale and Parker (2014) have identified several institutional systems and practices which embody student transition as becoming, namely: "flexible study modes" (p. 738) as reflected in a lack of distinction between studying full-time and part-time, flexible entry and exit routes to study programmes, as well as a curriculum and pedagogic practices that incorporate varied "student identities, ways of doing and being" (p. 746).

Although a tendency to focus on traditional students' experiences of transitioning to academic discourses and literacy practices is apparent in the literature, a number of studies have looked into experiences of mature students, particularly those who transition from further education and workplace contexts and enter latter levels of a degree programme. This research highlights challenges which transitioning to academic discourses and literacy practices presents to mature entrants as well as other students. These challenges centre on students' unfamiliarity with, and the disparity between students' and lecturers' understanding of, the nature of academic writing and its discursive practices.

An aspect of academic writing which can be challenging for students is making sense of assessment and feedback practices which may be significantly different from those experienced in prior learning contexts. Students' difficulties in interpreting assessment task demands are evident in studies which have compared students' and lecturers' interpretation of terminology used in assessment tasks. One such study, involving mature students in a UK university, is Richards and Pilcher's (2013, 2014). Research outcomes from this study reveal more differences than agreements between students and lecturers in their understanding of a selection of key generic assessment terms such as 'discuss' and 'critically evaluate'. For instance, whilst students understood 'critically evaluate' as negative criticism, lecturers' perception of this term was more of analysis than criticism.

In Richards and Pilcher's study, three factors are implicated in lack of shared meaning of the assessment terms between students and lecturers. Firstly, students' unfamiliarity with such terms is compounded by lecturers' assumptions that students enter university already knowledgeable in meanings and usage of the assessment terms, hence requiring less guidance on how to employ the terms. However, since usage of these terms is not deemed "common sense" knowledge and "transparently meaningful" by students (Lillis & Turner, 2001, p. 58), the result can be a prolonged and difficult process of gaining familiarity with, and exclusion of students from successfully participating in, assessment discourse practices (Lillis, 2001). This particularly applies to students whose backgrounds in "language, literacy, and learning practices" are less similar to those valued in the HE context (Ridley, 2004, p. 104).

In Richards and Pilcher's study, disparity in understanding of assessment terms between lecturers and students is also seen as a reflection of differences in their cultures of learning ("a set of expectations and processes which students usually learn through practice within the context of a particular discipline") (p. 148). That is, cultures of learning which mature students acquire from further education and workplace contexts may differ from those which are expected of them at university. In this study, cultures of learning acquired in other contexts which students brought with them to university made adjustment to the university's culture of learning difficult. Entry to degree programmes at an advanced level is a third factor which is implicated in the widening gap between students' and lecturers' understanding of assessment terms as students have limited time to adapt to a new culture of learning.

Another challenge faced by mature students relates to indeterminacy about academic standards required of them, particularly in the initial stages of their studies. Studies, such as Rae and Cochrane (2008) and Tett et al. (2012), which have explored mature students' perceptions of experiences of assessment and feedback practices in UK universities reveal that such uncertainty is usually due to insufficient guidance and ineffective feedback students receive on their writing. In these studies, students cited insufficient, obscure, untimely, and unconstructive comments as what contributed to difficulties in their ability to make sense of and utilise feedback. This is despite the potential of feedback to mediate students' internalisation of academic standards which would enable them to self-assess and monitor quality of their writing and progress in relation to the standards (Gibbs, 2006; Price & O'Donovan, 2006). In Rae and Cochrane (2008) and Tett et al.'s (2012) studies, students' difficulty with making sense of written feedback is apparent in their desire for this feedback to be supplemented by one-to-one or group discussions of feedback with lecturers, and use of exemplars and assessment criteria. These findings from Rae and Cochrane (2008) and Tett et al. (2012) studies echo the view by O'Donovan, Price, and Rust (2004) and Rust, Price, and O'Donovan (2003) that academic standards as tacit knowledge are too complex to be conveyed successfully through a single technique, such as written feedback. Rather, successful sharing, and bridging of gaps in students' and lecturers' understanding, of these standards would require adopting a 'multifaceted approach' which combines a range of explicit and tacit knowledge transfer techniques (O'Donovan et al., 2004; Rust et al., 2003). Tacit knowledge transfer techniques such as use of exemplars, dialogue, and self-assessment may enable students to "elicit tacitly what lecturers cannot say explicitly" (Handley & Williams, 2011, p. 104).

# 2.4.2 Transitioning from writing in prior study and workplace contexts

When students move to university, they carry with them discursive knowledge and experiences accumulated from participating in various discourse communities (Brandt, 2001). Prior knowledge and experiences have been metaphorically described as "baggage" (Devitt, 2007; Moss & Walters, 1993), and it is argued that having a larger repertoire of prior knowledge and experiences may translate into "more baggage to carry" (Devitt, 2007, p. 226). Students who have participated in literacy practices of professional communities are likely to arrive at university already having internalised discursive knowledge and identities of their professions, through the genres they have 'produced and consumed' (Michaud, 2011, 34

p. 246) in the workplace. Quick (2012) has argued that even students who have not been involved in extensive writing at work enter university having already been socialised into discursive practices and genres of the workplace. She notes that the "immersion into the (workplace) culture itself" (p. 231) is enough for students to internalise discursive knowledge, and the 'values and assumptions' associated with their professional discourse communities.

The professional writing knowledge and experiences are likely to shape or influence students' ways of meaning-making, and thus have a role to play in how students negotiate their transition to writing in academic contexts (Michaud, 2011; Richards & Pilcher, 2013). Specifically, a range of discursive knowledge such as antecedent genres acquired at work, can serve as resources which students can advertently or inadvertently draw on in order to tackle unfamiliar academic writing demands (Devitt, 2007; Quick, 2012).

Students' inclination to adapt familiar workplace discursive knowledge as a resource for meaning making was found in Michaud's (2011) study which investigated ways in which mature students used workplace discursive knowledge in their academic writing. Based on interviews with students and analysis of students' academic writing and samples of workplace texts, the findings indicated that students drew on their repertoires of professional antecedent genres to aid them in production of unfamiliar genres. Besides antecedent genre knowledge, composing strategies acquired in workplace contexts were employed. For instance, new texts were produced by "adapting" and "remixing" existing texts rather than inventing new or original content material, a composing strategy Michaud refers to as "assemblage". Students could have fallen back on familiar genres and composing practices because they had not yet acquired or mastered academic genres and practices (Devitt, 2007; Gee, 1996), or because prior writing experiences had become so routinised that they may have been a "difficult habit to break" (Michaud, 2011, p. 255).

Although mature students may have professional (writing) experiences at their disposal, they may not always perceive these as resources for meaning-making in academic writing. Students' failure to draw on existing resources is reported in Quick's (2012) study which was aimed at establishing whether mature students were able to transfer their workplace discursive knowledge to workplace-oriented writing tasks at university. An analysis of the students' job application cover letters for rhetorical adaptability revealed their inability to

draw on familiar rhetorical knowledge to produce workplace oriented/related genres. Quick (2012) concludes that workplace discursive knowledge is not readily or automatically transferable to academic writing contexts. Students' tendency not to fully utilise their repertoire of discursive resources is also reported by Rounsaville, Goldberg, and Bawarshi (2008). Their study of antecedent genres which first year undergraduates reported utilising when completing an essay writing assignment revealed that students were more inclined to draw on school/academic-related rather than non-academic (e.g. work, 'extracurricular') antecedent genres which, according to the authors, "would have been equally if not more useful in completing the assignment" (p. 106). The authors suggest that such inclination is a reflection of students' assumption that particular genres are related with specific domains, to the extent that they do not perceive the utility of genres associated with non-academic domains when producing academic genres.

Other explanations have been provided to account for students' inability to draw on and use prior discursive resources in their writing. One of the explanations is that students may be unaware of the value and relevance of their prior writing experiences for assessment writing tasks, including those which are designed to simulate real-world writing with which they may be familiar (Quick, 2012). This explanation echoes Tran's (2010) view that students' interpretation of what knowledge is valued and accepted in their disciplinary writing influences their decision to draw on their writing knowledge from other domains. Particularly, how students think their prior discursive knowledge is perceived as a legitimate resource for meaning making is likely to enable or constrain their ability to draw on such knowledge. Another possible explanation is that students may not attempt to draw upon, or are likely to face challenges when attempting to draw on, discursive knowledge (e.g. antecedent genres) which was insufficiently acquired in the initial learning context (Devitt, 2007).

A further explanation is that students might find it difficult to draw links between writing demands of the academy and those of other domains such as the workplace in part due to their perception of these domains as distinct discursive worlds (Quick, 2012). As Perkins and Salomon (1989) have argued, figuring out how prior knowledge relates to new contexts would require learners to adopt a "high-road" knowledge transfer mechanism; that is, to engage in "intentional mindful abstraction" of discursive knowledge from prior contexts for

application in new writing situations (p. 113). It also entails engaging in "adaptive transfer", a notion which DePalma and Ringer (2011) have conceptualised as "the conscious or intuitive process of reshaping" prior knowledge in new or unfamiliar writing situations (p. 134). Thus, rather than merely replicating or using prior knowledge, it is "adapted" or "transformed" to fit novel contexts (DePalma & Ringer, 2011, p. 142). Deploying the "high-road transfer" technique could also help learners avert a tendency to overgeneralise prior learning to new contexts, a form of negative transfer which Schwartz, Chase, and Bransford (2012) have called "overzealous transfer (OZT)". According to Schwartz et al. (2012), OZT occurs when there is lack of selectivity in application of prior learning to new contexts, in which knowledge was acquired and deemed appropriate, and target or new situations.

Despite serving as resources for students to navigate unfamiliar writing contexts, limitations of writing experiences acquired in other domains (e.g. work/prior study) for meaning making are acknowledged in the literature. These limitations mainly emanate from discrepancies in discursive practices students bring with them from other contexts and disciplinary practices they engage in at university (Lea, 2004; Paxton & Frith, 2014). Research which has drawn comparisons between academic and workplace writing demands highlights differences which make writing in these two contexts constitute "different activities" (Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Paré, 1999, p. 223). The motive for writing is what mainly distinguishes between the writing done in academic and workplace contexts. In academic contexts, the epistemic role of writing is of primary importance (Freedman, Adam, & Smart, 1994). That is, writing is used to foster individual students' learning of disciplines' content knowledge and ways of knowledge construction (Dias et al. 1999). Thus, when students write at university, the goal is to "perform knowledge" (Paretti, 2006), so that lecturers can evaluate students' learning of "discipline's knowledge" and "ways of knowing" as demonstrated in their texts (Dias et al. 1999, p. 206). In contrast, the writing undertaken at work is largely "collective epistemic", involving "construction and application of institutional knowledge" (Dias et al., 1999, p. 202), as well as "instrumental" and "praxis-oriented" (Freedman et al., 1994, p. 204), whereby texts are seen as means through which "material" or "practical" outcomes are achieved (Freedman & Adam, 1996, p. 421). Moreover, as Vásquez (2013) and Dias et al. (1999) have noted, unlike in academic contexts, the writing done at work is not primarily for purposes of displaying knowledge acquisition or ability to write. Any learning that occurs

through the writing process is a "by-product" of the instrumental purpose of writing (Dias et al., 1999, p. 211).

These differences create discontinuities between writing practices students encounter at work and those required of them at university. Failure to recognise such discontinuities can lead students to draw on discursive knowledge which has served them well at work but is deemed inappropriate in academic contexts and thus leads to unsuccessful writing (Devitt, 2007; Pardoe, 2000). Therefore, the challenge for students who transition from the workplace to university or straddle these "discursive worlds" is to learn to switch between practices of these worlds and negotiate "discursive identities" associated with these worlds (Northedge, 2003b, p. 27).

A disjuncture in literacy practices which students experience in the academy and prior education has also been reported in research which has probed the nature of previous academic writing experiences undergraduate students, particularly traditional first year entrants, bring to bear on their writing. Williams' (2005) study reveals gaps in interpretation and usage of assessment task verbs between first year students and their lecturers in a South African university. Whilst students' interpretation of most of the terms was more aligned with common-sense or dictionary meaning, the meanings which the lecturers attached to the verbs demonstrated distinctive usage of the terms within the science/chemistry discourse community. Williams believes that students' response to unfamiliar discipline-specific usage of the terms was to fall back on familiar literacy practices.

Other studies (e.g. Andrews, Robinson, See, Torgerson, Mitchell, Peake, Bilbro, & Prior, 2006; Andrews, Torgerson, & See, 2010; Wingate, 2012a) have attributed undergraduate students' limited understanding or misconception of argumentative writing in part to the influence of pre-university literacy practices. Wingate's (2012a) study, which was conducted in a UK university, was based on analysis of first year applied linguistics undergraduates' responses to a questionnaire completed during induction week, lecturer written feedback on students' argumentative essays, and students' diary entries. Her analysis was based upon an 'essay writing framework' composed of three interdependent components. At the core of this framework is establishing the writer's position which entails expressing a voice or stance in an academic debate, comparing evidence/ideas from sources, and finding support for one's position. Analysis and evaluation of content knowledge, as another element, involves 38

effective selection and use of information from sources for supporting claims and developing a position, and being critical of evidence derived from source texts. To present their position in a coherent manner, which is the third component, writers should have knowledge of 'schemata' (e.g. structure, style, and register) appropriate to the genre of argument at the HE level.

Drawing on this framework, the outcomes of her analysis revealed that the majority of the students' understanding of an argument was inconsistent with what is generally expected at university. This was reflected in their lack of awareness of key aspects of argumentation such as a writer's stance in an academic debate, supporting evidence, and a coherent presentation of argument (structure). Moreover, rather than demonstrating awareness of a "multi-voiced or dialogic" nature of argument (Andrews, 2000, p. 13), which is characteristic of academic writing at university, the concept of argument was mostly understood as binary or dualistic, involving two opposing positions (Andrews, 2000).

The tendency of students to draw on pre-university or school-based practices which contrast with what is expected of them at university is also reported in Andrews et al.'s (2006; 2010) study. In this study, comparisons were drawn between students' and lecturers' understanding of argumentation in three disciplines (biology, electrical engineering, and history) at three universities (2 in the UK and 1 in the USA). Differences in how the notion of argument was conceived by students and lecturers were quite apparent in history where argument development occupied a central position in students' writing. For instance, lecturers felt that argumentation centred around interpretation of past events and thus required making claims (thesis) and confirming or disproving claims through engaging with both primary and secondary sources. History students, on the other hand, saw argumentation as equivalent to expository essay writing, although their understanding included elements of comparison (for and against argument).

In both studies, it is believed that inadequacies in the guidance students were offered to facilitate development of discipline specific knowledge of the argumentative essay genre compounded students' misconceptions of the notion of argument and led them to fall back on models of argument which served them well in previous education. However, the efficacy of school-based argumentative practices which students draw on are considered inadequate resources for meaning making expected at HE level. For example, the school essay model,

with its simple structure, is considered inadequate to support development of complex arguments which are based on diverse and conflicting perspectives typical at HE level (Andrews et al., 2006; Wingate, 2012a).

Prior literacy practices are also implicated in students' perceptions and practices of intertextual borrowing in academic writing. This is evident in research (e.g. South African HE context: Angélil-Carter, 2000; Bharuthram & McKenna, 2012; Hendricks & Quinn, 2000) which has looked at how undergraduate students in both early (first year) and latter (third year) stages of their studies perceive rhetorical functions which intertextual borrowing serves in academic discourse. One of the major outcomes of these studies is students' limited understanding of the role of citation in academic writing. Their understanding of source use was mainly confined to avoidance of plagiarism or as evidence of coverage and understanding of required readings. Thus, source text use was not largely seen as a "knowledge making practice" (Paxton & Frith, 2014, p. 181); that is, as a resource writers use to construct arguments and develop and contribute their voice to academic debates (Hutchings, 2014).

Factors outside the students are implicated in students' perceptions of pedagogical functions of source use, among which are institutional discourses about use of sources, the nature of guidance or instruction on source use offered to students, and literacy practices from prior study. Findings from several studies (e.g. South African HE: Angéli-Carter, 2000; Australian HE: Gullifer & Tyson, 2010) have shown that students' understanding of the role of citation as avoidance of plagiarism could be a consequence of institutional discourses about textual borrowing. These studies have established that institutional discourses, usually reflected in institutional policies, tend to portray the role of citation negatively in terms of avoiding plagiarism, coupled with warnings of punitive (legal) consequences of inappropriate source use. Gullifer and Tyson (2010) have observed that the consequence of institutional discourses like these is a tendency for students to overlook the core pedagogical functions of using source texts such as to support or develop their own position or argument, and contribute to academic debates in their fields (epistemological functions). They further note that instead, students may become pre-occupied with correct technical citation conventions in order to avoid accusations and consequences of plagiarism.

Literacy practices from previous learning are also linked to students' conceptions of pedagogical functions of source text use. For example, in her study, Angélil- Carter (2000) found that first and third year undergraduate students' attitude towards texts and their views of knowledge appeared to be influenced by previous literacy practices. Students' tendency to treat source texts as factual knowledge rather than authors' "constructions", which can be debated or contested (p. 99), were seen as a likely consequence of little prior experience with citations. Since, as reported by students, the dominant forms of writing in their previous study were generally descriptive and narrative (creative writing), they were not used to writing with multiple source texts and engaging with diverse viewpoints. Echoing Andrews et al. (2006) and Wingate (2012a), Angélil-Carter considers these kinds of prior literacy practices inadequate to support students in learning, and engaging with, citation practices of the university.

What these findings imply is that not all the "discursive knowledge making practices" (Paxton & Frith, 2014, p. 175) students bring to the academy and draw on can be regarded as legitimate or adequate for meaning making. Paxton and Frith (2014, 2015) have pointed out that instead of enhancing students' learning of academic/disciplinary discourses and enabling meaning-making, some familiar practices or antecedent genres students draw upon, particularly those which contrast or conflict considerably with disciplinary practices, may constrain meaning-making and interfere with students' understanding and learning of discourses and genres of their disciplines. Thus, students' academic writing challenges and the consequent unsuccessful texts they produce are seen as the outcome of "negative transfer" or interference (Perkins & Salomon, 1989) of literacy practices from other contexts in academic writing.

Notwithstanding the potential drawbacks, discursive knowledge students bring with them from familiar contexts (work and previous study) is considered valuable. Knowing what literacy resources students bring with them into the academy can provide lecturers with access to discontinuities between students' prior literacy practices and those they engage in at university (Paxton & Frith, 2014, 2015). Such knowledge could be incorporated into course and assessment design which builds on students' prior knowledge and enables them to "take advantage of the resources they bring" (Rounsaville et al., 2008, p. 99). Understanding discursive resources students bring along to university could also allow lecturers to

interrogate their own assumptions about students' prior knowledge and to address gaps between their assumptions and students' realities (Artemeva & Fox, 2010). Moss and Walters (1993) argue that learning more about literacy knowledge which students bring to university can help lecturers to bridge gaps between students' prior literacy knowledge and the "expectations of the academy" (p. 162). They also point out that such awareness could help lecturers develop "a healthy and useful perspective" (p. 162) for considering challenges students experience with academic literacy.

Therefore, rather than make assumptions about students' prior literacy experiences and, how these might relate to disciplinary practices (Lea, 2004), scholars (e.g. Artemeva & Fox, 2010; Paxton & Frith, 2015; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011) who have explored literacy practices or discursive resources students draw on when they encounter new literacy tasks have been emphatic about the need for lecturers and course or curriculum designers/developers to orient themselves to the following: the nature of discursive resources students enter university with, how they make use of these resources, and how such resources may enhance or impede learning of disciplinary discourse practices.

Given the salience of students' prior writing knowledge and experiences, an area of concern relates to how best academic staff can learn about, and address, discontinuities which arise because of incongruities between disciplinary literacy practices and those students bring to the academy. The literature offers diverse suggestions on how gaps between students' prior literacy practices and disciplinary practices can be identified and bridged. Artemeva and Fox (2010) have suggested use of 'diagnostic' or formative assessment on commencement of students' studies to probe their habits of meaning making and genre knowledge which they enter university with. They argue that outcomes of this assessment would alert lecturers to gaps in their expectations about students' discursive resources and how students make use of these discursive resources in their writing. Moreover, formative feedback may lead to students' increased awareness of the in(appropriateness) of their discursive resources within a low-stakes assessment context, which could encourage them to "examine and make strategic uses of their prior discursive resources" (Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011, p. 332).

Since students may not always be "conscious" of the ways they are using prior discursive resources such as antecedent genres (Rounsaville et al., 2008, p. 98), Devitt (2007) has suggested teaching students about genre awareness. Devitt believes that this could enable

students to develop capacity to draw from antecedent genres "mindfully and deliberately" (p. 224) as they would be able to (a) pay attention to similarities and differences between prior and current writing situations, (b) assess whether antecedent genres serve as legitimate meaning making resources in a given situation, and (c) make adaptations to known genres to fit the new writing situation. Besides enabling students to draw on appropriate antecedent genre knowledge, explicitly teaching students about genres they are expected to produce, aided by use of student exemplar texts, is considered as a means through which lecturers could address misconceptions students might have about genres they are required to produce at university (Wingate, 2012a).

Proponents of use of dialogue in developing students' writing, such as Lea (2004), Lillis (2001, 2006), and Richards and Pilcher (2013, 2014), believe that dialogue in a form of "verbal exchange and debate or written expression" (Harrington, 2011, p. 55) can provide "pedagogic spaces" (Lea, 2004, p. 745) in which:

- Gaps between students' and lecturers' ways of making sense of disciplinary literacy practices could be established (Lea, 2004; Richards & Pilcher, 2013)
- Assumptions regarding students' knowledge of disciplinary meaning making practices could be explored (Richards & Pilcher, 2013)
- Identified gaps could be bridged and assumptions addressed (Lea, 2004; Richards & Pilcher, 2013)
- Lecturers could scaffold students' learning of disciplinary practices by making practices that inform texts which students encounter or are required to construct, and conventions within which they are expected to write, visible (Lea, 2004; Lillis, 2001, 2006)
- Students could be provided with opportunity to explore alternative meaningmaking practices besides the sanctioned conventional ones (Lillis, 2001, 2006)

The pedagogical value of dialogue in facilitating students' learning of literacy practices and standards of academic writing they are expected to engage in is reported in a number of studies. For instance, Richards and Pilcher (2013, 2014) have reported the efficacy of dialogue in enhancing mature students' understanding of discipline specific use of assessment task terms at a UK university. Findings of their study reveal that through student-lecturer dialogue around key assessment task words, students were enlightened on their lecturers'

interpretation and usage of these terms and what constituted appropriate responses to such terms. Talking about the interpretations of the task words also had a positive impact on lecturer practice as the discussions exposed lack of shared understanding of the terms between students and lecturers.

Dialogue as a means of familiarising students with academic standards expected of their work is reported in such studies as Hendry, Armstrong, and Bromberger's (2012). Their study, conducted at an Australian university, explored first year law undergraduates' perceptions of "teacher-led discussions" of exemplars in class which were aimed at increasing students' understanding of standards of academic work. Results from focus group discussions with students revealed that they found exemplars dialogue useful mainly because lecturers were able to explain how assignment exemplars were judged at different levels of performance or standards and why they graded the exemplars in the way they did. Handley and Williams (2011) have noted that the value of analysing and discussing exemplars is that students are able to engage with standards expected of their work, which are "embedded" in exemplars and summarised in rubrics (Hendry et al., 2012). These activities can also support development of students' capacity for making evaluative judgements of others' work (Carless & Chan, 2017). However, the effectiveness of discussing exemplars to support students' understanding of academic standards largely depends on the role of lecturers in these interactions and their facilitation of the discussions. Hendry et al. (2012) and Carless and Chan (2017) recommend an 'interactive' approach in which there is a balance between student judgements about the quality of exemplars and lecturer commentary on the exemplars. The authors propose that the lecturer commentary should focus on highlighting main aspects of good quality work.

# 2.5 Lecturers' perceptions about academic writing

As experts of their disciplinary knowledge, academics' views about academic writing are valuable. Lillis and Curry (2010, p. 22) have observed that academic writing, as a social activity, is "rarely an individual process or product" but rather is "mediated at the level of interaction between individuals" and at the institutional level. Since subject specialists are involved in the production and reception of students' texts, they are immediate mediators of students' writing. For example, lecturers mediate students' writing through provision of guidance on writing and feedback on their written work (Lea & Stierer, 2000) in order to

enable students "unpack the ground rules" of assessment tasks (Lea & Street, 1999, p. 78) and close the gap between students' and lecturers' understanding of writing requirements and expectations which are set by the latter. Beyond students' text production, lecturers are disciplinary discourse mediators. In this case, the lecturers' role is to mediate between the discipline and students by inducting them into disciplinary discourses (Andrews, 2010). In addition, their role, as "the gatekeeper of disciplinary discourse" (Andrews, 2000, p. 11), is to determine what gets valued as knowledge and how it is represented (Andrews, 2010).

Research which has explored academics' experiences of student literacies, particularly barriers to students' writing and reading, has revealed lecturers' perceptions of factors contributing to the challenges which students encounter at university. Results of these studies (e.g. Gourlay & Deane, 2012; Hardy & Clughen, 2012; Hyland, 2013b) highlight that lecturers attribute such difficulties to student under-preparedness for and lack of experience in the kinds of writing they are expected to do at university. That is, they acknowledge that prior learning experiences do not equip students with the knowledge required to successfully navigate the kinds of writing (e.g. complex argumentative and expository writing) expected of them (Hyland, 2013b).

Lecturers tendency to apportion blame on previous educational experiences (e.g. school practices) for students' writing challenges is reported in several studies (e.g. Gourlay & Deane, 2012; Hardy & Clughen, 2012; Itua et al., 2014). In these studies, lecturers thought that students' unfamiliarity with literacy practices at university emanate from pedagogical approaches of pre-university education and the nature of writing which students experience in previous learning. These lecturers cited the following as examples of pre-university practices which contribute to student under-preparedness for the type of writing required at university: lack of independent learning (spoon-feeding), a focus on exams, lack of extensive reading of scholarly texts, and an over-reliance on internet sources, such as Wikipedia. Lack of extended and evidence-based (writing from sources) writing at the FE level due to emphasis on short writing tasks rather than "open pieces of writing" (p. 314) is also highlighted in Itua et al. (2014). Lecturers in Itua et al.'s (2014) study felt that the consequences of heavy reliance on information sources such as Wikipedia to inform their writing are inability and unwillingness to extensively use library resources, inability to engage with scholarly literature, and use of "unscientific/layman's terminology" in their writing (p. 314). In Hardy and Clughen (2012)

study, pre-university literacy experiences were faulted for a deficit of students' linguistic and literacy skills, such as lack of ability to read in depth and critically, limited understanding of the conventions of written English (e.g. grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, and paragraphs), a limited vocabulary, inability to reflect on or critically review their own work, and lack of coherent argument or structure.

Subject lecturers are regarded as capable of helping students develop their writing in the disciplines due to their knowledge of subject/discipline discourses, subject content, and students' disciplinary writing needs (Basturkmen, 2017; Northedge, 2003a), and knowledge of writing in their disciplines (Zhu, 2004). The need for subject lecturers to be responsible for academic writing instruction is also based on the argument that most of the writing that is important to undergraduates occurs in content courses (Hyland, 2013b; Zhu, 2004). However, the idea that subject lecturers should support development of students' academic writing is challenged mainly on the basis of the lecturers' tacit knowledge of their disciplinary discourses and practices. It is argued that subject lecturers are likely to experience challenges making this tacit knowledge explicit for students so that they can develop "meta-knowledge" of such discourses (Jacobs, 2005, p. 478). As noted by several scholars (Elton, 2010; Etherington, 2008; Jacobs, 2005), unless such knowledge is drawn out in order to make it explicit, it often remains "tacitly held by subject specialists" and may be unknown to students (Etherington, 2008, p. 37).

Additionally, subject lecturers do not always perceive teaching academic writing as their main domain but rather that of literacy lecturers (Basturkmen, 2017). This view is evident in Zhu's (2004) study which examined business and engineering lecturers' views on academic writing and writing instruction in a USA university. Interviews with the lecturers revealed that they believed that writing would be effectively taught by writing/language teachers. The study also established that despite acknowledging their role in facilitating development of students' academic writing, they prioritised their role of teaching subject content over academic writing. They believed that they could help students develop academic writing largely by providing them with writing opportunities and content-related feedback on their work. Similarly, Hyland's (2013b) study highlights academics' (business, science, engineering, and arts) views, in a Hong Kong university, on their role in helping students develop academic writing. The findings indicate that several lecturers did not see the need to

offer students explicit instruction in disciplinary writing as they believed that students' knowledge of disciplinary writing conventions developed along with subject knowledge, and that students could learn to write through reading in the subject.

How lecturers conceive the nature of academic writing and the place of writing in the disciplines' curricula influences their views on how students' academic writing ought to be developed and who should assume such responsibility. In Zhu's study, lecturers who held the view that academic writing largely involves the transfer of general writing skills to different contexts thought that writing instructors should be responsible for teaching academic writing. In Murray and Nallaya's (2016) study, subject lecturers' reluctance to take up responsibility of teaching academic writing is linked to their tendency to conceptualise academic literacies as an issue about language proficiency. The lecturers also treated academic literacies and study skills as the same, and thus something that could be taught outside of, rather than embedded in, subject curricula. Similarly, findings from Gourlay and Deane's (2012) study of lecturer perceptions of writing and plagiarism of first year undergraduates at a UK post-92 university indicate that a 'study skills' model of writing leads lecturers to consider student writing development as "extracurricular and remedial" (p. 19). Other scholars (e.g. Deane & O'Neill, 2011; Wingate, 2011; Wingate, Andon, & Cogo, 2011) have attributed subject lecturers' reluctance to teach writing in part to time constraints and increased workload. For instance, Wingate (2011) has observed that subject teachers may be concerned that integrating academic writing instruction with subject curriculum entails reducing time allotted to teaching of subject content in order to accommodate the teaching of writing.

In light of these arguments, it is acknowledged that developing students' academic writing ability requires the expertise of both academic literacy and subject teachers since neither is capable of independently achieving this (Elton, 2010; Jacobs, 2007a). Hence, "collaborative pedagogy" (Jacobs, 2010) between subject and literacy lecturers is recommended. The strength of collaborative pedagogy lies in the expertise which either party brings to academic writing instruction. The collaborative interactions or conversations between literacy and subject lecturers provide "discursive spaces" (Jacobs, 2007a) where each party brings expertise necessary to induct students into and enable them to participate in disciplinary discourses. On the one hand, as "insiders" of their particular disciplines, subject lecturers bring tacit knowledge of their disciplinary genres, underlying discourses, and rhetorical

processes for meaning making (Jacobs, 2007a, b). On the other hand, as "outsiders" to subject lecturers' disciplines, literacy lecturers bring their rhetorical knowledge for making disciplinary genres, discourses, and rhetorical processes explicit (Jacobs, 2007a, b). Thus literacy lecturers can use this knowledge to enable subject lecturers to 'bring out' and 'make explicit' their tacit knowledge of disciplinary discourses and writing conventions (Blake & Pates, 2010; Etherington, 2008; Jacobs, 2005, 2007a, 2010). "Explicit awareness" ("meta-awareness") of discipline-specific discourses is deemed necessary for lecturers to be able to induct students into and enable them to participate in such discourses (Jacobs, 2007a, p. 877). Therefore, one of the vital roles of literacy lecturers in their collaborative interactions with subject lecturers is to gain access to and "unlock" the latter's tacit knowledge of disciplinary discourses and enable them to bring such knowledge into the "realm of conscious understanding" (Jacobs, 2005, p. 480).

#### 2.6 Approaches to teaching academic literacies

The literature suggests several approaches to teaching academic literacies. In the following sections, three approaches which involve different levels of collaboration between subject and literacy lecturers are discussed, namely: co-operation, curriculum-linked/partly embedded, and curriculum integrated/fully embedded.

# 2.6.1 Co-operation

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) have described the 'co-operation' approach as mainly involving literacy lecturers consulting with subject lecturers and their departments in order to find out about the following information which can be used to design academic writing courses: task types required of students, disciplinary practices, conventions, and values, the "conceptual and discoursal framework" of particular subjects (p. 43), as well as expectations and areas of priority of target students and departments. Literacy lecturers also obtain information about subject-specific texts which can be used to develop instruction materials. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) note that it is through the analysis of these texts that literacy lecturers can learn about the workings of a particular subject area.

Wingate (2011) has identified low involvement of subject lecturers, for example in the design and delivery of the course, as a main feature of the co-operation or additional approach. That is, usually subject lecturers' contribution is limited to providing information for designing the course and developing learning materials. In addition, the writing course is largely separated from the learning of subject content. However, as Wingate (2011) has noted, a potential consequence of low-level involvement of subject lecturers in developing instruction materials and teaching of the writing course can be a low student uptake of the course. This is mainly because students' interest in participating in writing courses is likely to decline if they perceive the learning of writing as not relevant to the learning of subject content (Wingate, 2015).

## 2.6.2 Curriculum-linked/partly embedded

Another approach to the development of academic literacies is the curriculum-linked or partly embedded. As described by Tribble and Wingate (2013), the academic literacy course is offered in the disciplines in which subject content is taught. This calls for provision of academic literacies instruction which is tailored to student needs. Hence, instruction is based on texts representing the genres relevant to the students' disciplines. As Wingate (2018) explains, the role of subject lecturers could be to identify genres which students need to become familiar with and to provide texts such as assessed exemplar student assignments which literacy lecturers, in consultation with subject lecturers, can use to develop materials for the teaching of the disciplinary genres. Besides the use of discipline-specific instruction materials, in this approach, assessment tasks required of students are linked to subject content. In addition, the course is jointly taught by subject and literacy lecturers. Tribble and Wingate (2013) have argued that team-teaching by literacy and subject lecturers enables students to receive support on both "discursive and subject-related aspects" of academic writing (p. 314).

Several strengths of the curriculum-linked approach of academic literacy instruction have been identified. For example, Tribble and Wingate (2013) have argued that subject lecturers' participation in the design and delivery of the course contributes to the "authenticity and subject-specificity" of literacy instruction (p. 318). Coupled with the use of subject-specific instruction materials, subject lecturers' involvement in the delivery of the course can help elevate the "status and relevance" of academic writing from the perspective of students (Wingate, 2011, p. 68). The result can be high levels of student participation and engagement in the writing course (Deane & O'Neill, 2011; Wingate, 2015). Lastly, Tribble and Wingate (2013) see the curriculum-linked approach as a "realistic and sustainable way" of providing

discipline-specific writing instruction mainly because subject and literacy lecturers can fairly share the responsibility of designing and delivering the course. Despite these strengths, a major drawback of this approach is that it remains an additional strategy if literacy instruction is not embedded in subject curricula (Wingate, 2011).

### 2.6.3 Curriculum integrated/fully embedded

The curriculum integrated or fully embedded approach to teaching academic literacies is highly recommended in the literature. Generally, integration of academic literacies and disciplinary content means developing "student capabilities in required academic literacies within the content and assessment framework of a programme and within the timetabled classes of the programme" (Hillege, Catterall, Beale, & Stewart, 2014, p. 687). Wingate (2015, p. 59), however, argues that the highest degree of integration is also achieved when academic literacy development "becomes part of a credit-bearing module" within a study programme. Jacobs (2007b, p. 71) argues that the goal of the integrated approach should be to make "explicit" and give students "access to the workings of disciplinary discourses". In order to achieve this goal, subject lecturers need to be heavily involved in developing teaching materials and delivering the literacy course (Blake & Pates, 2010; Wingate, 2011).

In this approach, subject specialists and literacy lecturers play specific roles. Whilst subject lecturers are mainly responsible for course delivery, the literacy lecturers can play a guest role, for example to teach an aspect of academic literacy (Blake & Pates, 2010). Both subject specialists and literacy lecturers are involved in designing the literacy course and developing instruction materials. However, the role of literacy lecturers is to identify "opportunities for literacy work in the subject curriculum" (Wingate, 2015, p. 130). Specifically, their role is to help subject lecturers to articulate literacies relevant to their disciplines, map these literacies unto learning aims and outcomes, and identify assessment tasks which would measure the targeted learning outcomes (Murray & Nallaya, 2016). In collaboration with subject lecturers, the literacy lecturers' role is to identify target subject-specific genres and analyse these in order to make their discourse features explicit (Murray & Nallaya, 2016; Wingate, 2015). To facilitate analysis of the genres, subject lecturers should enlighten literacy lecturers on the "social context" and communicative purposes of the disciplines' genres (Wingate, 2015, p.130). To ensure a sustained provision of curriculum embedded literacy instruction, Murray and Nallaya (2016) suggest that literacy lecturers should reinforce subject lecturers' teaching

of academic literacies by providing them with professional development in the form of "faceto-face consultations, workshops, and online resources" (p. 1304). The authors recommend that this professional support should aim at enhancing subject lecturers' understanding of academic literacies and the embedding process, as well as providing them with the necessary "pedagogical skills" for teaching academic literacies (p. 1302).

Proponents of the embedded approach (e.g. Blake & Pates, 2010; Jacobs, 2007a, b; Murray & Nallaya, 2016; Wingate, 2011) argue that when academic literacy instruction is integrated with regular subject teaching and assessment, inclusiveness in the provision of writing support for all students within their respective disciplines is likely to be achieved. Wingate (2015) also notes that embedding the teaching of academic literacy in subject curricula makes it possible to do away with exclusive provision of literacy instruction to a selected groups of students, such as those deemed by their lecturers to be at risk of failure due to their lower language proficiency levels or unsatisfactory level of academic literacy. Wingate (2015) further notes that the "stigma of 'remedy" (p. 62) which is associated with deficit models of literacy support such as study skills can be eliminated if literacy instruction is offered to all students. Another potential benefit of the curriculum integrated approach is that when lecturers are highly involved in the teaching of academic writing, students' views regarding the relevance of academic literacy instruction can improve (Wingate, 2011). Finally, Deane and O'Neill (2011) argue that embedding writing instruction into subject curricula increases students' chances of success since they begin to engage with discourses and genres pertinent to their disciplines from the outset of their degree programmes.

Notwithstanding these potential benefits, obstacles to the provision of curriculum embedded writing instruction are acknowledged in the literature. Firstly, dominant institutional discourses regarding the concept of academic literacies can hinder the implementation of integrated approaches to academic literacy instruction. Jacobs (2007b, p. 70) names three such institutional discourses: those which (a) depict language as "an instrument of communication rather than as a means for making meaning", (b) "conflate academic literacy and English proficiency", and (c) "frame students in a deficit mode". Jacobs (2007a, b) notes that these discourses can lead both subject and literacy lecturers to conceptualise academic literacies as autonomous transferable generic skills, and thus their understanding of how academic literacies should be taught. For instance, these discourses can reinforce the notion

that academic literacy interventions should be offered outside of the curriculum (Murray & Nallaya, 2016), in a form of English language remedial classes and "add-on, generic academic literacy skills-based courses" (Jacobs, 2007b, p. 70). These discourses also depict the development of students' disciplinary literacies as the domain of literacy lecturers, thereby absolving subject lecturers of the responsibility of teaching academic writing and hindering opportunities for collaboration between subject and literacy lecturers (Jacobs, 2007a).

Subject lecturers' reluctance to participate in literacy instruction can also compromise the integration of literacy instruction with subject curricula. This reluctance has been linked to the lecturers' apprehension that embedding literacy instruction with subject curricula would lead to more workload, investment of more time, and reduction of subject content (Wingate, 2011). However, Wingate (2011) argues that despite the increased workload and the need for subject lecturers to invest more time, the integrated approach does not necessarily result in coverage of less subject content. She observes that if student-centred approaches which foster independent learning and "student interaction" in the classroom are adopted, "the delivery of content can become more condensed and concise" (p. 78). One such approach, which Wingate (2011) refers to, is the one in which students are encouraged to do preparatory reading of subject content and come to lessons better prepared. Another factor which contributes to subject lecturers' reluctance to take up responsibility of teaching academic literacies is their belief that they lack the necessary expertise for socialising students into disciplinary literacy practices (Murray & Nallaya, 2016), and thus consider academic literacy instruction as the domain of literacy lecturers (Blake & Pates, 2010).

In order to facilitate the embedding of literacies in subject curricula, it has been argued that institutional discourses which reinforce the separation of academic literacies from content knowledge need to be counteracted. Jacobs (2007a), for instance, recommends a reconceptualisation of academic literacies as being "central to how disciplines structure and communicate their knowledge bases" (p. 873), and the teaching of academic literacies as about giving students access to "disciplinary knowledge" (p. 875) and "the workings of disciplinary discourses" (Jacobs, 2007b, p. 71).

Measures which could help increase subject lecturers' involvement in literacy instruction include enhancing the subject lecturers' understanding of what it means to integrate academic

literacies with subject content, the rationale for implementing the curriculum integrated approach, the concepts which inform this approach, as well as the processes and the nature of changes involved (Murray & Nallaya, 2016). The authors believe that communicating this information clearly can help minimise scepticism and resistance on the part of those who are tasked with implementing the integration of literacy instruction in disciplines. However, Wingate (2011, p. 84) argues that building a robust "pedagogical argument" of the embedded approach would require developing methods of supporting students' academic literacies and proving their efficacy.

Securing the support of senior leadership of HE institutions is also seen as necessary for successfully implementing initiatives aimed at embedding literacy instruction in subject curricula. Such support is required in order to ensure that staff complies with their responsibility of integrating literacy instruction with the teaching of subject knowledge (Murray & Nallaya, 2016). Support of senior management is also needed if funding for staff development and resources, which would facilitate the implementation of the curriculum integrated approach, is to be secured (Wingate, 2011). Support at the senior management level is also needed to effect institutional restructuring which is likely to happen when embedding the teaching of literacies in subject curriculum. The structural changes include the "decentralisation of literacy instruction" and the consequent relocating of literacy lecturers to various faculties or departments (Wingate, 2015, p. 62).

### 2.7 Summary of the reviewed literature

The following are the major insights from the reviewed prior literature on academic writing experiences of undergraduate students, including mature students:

- Undergraduate students, including mature ones, experience challenges transitioning to the academic literacy requirements of their disciplines. These challenges are compounded by several factors such as students' previous discursive experiences from prior learning and professional contexts which influence or shape their academic writing, inadequacies in academic literacy support, and lecturer and institutional assumptions about the affordances of students' prior literacy experiences.
- Prior writing experiences which students draw upon serve as resources for navigating new writing tasks. However, not all such resources are considered as legitimate or

adequate for meaning making expected at university. This is particularly the case for prior discursive resources which contrast or conflict considerably with disciplinary practices.

• Lecturers' understanding of the nature of academic writing influences their views of how students' academic writing should be developed and their role in helping students to develop their writing.

Given that prior research acknowledges the significant role students' prior writing experiences play in their transition to academic literacy practices, it is clear that their knowledge and experiences of writing in other contexts should be examined. This is more pertinent for mature students, given that most of them are likely to enter university with a certain level of knowledge and experience of writing in professional settings. However, prior research offers limited insight into the nature of prior discursive resources mature students bring to their academic writing and the affordances these resources offer students when writing assignments.

Previous research has established that lack of shared awareness of disciplinary literacy requirements between students and lecturers can compound students' academic writing challenges and prevent them from producing successful writing. However, there is scarcity of literature into how undergraduate students and their lecturers interpret requirements of academic writing, as well as ways through which students learn about, and lecturers communicate, these requirements.

There is also comparatively less extensive research on academic writing experiences of mature undergraduate students, in contrast to those of traditional students. In addition, focus of much prior research is first year writing experiences of undergraduate students in comparison with experiences of students in advanced stages of their studies. In light of these research needs, this study sought answers to the following questions:

### 2.8 Research questions

- 1. How do mature undergraduate students and their lecturers in a Malawian context interpret requirements for student writing?
- 2. How do these mature students learn about what is required of their writing?

- 3. What are the perceived (by students and lecturers) affordances of discursive resources from professional contexts which these mature students bring to bear on their writing?
- 4. What reasons do these students and their lecturers give for mature students' academic writing challenges?
- 5. What strategies for developing the academic writing of mature students do these lecturers and students suggest?

The following chapter presents details about the context of this study, participants, the methodological approach, as well as data collection and analysis techniques adopted in order to address the above stated research questions.

#### **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the methodological approach which was employed in order to explore student and lecturer perceptions of academic writing experiences of final year mature undergraduates at the Polytechnic College of UNIMA. The chapter first provides an overview of the context in which the study was carried out. Details of the mixed-methods research design are presented in the next section. A discussion of data collection methods and the study's procedures follows in sections 3.4 and 3.5 respectively. Data analysis techniques are presented in section 3.6. The researcher's positioning in the research context is offered in section 3.7. The chapter ends with a discussion of ethical considerations pertinent to this study.

# 3.2 Research context

In order to understand the context of this study, this section provides an overview of the Malawi education system with a primary focus on tertiary education. It also provides background information about the UNIMA and its constituent college, the Polytechnic, which is the immediate context of this study.

### 3.2.1 Malawi's education system

Malawi has an 8-4-4 structure of education. This translates into eight years of primary school which, officially, learners enter at age six. A primary school leaving certificate qualifies learners for secondary education which lasts for four years. At the end of secondary education, they sit for a school leaving certificate examination, which is typically taken at age 17. A credit pass in 6 subjects including English qualifies learners for admission to at least four years of university education at bachelor's degree level in public universities.

## 3.2.1.1 Tertiary education

In Malawi, tertiary education can be described as post-secondary education which is offered by universities and colleges/institutes (of further education). The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), a regulatory body whose primary mandate is to provide accreditation and quality assurance services in HE institutions, recognises four public universities, 19 private universities, and about 12 colleges/institutes of higher learning (National Council for Higher Education, 2018). Qualifications offered by universities range from certificates to higher degrees such as PhDs, whilst colleges/institutes usually award diplomas and certificates in technical/vocational training.

Public universities such as UNIMA receive financial support from the government and their tuition fee is relatively lower compared to what learners pay in private institutions. In all public universities, eligible students can apply for government loans to fund their education. Students who are admitted through the mature-entry route do not qualify for the loans (Higher Education Students' Loans and Grants Board (HESLGB), 2019). Therefore, some students' tuition fee is funded by the government whilst others self-finance their studies. With the exception of UNIMA (see section 3.2.1.2 for the profile of UNIMA), the other public universities were established post 1993 (democratic era) with an aim of widening student access to HE.

# 3.2.1.2 Profile of the Malawi Polytechnic, University of Malawi

UNIMA, which was established in 1964, is the oldest, public collegiate university with four constituent colleges, and a student population of over 8,000 on certificate, diploma, and degree programmes (University of Malawi, 2017). Admission of traditional students to the UNIMA is coordinated by the NCHE, while respective colleges are responsible for admission of mature students. Generally, a merit pass in six subjects including English language for the national school leaving certificate examinations (equivalent to the British 'O' level qualification) qualifies learners to apply for admission to UNIMA's various degree programmes (see section 3.2.2 on additional entry requirements for mature students). Because English is the medium of instruction and formal communication at UNIMA, a certain level of proficiency in English is a compulsory requirement. It is believed that passing English language in the school leaving certificate examinations with at least merit is ample evidence of the students' competency in the language. Therefore, it is expected that these students should be able to deal with English language proficiency demands of their programmes.

Two of the UNIMA's constituent colleges, Kamuzu College of Nursing and College of Medicine offer healthcare related programmes such as nursing and medicine respectively. The third college, Chancellor College offers degree programmes in education, science, social sciences, and arts. The degree programmes at the Malawi Polytechnic, which is the immediate context of this study, are largely in the fields of commerce, engineering, and 57

applied sciences. The Polytechnic is the second largest in terms of student enrolment with a current student population of 4,777 (The Polytechnic, 2019). In the 2016/17 academic year, there were approximately 3,100 undergraduate students who were enrolled in various degree programmes offered in five faculties, namely applied sciences, commerce, education and media studies, engineering, and built environment. This number constitutes about 557 mature entry students, 168 of which were final year students. The majority (about 130) of these final year students were enrolled in social science programmes offered by the faculties of commerce, and education and media studies.

### 3.2.2 Mature students in the University of Malawi

Mature students are a group of students who are admitted to the University of Malawi through the programme of widening access of tertiary education. Whist the mature students enter university for different reasons (e.g. changing workplace demands and need for employees to continuously acquire new knowledge and upgrade their qualifications) (Osman & Castle, 2006), they are more likely to be motivated by the increasingly accumulation of what Michaud (2011, p. 246) calls the "cultural capital of the bachelor's degree" in particular, and probably university education in general. Thus for most students, university education could be seen as a means to develop knowledge and skills which they could use for personal development, for example, to change or advance careers, or secure their current jobs (Owusu-Agyeman, 2016; Swain & Hammond, 2011).

For the purposes of this study, mature students are defined within the 'life-cycle discourse' framework (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002). For criteria which are used to define non-traditional students within this framework, see section 2.4. Based on the 'life-cycle discourse' framework, mature students in the UNIMA are those who generally are adults, aged above 21. Due to accreditation of prior learning and work experience in areas related to programme of study, mature students are accepted as direct entrants; that is, they enter later years of degree programmes (year two or three) which run for four years. Although individual faculties or departments use their discretion in deciding whether to enrol students in second or third year, academic entry qualifications and work experience relevant to study programme are the main criteria which determine the level at which a student is enrolled. For the academic qualifications; that is, whether the content knowledge which is covered at
the FE level is equivalent to year 1 or 2 curriculum of the degree programmes (see Appendix 1 for a summary of entry requirements for degree programmes on which participants of this study were enrolled). Joining the programmes in year two or three means that students are exempted from modules presumed to have been covered in their further education qualifications. By exempting students from earlier years of their programmes, the assumption is that they already have prerequisite or foundational knowledge which would enable them to cope with learning demands in the subsequent years.

As per UNIMA's entry requirements for this group of students, mature students enter the university with work experience of not less than two years acquired after obtaining a further education qualification (see Appendix 1 for a summary of programme entry requirements relevant to participants of this study). This means that they do not progress directly from a further education qualification to university. The admission criterion of two years post-diploma work experience also implies that for mature students there could be a gap of at least two years, long after their last experience of formal education. Since there is no restriction as regards how recent the academic entry qualification should be, this gap can be prolonged.

In addition to their work experience, what distinguishes this group of mature students from the traditional ones is that unlike the latter, the former enter university with a tertiary education qualification obtained from institutions in Malawi and through distance study. Table 1 presents a list of some of the institutions which award entry qualifications for degree programmes which participants of this study were enrolled on. ABE, ACCA, ICAM, and CIPS offer distance learning, whereby students engage in independent learning/self-study using online learning support in the form of study guides/syllabuses and past exam papers. Nevertheless, students can choose to attend classes at local accredited centres, usually colleges, where they also sit their examinations set and assessed by the qualification awarding institutions. As a way of preparing students for the examinations, they are taught the syllabi and afforded opportunities for formative assessment, and support for assignment writing and examination revision.

As shown in Table 1, these institutions mainly provide vocationally related training for students who wish to join the workforce or develop a career. But the training and qualifications obtained from these institutions can be used to pursue further education at university. Given the nature of these qualifications, emphasis is on technical knowledge.

 Table 1: List of institutions which award entry qualifications for degree programmes of student participants

Field/ discipline	Awarding institution/examination body	Qualification/ level of study	Mode of study/ Learning	Mode of assessment	Year of entry into degree programme (UNIMA)
Accounting/ internal auditing	ACCA	Diploma in accounting technician/ financial	<ul><li>Independent learning</li><li>Taught</li></ul>	Examinations	2/3
	ICAW	accounting			
Business administration	ABE	Diploma in business management/ marketing	<ul> <li>Independent learning</li> <li>Taught</li> </ul>	Examinations & assignments	2/3
Procurement and logistics management	CIPS	Diploma in procurement and supply	<ul> <li>Independent learning</li> <li>Taught</li> </ul>	Examinations	3
Technical Education (Science)	MANEB, TEVETA	Advanced craft certificate	Taught: competence- based training/ apprenticeship	Examinations – theory based/ practical work	2/3
Education (business studies)	ICAM, ACCA, ABE	<ul> <li>Diploma in accounting technician/ financial accounting</li> <li>Diploma in business management/ marketing</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Independent learning</li> <li>Taught</li> </ul>	Examinations /assignments	3
Journalism	Colleges (e.g. MIJ) & UNIMA's CEC	Diploma in journalism	Taught	Assignments/ examination: theory based, practical work	2

Notes: ACCA: Association of Chartered Certified Accountants; ICAM: Institute of Chartered Accountants in Malawi; ABE: The Association of Business Executives; CIPS: Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply; MANEB: Malawi National Examination Board; TEVETA: Technical Entrepreneurial and Vocational Education and Training Authority; MIJ: Malawi Institute of Journalism; CEC: Continuing Education Centre Sources: <a href="https://www.abeuk.com">www.abeuk.com</a>, <a href="https://www.abeuk.com"/>www.abeuk.com"/>www.abeuk.com</a>, <a href="https://www.abeuk.com"/w

However, the syllabi of some of these qualifications cover communication skills. For instance, the two accounting qualifications, ACCA and ICAM, have professional communication modules whose aim is to equip students with skills necessary to meet communication demands of their professions. ACCA's communication course is optional and covers, among others, different communication styles and barriers to effective communication (ACCA, 2018). ICAM, on the other hand, offers a core and credit bearing

module whose syllabus includes business writing with components such as features of good business writing and types of business correspondence (e.g. memo, notices, business letters, and short formal report) (ICAM, 2015).

Similarly, TEVETA syllabi have communication modules which focus on writing, among other things (S. Bulla, lecturer at a technical college, personal communication, June 6, 2018). Topics covered in these modules include forms of business correspondence (e.g. memos, technical proposals, and reports), and qualities of good writing (e.g. structure, paragraph construction, rhetorical techniques, use of sources -citation). MIJ qualifications have a communication course whose writing component addresses business writing, rhetorical conventions (e.g. narrative, argument, and description), and documenting sources (M. Manja, media training manager of MIJ, personal communication, June 3, 2018).

### 3.3 Methodological approach and research design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach which is based on the pragmatist paradigm, a worldview which focuses attention on a research problem or question and use of "pluralistic approaches" (Creswell, 2014, p. 10) in order to gain knowledge about the problem under study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Since pragmatism does not subscribe to a single paradigmatic worldview, researchers who employ a mixed-methods approach can draw from both the quantitative and qualitative research traditions which best help them to address their research problem (Creswell, 2014). A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2014) was adopted in this study, in which a questionnaire was employed first and was followed by retrospective semi-structured interviews with some of the questionnaire respondents for further discussion of their questionnaire responses (detailed discussion of these research instruments can be found in section 3.4). Although qualitative and quantitative data were analysed separately using their respective analytical techniques (see section 3.6 for data analysis procedures), the emerging findings from the data sets were examined for any possible links. That is, the different forms of data sets were related to each other and examined for complementary, convergent, or even divergent results (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003). In addition, quantitative and qualitative findings were discussed jointly at the interpretation stage. As Erzberger and Kelle (2003, p. 457) have noted, it is possible to derive "theoretical propositions" based on the "synthesis" of qualitative and quantitative data.

For this study, the value of working within a mixed methods approach is that it was possible to utilise the strengths of qualitative and quantitative approaches and "offset" their limitations (Bryman, 2006, p. 106). The outcome of combining both approaches was a more comprehensive account of participants' perceptions of mature students' academic writing experiences, which could not have been achieved if either approach was used alone (Bryman, 2006; Erzberger & Kelle, 2003).

As Bloor (1997, p. 41) has noted, "methodological pluralism" has "an interactive impact" as it allows different facets of research problems to be explored. For instance, in this study, use of semi-structured interviews made it possible to attain an in-depth, contextual understanding of participants' subjective and diverse perspectives of, and meanings which they attach to, mature students' academic writing experiences. On the other hand, the student questionnaire facilitated exploration of the prevalence of students' reported academic writing experiences among a larger group of mature students. The outcome of triangulating different methods can be broader knowledge which can prompt deeper and richer analyses (Flick, 1992). The following sections discuss some of the distinctive features of qualitative and quantitative research traditions which this study draws on.

#### 3.3.1 Qualitative approach

The qualitative approach is appropriate for research that seeks to explore student academic writing within specific sociocultural contexts in which it occurs, and in terms of the meanings people attach to student academic writing (emic/insiders' understandings of participants) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The assumption of multiple, socially constructed realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), which primarily underpins qualitative research, enables qualitative researchers to draw out participants' subjective perceptions of, or meanings that they attach to, their experiences and social action (Neuman, 2006). Thus, employing the qualitative approach facilitated exploration of the complexities of participants' perceptions of mature students' academic writing experiences within the contexts in which the students' texts were produced, interpreted, and evaluated.

For the purposes of this study, the context against which participants' accounts concerning students' academic writing experiences can be understood is based on Malinowski's notions of contexts of situation and culture. Context of situation is understood as the actual and immediate context in which writing occurs (Clark & Ivanić, 1997). Biber and Conrad (2009,

p. 40) have identified key characteristics of this context which include physical aspects such as participants (authors and audiences), relations among participants (shared knowledge: personal and specialist, social roles: relative status or power), the medium (printed/on-line), production and comprehension circumstances (e.g. time for planning and revising, space constraints), as well as communicative purposes, and topic area.

On the other hand, context of culture is an abstract and broader construct (Lillis, 2001). Clark and Ivanić (1997, p. 67) have described it as a wider historical, political, and socio-cultural environment which comprises institutional cultural knowledge such as competing norms and practices, values, beliefs, power relations, ideologies, and their associated range of norms, conventions, genres and discourses which are in principle available to members of a particular culture. These factors influence, shape, and constrain writing and its interpretation that occur at the context of situation level (Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Lillis, 2001). In order to fulfil the demands of writing tasks, writers bring to the context of situation their knowledge and experiences of context of culture (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). However, writers vary in how they draw on and engage with these factors. According to Clark and Ivanić (1997), this depends on writers' knowledge and experiences of the possibilities and constraints that are available within the context of culture and their level of commitment to such considerations; that is, whether they decide to adopt and conform to, flout and contest the privileged elements of institutional cultural knowledge. Recognising the impact of both contexts of situation and culture on text production and interpretation entails acknowledging that the two forms of context are inextricably connected despite being characterised as occurring at two separate levels. Based on this relationship, characteristics of abstract contexts of culture can be inferred from their instantiations in the contexts of situation.

In order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives on mature students' academic writing experiences, data were obtained from in-depth semistructured interviews with students and lecturers. Student interviews also included text based elements (see section 3.4.2.1). These data were triangulated with questionnaire data, a process which involved establishing and analysing links between the data sets and "weaving together" of data (Lillis, 2008, p. 356). An additional benefit of combining data sources can be "rich contextual details" which are necessary for making sense of data (Lillis, 2008, p. 369). Moreover, in order to allow participants' understandings to emerge from data, categories for interpreting interview data and those derived from open-ended questionnaire responses were not predetermined, but rather they were "derived inductively" (Hammersley, 2010) from data themselves.

Adopting the qualitative approach also means that focus is not only on foregrounding participants' perspectives, but also on developing analytic understandings (etic/outsiders' understandings). According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 231), developing analytic understandings, which can be different from and at variance with participants' perspectives, requires making connections between participants' perspectives and wider social contexts which participants may be oblivious to; as well as recognising participants' varied perspectives which may be at odds with each other but can nevertheless provide insight into the phenomenon under investigation. Moreover, such analysis pays attention to what participants are unaware of.

As Lillis (2008) has observed, researchers can approach data analysis with a "frame of reference" (Kell, 2010, p. 224). For example, in the present study the researcher's knowledge derived from experience of teaching academic writing to both traditional and mature students in the context of the study facilitated interpretation of participants' perspectives. However, some authors (for example Hammersley, 2010; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) have cautioned that the same framework can constrain interpretation of and increase chances of misunderstanding participants' (emic) perspectives. Therefore, as researchers attempt to make the strange familiar, they need to remain conscious of and suspend their "immediate inferences, common-sense assumptions and theoretical presuppositions" which can impede their ability to fully consider participants' perspectives (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 230).

Finally, adopting a qualitative approach has implications on how this study's findings are generalised. Since participants in this study were not drawn with the aid of statistical techniques, generalisations of findings are not achieved through statistical means. Rather attempts to generalise findings to broader contexts are based on Yin's (2014) suggested two levels of generalising findings in qualitative studies: making theoretical claims and generalising outcomes across contexts or cases. On the one hand, generalisation can be done at the conceptual level ("abstract theory building") where it is based on new concepts that emerge from a study, and aims at "corroborating, modifying, rejecting, or advancing 64

theoretical concepts" that inform the study (p. 41). On the other hand, at the concrete/specific level, research outcomes can be applied to or have implications for other situations and cases beyond the participants and the research context. That is, researchers make claims about the "typicality or representativeness" of their findings (Hammersley, 1996, p. 171).

Since generalisation of findings is constrained by the context in which a study is conducted, providing sufficient details in the research report can enhance the audiences' understanding of the research context and findings, thereby enabling them to decide on the degree to which the findings have implications for other settings (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Mackey & Gass, 2005). Allwood (2012), however, recommends that rather than merely leaving it up to the interested audience to decide on the applicability of results, the researcher should identity phenomena and contexts to which the results might generalise.

## 3.3.2 Quantitative approach: Survey

In this study, lecturer and student questionnaires contained components which were informed by the quantitative approach. Researchers working within the quantitative approach are guided by the principle of measuring the objective reality in their inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Hence minimising individual-based subjectivity (the researcher's and researched) which can influence and threaten objective presentation of results is central to quantitative research, and according to Dörnyei (2007), this is usually achieved by standardizing research instruments and procedures at various stages of the research process.

Dörnyei (2007, p. 33) also notes that interest is in the common features of participants, and thus research centres around studying variables that represent such common features and quantifying them through "counting, scaling, or by assigning values to categorical data". Reducing ideas into a small set of variables also means that quantitative research is characteristically highly structured as the aim is to facilitate investigation of these variables and analysis of their prevalence in the population under study (Bryman, 2016).

#### **3.4 Research instruments**

### 3.4.1 Student and lecturer questionnaires

Both student and lecturer questionnaires, which the researcher created, contained closed items (ranked and Likert scale). Ranked items required respondents to select and rank items

from a given list by assigning a number to them according to their preferences; while for the Likert scale items, respondents were asked to choose appropriate responses on a four-point scale. The design of the questionnaire was informed by the researcher's personal experience of teaching undergraduate students and evaluating their work, feedback from piloting the instruments, as well as studies investigating similar issues. For instance, generic writing requirements (evaluative criteria) were derived from Harrington, Elander, Norton, Reddy, and Aiyegbayo's (2006a) study on students' and lecturers' interpretation of assessment criteria in the field of psychology. Some items for writing tasks required of students were derived from research on kinds of writing assignments and their characteristics required of university students (Nesi & Gardner, 2012; Zhu, 2004). Some open-ended items which were used to elicit information about students' workplace writing experiences were drawn from Knoch, May, Macqueen, Pill, and Storch's (2016) study on perceptions of new graduate employees of academic and professional writing demands. Some items in both student and lecturer questionnaires were similar as it was hoped that similar items would facilitate comparison between student and lecturer responses.

The closed items in the student questionnaire were designed to elicit information such as (see Appendix 5):

- 1. Background information about students such as age, gender, the faculty they were affiliated to, the degree programme enrolled for, year of entry to university, and entry qualification.
- Generic requirements (evaluative criteria) of students' academic writing: Students were asked to select five generic writing requirements expected of their writing by most of their lecturers and rank these according to order of importance.
- 3. Means through which students became aware of these writing requirements.
- 4. Perceptions of what contributed to development of their academic writing: Students were asked to choose three aspects and rank order these in terms of what contributed the most to improvement of their writing.

The questionnaire for lecturers contained closed items which covered, among other things, the following (see Appendix 11):

- 1. Background information: the faculty and disciplinary area they belonged to, their highest academic qualification, academic position, duration of teaching mature students at UNIMA, and the subjects, and the level at which, they taught.
- 2. Generic requirements (evaluative criteria) expected of students' writing: lecturers were asked to choose five requirements which they expected of students' written work and rank these according to order of importance.
- 3. Means through which lecturers communicated what they looked for in students' assignment responses.

Since it was not feasible to provide respondents with all the possible response categories, a category of 'other' was included for most of the closed questions. The main reason for including the 'other' category was to give participants a chance to offer responses that were not provided. In addition, this was done to minimize the possibility of participants choosing responses which did not apply to them and leaving out items unanswered because they felt that none of the given responses were applicable (Bryman, 2016).

A number of open-ended questions in the student questionnaire allowed respondents to express their views without being constrained by pre-determined response categories, and elicited diverse and a wide range of participant views. Through open-ended items, students offered perspectives on the following:

- 1. What they found easy about their academic writing
- 2. What they found difficult about academic writing
- 3. What could be done to facilitate development of their academic writing
- 4. The advantages and disadvantages which being a mature student afforded them in terms of the writing required of them at university.

Several questions were used to obtain information about students' workplace writing experiences, such as the kinds of writing they had done at work, and how helpful they found their workplace writing experiences when engaging in academic writing. Among other things, this set of questions enabled students to reflect on similarities or differences between writing demands and practices of the university in general and their disciplinary areas in

particular, and those of the workplace. Also, these questions enabled students to reflect on what their workplace writing experiences afforded them when writing at university.

Using the questionnaire proved useful in the sense that besides enabling the researcher to recruit students to participate in interviews, collecting data from a larger group of students facilitated exploration of the prevalence of students' reported academic writing experiences. Petrić and Czárl (2003) contend that involving a large number of participants makes it possible to go beyond individual participant "idiosyncrasies" (p. 188) and obtain insights into participants' "general tendencies" (p. 209). Notwithstanding its strengths, several limitations of the questionnaire were evident in this study. One of the limitations concerns open-ended items in the sense that besides providing responses which lacked specifics, some students did not attempt to answer all the questions. It is possible that some students were reluctant to write extensively because of the need to invest much time and greater effort in responding to such questions (Dörnyei, 2007). One of the drawbacks of generic responses is that they do not allow in-depth investigation of complex constructs, hence data derived from such responses offer "thin description" of the phenomenon which is being investigated (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 115). Additionally, in the absence of specific details, there is a risk of misinterpreting participants' responses, especially if an attempt is made to fill in the missing details by inferring what the participants meant.

Another limitation is related to students' lack of understanding of instructions for responding to items. Despite piloting the questionnaire prior to administering it to participants (for details on piloting, see section 3.4.3), some students' responses to certain questions demonstrated misinterpretation of items. This particularly applies to rank order items whereby more or less items than required would be selected and ranked, and in certain cases, required items would be selected but not ranked. It is possible that some students found rank order items cognitively demanding since they required students to do multiple tasks, namely selecting and ranking/ ordering. These limitations are in line with Petrić and Czárl's (2003, p. 208) observation that piloting and revising items cannot resolve all problems, specifically those related to the "idiosyncratic ways in which respondents understand certain words or terms". An additional limitation concerns the reliability of questionnaire findings. It is acknowledged that some questionnaires had vague categories, and internal consistency of the questionnaire was not checked using, for example, the Cronbach alpha coefficient.

#### 3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Some interview questions were matched with questionnaire responses of individual interviewees (refer to Appendices 16 and 17 for student and lecturer interview schedules). Therefore, during the interviews, participants were given a copy of their questionnaire to refer to. The researcher also had a copy to hand. All interviews were audio-recorded which ensured that detailed responses were captured, and that there was no disruption to the interview process due to excessive note taking (Dörnyei, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews elicited self-reported data which provided insight into students' and lecturers' perceptions of students' academic writing experiences. According to Prior (2004, p. 188), a semi-structured interview can "move between scripted questions and open-ended conversations". Thus although for this study interviews were guided by a list of general and open-ended questions to ensure that they were conducted "more systematically and comprehensively" (Patton, 2002, p. 343), I was not restricted to and did not strictly adhere to a set of questions listed in the interview schedules. Instead, I was able to pursue an interviewee's specific responses that emerged in the course of an interview which were perceived as significant and which required clarification and elaboration. The consequence was that interviewees were able to elaborate on issues which they raised earlier and provided richer and in-depth explanations.

In addition, since a semi-structured interview can be more sensitive to individual and situational differences (Patton, 2002), it was possible to approach each interview from an interviewee's perspective. For instance, there was a variation in the questions asked of students concerning feedback they had received on written work which they had brought along to the interview (see the section 3.4.2.1). This mainly applies to questions which required students to identify specific areas in their writing which lecturers had commented on and to offer their reaction to the feedback in terms of how they felt and the utility of such feedback. For example, when it was discovered during the interview that students were offered oral feedback instead of written one, I focused on the former rather than the latter although initially the focus of questions was on written feedback. In the light of knowledge that interviewees did not receive any form of feedback on their written work, these questions were deemed inappropriate.

#### 3.4.2.1 Student interviews

The student interview schedule had two types of questions, namely general questions which elicited reported experiences of academic writing and text-based questions which focused on written work they had brought along to the interview. For the interview, the plan was to explore students' general academic writing experiences first and then move on to questions addressing their experiences of writing particular assignments. The questionnaire responses were used as prompts to follow-up and explore students' responses in-depth and enable participants to reflect further about their answers. For example, I asked students to interpret the tasks requirements which they had identified in the questionnaire. They were also asked to talk about perceived similarities and differences between workplace and academic writing. Responses to this question helped bring to the fore perceived similarities and differences between the two contexts in terms of writing demands, such as the nature of writing tasks (genres and their features), valued qualities in written work, writing processes, and underlying norms of writing.

I further asked them to talk about one assignment which was most successful and another one which was least successful. Much interest was in the reasons students gave as accounting for the success or lack of success of the chosen assignments. It was hoped that responses to these questions would provide insights into students' understanding of what lecturers looked for in an assignment response. Focus was on assignments they had already written because it was assumed that these had much bearing on their experiences. In addition, it was hoped that such critical incidents, which Greene and Higgins (1994, p. 124) describe as "specific and dramatic events which have forceful impact" on interviewees, would help elicit more specific and detailed responses. Fourteen students talked about assignments they had brought to the interview (refer to the 'text-based interviews' section for details of the assignments). The rest chose to talk about other assignments which they did not have with them during the interview as they did not consider those they had brought to the interview as the most or least successful. Limitations of asking students to talk about assignments which they had not brought along to the interview need to be acknowledged. Generally it was observed that unlike those who had the assignments with them, students who did not had a tendency to generalise rather than provide the specifics. This can be attributed to limited memory as some students had a vague recollection of the details of the assignments, and at times seemed hesitant or uncertain about some of the aspects of the assignments they were talking about.

Nevertheless, some students were able to offer a vivid description of the assignments which they had not brought along, for example in terms of their demands, what was successful or unsuccessful about the assignments and reasons accounting for success or lack of success. This vivid recollection could be attributed to various reasons, namely that the assignments had been written most recently and the exceptional or unexceptional nature of the assignment tasks, the circumstances or conditions under which the assignments were written, as well as their performance in the assignments. In hindsight, the challenge of limited memory could have been resolved by asking students to bring with them assignments they considered their best or worst in terms of performance.

I also asked students to elaborate on answers about the writing challenges they had identified in the questionnaire. Subsequent questions included how they dealt with the identified challenges, and what else would help them address such challenges. The closing general question offered interviewees a chance to raise issues related to their academic writing experiences which they considered as pertinent, but were not addressed in the interview schedule (see Appendix 16 for the student interview schedule).

Several interview questions centred around samples of students' written work which they brought along to the interview (see Table 2 below for a summary of assignments). These questions focused on feedback received on their written work, what was successful about the assignments, and difficulties they faced with writing the assignments. The questions specific to the assignments were adapted from case studies exploring undergraduate students' perceptions and experiences of academic writing within their disciplinary areas (Morton, Storch, & Thompson, 2015; Leki, 2007).

The strength of eliciting writer views through an interview centred around texts resides in the opportunities it offers researchers to explore aspects of academic writing which students could be aware of but remain implicit in texts they produce. 'Talk around text', as a data collection method, involves researchers directing their "attention beyond the written text towards a consideration of some elements of writers' perspectives about texts" (Lillis, 2008, p. 355). As Lillis and Tuck (2016, p. 35) have observed, this allows researchers to seek insider (emic) "understandings of writing which cannot be derived solely from the expert or etic analysis of text". Several aspects which mere analysis of texts fails to capture have been identified. These include writers' "thoughts, feelings, and sense-making" (Prior, 2004, p.

179), "contextual knowledge that shapes" their writing (Odell, Goswami, and Herrington, 1983, p. 227) and 'tacit personal knowledge' that is applied to writing tasks (p. 222). To access these, writers need to be questioned directly. Moreover text-based interviewing can help address one major limitation of retrospective accounts, namely interviewees' dependence on memory as the basis for their responses (Greene & Higgins, 1994).

Genres of assignments	Disc	scipline* No. of scripts (Yr of scripts (Yr of study assignment submitted) No. of scripts with feedback comments									nments	Total No. of scripts with							
	A	BA	Е	IA	J	PL M		2	3	4	?	A	B A	Е	IA	J	PL M	feedback comments	
Essay	3	7	1	-	5	2	18	1	9	7	1	Х	7	1	-	5	1	14	2
Research project proposal	-	1	1	-	2	3	7	-	2	5		-	1	1	-	2	2	6	-
Case studies	1	-	-	4	-	4	9	-	-	9		1	-	-	2	-	4	7	1
Research based report	1	-	1	-	-	1	3	1	2	-		1	-	Х	-	-	Х	1	-
Descriptive short answers	-	-	1	-	-	4	1	-	-	1		-	-	1	-	-	Х	1	1
Examination (e.g. multiple choice questions, short essay questions, descriptive short answers, case study based, calculation- based)	6	1	-	8	7	1	27	-	9	17	1	2	1	-	6	4	4	17	11
Total	11	9	4	12	14	15	65	2	22	39	2	4	9	3	8	11	11	46	15

Table 2: A summary of type of texts which students brought to, and were discussed in, interviews

Key: \*Discipline: A: Accounting; BA: Business Administration; E: Education; IA: Internal Auditing; J: Journalism; PLM:

Procurement & Logistics Management

(-): not available/applicable

(?): not indicated

Since retrospective accounts are designed to capture an interviewee's "self-conscious reflection" (Greene & Higgins, 1994, p. 118) and 'constructions' which are based on their 'inferences' of what happened (p. 116), the "farther the separation between the event and the recall", the higher the possibility that their accounts will be simplified and conventionalised (Prior, 2004, p. 185). Thus, referring interviewees to external stimuli can help to trigger and aid their memory, as well as enable them to reflect on specific writing experiences, a result of which can be more detailed and focused responses (Greene & Higgins, 1994; Prior, 2004). Therefore, in the present study students' written work was used as prompts, and in the course of the interviewes had their assignments in front of them which they referred to.

<sup>(</sup>x): no written feedback comments

To enable students to talk about their specific experiences of writing different types of texts they were asked to bring along a copy of two different, marked assignments preferably with feedback comments, which they had recently submitted for different modules. Table 2 summarises assignments students brought to, and were discussed in, the interview. It can be seen from Table 2 that students brought different types of texts. Most of these texts were written in fourth year. In total, 65 samples of students' written work submitted for 35 modules and mainly comprised of examinations and essays were collected. Forty-six of these had written feedback comments. Table 3 shows the distribution of grades awarded to 54 assignments which had a grade indicated.

Grade range (%)No. of assignments awarded marksBelow 40 (fail)440-59 (pass)2060-69 (pass with credit)2070 and above (distinction)10Total54

Table 3: Distribution of grades awarded to samples of student assignments

Whilst students were instructed to bring two assignments, five brought only one. Failure to locate marked assignment scripts was a common reason offered for inability to bring two assignments. The number of assignments was limited to two per student as it was assumed that it would be possible to discuss the assignments in detail with students within the maximum one hour allotted to each interview. In cases where students brought along more than the two marked assignments that had been requested, they were offered opportunity to choose the assignments that they wanted to discuss in the interview. However, they were guided in terms of what kind of assignments I was looking for, which is two different types of marked assignments recently submitted for different modules, preferably with feedback comments. Reference to these assignments allowed students to talk about writing demands of different text types, what contributed to the success or lack of success of the assignments, what specific challenges they faced when writing these texts, as well as comment on feedback offered by different lecturers.

Limitations of asking students to comment on two assignments need to be acknowledged. Firstly, whilst the assignments offered insight into the type of texts students produced in their disciplinary areas, it cannot be claimed that these assignments represent the range and variation of assignment type required of students in such disciplines. During interviews with both students and lecturers I became aware of a wide range of texts that students produce for various subject areas. Secondly, it is acknowledged that each writing context has specific demands. This is usually reflected in lecturers' differing expectations /requirements of student writing for individual tasks, which is usually based on their distinct understandings of what constitutes good writing (Etherington, 2008, Lea & Street, 1998). This implies that lecturers' expectations and requirements of the assignments that students commented on in the interview may not be representative of those of other lecturers. This variation in practice also applies to the feedback comments on students' written work. It cannot be assumed or concluded that such feedback is typical of the kinds of feedback students were offered on other assignments written for different lecturers and subject areas.

In order to facilitate understanding of the context in which the assignments were produced, students were also asked to bring other documents related to the assignments such as rubrics. It needs to be noted that students did not bring rubrics for most of the assignments. Students gave various reasons for this; namely that they had misplaced the rubrics, had forgotten to bring them along, had given them away to fellow students, or they were not provided with one when the assignments were set; that is, they did not have a written record of the rubrics since the briefing about assignment tasks was done orally in the classroom.

For each assignment, students were asked to talk about what was successful about the assignment and explain why they were successful in the identified areas. The assumption was that responses to these questions would offer useful insights into students' views about task-specific criteria which lecturers used to evaluate their written work. It was hoped that elicited responses would help to illuminate their understanding of academic writing requirements. In order to establish task-specific challenges which they encountered, students were asked to identify areas of the assignments which they particularly found difficult to write and provide reasons.

Several questions focused specifically on lecturer feedback on the assignments. It was hoped that asking students to comment on such feedback in the context of discussing their written work would help bring to the fore their perceptions of the following: requirements expected of students' writing, general and task-specific academic writing challenges which they experienced, and what could facilitate development of their academic writing.

In interviews, students were asked whether they had received written feedback on the assignments. In most cases the response was positive. Although initially I was mainly interested in lecturers' written feedback, I became aware that absence of written feedback did not necessarily mean that students were not offered any feedback on their writing. Therefore, when it transpired that the assignments which students had brought along had no written comments I enquired whether they had been given feedback in other forms. At times students volunteered this information in their response to whether they were offered written feedback. In most cases it turned out that students were offered oral feedback by their lecturers. This feedback was offered because students solicited it as individuals, and in such situations, the feedback received was personalised. Solicited or unsolicited, generalised feedback was usually offered in the classroom. Once it was established with each interviewee that his or her work had received feedback, I proceeded to ask questions related to feedback. Students were asked to identify specific areas in their writing which a lecturer had commented on. In addition, students' reaction to the feedback was sought; that is, how they felt about the feedback and what they thought about its utility. Asking students to talk about how they reacted to feedback prompted them to explain how they understood it; that is, they attempted to make sense of the feedback especially in terms of why lecturers offered particular comments.

In the absence of written feedback comments, students understood markings (e.g.? X  $\checkmark$ ) lecturers made on their writing and marks awarded on assignments as forms of feedback. There were also cases whereby in the absence of lecturer feedback or with a purpose to supplement lecturer feedback, students indicated that they obtained feedback from peers (fellow students) through for example exchanging and comparing each other's marked assignments. In these cases, I enquired about their reaction to such feedback in terms of its efficacy. However, if students did not receive any of these forms of feedback and did not consider marks as feedback, I was unable to ask questions pertaining to feedback on assignments since they were irrelevant. Table 5 provides a summary of student texts which were analysed for lecturer commentaries.

Hya	tt's categories of fe	edba	ck comments	Example feedback comm	ents according to assignment ty	pes which students brough	t to, and were discus	sed in, interviews	
				Essay	Research project proposal	Case studies	Research based report	Descriptive short answers	Examination
1.	b. Future		Alternatives	"You could do more on the analysis"	"Literature Review should lead towards the gap which should be researched. This Lit Review is not showing or is not going towards that gap. Review it."	"state advantages and disadvantages"		"I would have expected a discussion along rising cost of inputs thereby affecting competitiveness of products"	"Turn weaknesses to strengths, threats to opportunities"
			Future		"Expand the chapter to discuss how the theory is guiding the study"			"Rephrase, summarise, don't copy everything"	"Explain + use examples"
		с.	Reflective questions	"Where is the introduction that sign- posts your central argument in the essay?"	"Are you sure these are moderating variables?"	"generally what strategy are they pursuing?"	"Is the service in mature stage to introduce this option?"	"How is this a challenge to operations in the future?"	"Does table 1 define duties of directors?"
2.	Structural	Dis	course level	"The essay would have been excellent with coherent organisation and structured argument"	"Doesn't link well with previous paragraph"				
3.	Stylistic	a.	Punctuation/proof reading/spelling/ grammar/syntax/lexis	"Avoid contractions"	"improve sentence construction, some really sound literally translated"				"SP Quite"
		b.	Citation	"The cases which you cited were supposed to appear in the reference section"	"Any source of these statistics?"		"Bibliography?"		"Haa, haa, haa! Who said so?"
		c.	Presentation	"Subheadings are ideal for an assignment like this!!"	"Be consistent in spacing"	"Line spacing-highly compromised"		"Need headings please"	"Use essay style paragraphs"
4.	Content-related	a.	Positive evaluation	"The outline is good"				"Well done!"	"good introduction!"
		b.	Negative evaluation	"The beginning of the essay is a litany of definitions & it fails to introduce your position in the debate."	"All these specific objectives are not in line with the main objective of 'hindering factors'"			"you just copied without understanding"	"There is clear misunderstanding of the theory & no critical evaluation is possible"

# Table 4: Classification of lecturers' written feedback on students' assignments based on Hyatt's (2005) classification scheme

Assignment	No. of scripts per discipline and year of study assignment was submitted											Total							
type	Acc (3)	Accounting (3)			Business administration (9)			Education (3)		Internal auditing (7)		Journalism			Procurement & logistics Management			no. of scripts	
	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	2	3	4	
Essay	-	-	-	-	6	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	4	-	-	-	13
Examination	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	-	-	4	-	-	-	13
Research project proposal	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	1	2	7
Descriptive short answers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	5
Case study	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	4	5
Research based report	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Total	1	1	1	-	8	1	-	-	3	-	3	4	1	-	10	-	1	10	44

## Table 5: Summary of analysed student texts for lecturer commentaries

Key: (-): not available/applicable

Hyatt's (2005) scheme for classifying feedback which focuses both on form and content was used to analyse commentaries found within the text, on the margins, and at the end of students' work. Comments derived from 44 texts which students wrote for various modules offered in six programmes were analysed. The texts consist of different assignment types, namely: essay, examination (multiple choice, short essay, descriptive short answer, case-study based, calculation-based questions), research project proposal, descriptive short answer, case study, and research-based report. As shown in Table 4, four of Hyatt's seven broad categories and their subcategories apply in this context to a significant degree (see Appendix 18 for a detailed description of the four categories).

#### **3.4.2.2 Lecturer interviews**

In order to obtain the perspectives of both students and lecturers on similar issues, a number of questions which lecturers responded to were similar to those of students. These include a follow-up question on interviewees' responses to the questionnaire concerning generic writing requirements. They were asked to interpret generic writing requirements they identified in the questionnaire. Another point of similarity were questions which focused on lecturers' perceptions of academic writing challenges faced by mature students, factors which contribute to the challenges, and suggestions on what could facilitate development of these students' academic writing.

Other questions, drawn from Zhu (2004) and Knoch et al.'s (2016) studies, were more specific to lecturers. For example, to explore perceived affordances of discursive resources which mature students brought to bear on their writing, lecturers were asked to talk about

what they considered as strengths in mature students' writing and provide reasons which could account for such strengths. In addition, their views on what distinguished mature students' writing from that of the traditional ones were sought. The final question gave lecturers opportunity to raise additional issues concerning mature students' academic writing which had not been addressed by the questions in the interview schedule (The lecturer interview schedule can be found in Appendix 17).

Despite the value of semi-structured interviews to this study, it is important to acknowledge their limitations as these have implications on findings and conclusions which can be inferred from such data. Harwood and Petrić (2017, p. 26) have observed that one of the limitations of interviews is "truthfulness and interviewee performance". That is, interviewees can be selective in their responses in an attempt to "perform for the benefit of themselves or their interactants" (Harwood & Petrić, 2012, p. 84). This can result in interviewees' reluctance to share everything with the researcher or "disclose freely" especially when interviewees think that "responding truthfully may portray them in a bad light" (Harwood & Petrić, 2017, p. 26). Wagner (2015, p. 96) has also identified other forms of biases which interviewees can introduce in their responses which includes the tendency to respond to questions according to how they think the researcher wants them to respond ("acquiescence bias").

In this study, interviewees' responses could also have been influenced by their perception of the relationship they had with the researcher. It is possible that awareness of the researcher's identify as an academic staff member could have had an impact on the extent to which interviewees were willing to share information with the researcher. For instance, it is possible that some interviewees were more cautious in their responses due to concerns about how they would come across in their responses. Such awareness could have compelled some interviewees to give the researcher responses they thought she wanted to hear. Nevertheless, in this study, both student and lecturer interview data indicate that students and lecturers were disclosing not only information which could put them in a good light or enhance their own standing, but also in a bad light. For instance, on several occasions, students were self-critical of their study habits, strategies they used to tackle assessment writing tasks, and their attitudes towards academic writing at university. These criticisms were at times extended to fellow students, lecturers, as well as departments and the institution. Some of these practices were perceived as having a detrimental impact on their writing processes, outcomes, and performance in assignments, and overall development of their academic writing. Some of these factors were considered as accounting for their academic writing challenges.

Participants' tendency to disclose details which could portray them in a bad light was also evident in lecturers' accounts. These accounts include instances where lecturers criticised not only their own practices but also those of their fellow lecturers, departments, and the Polytechnic College as an institution. These criticisms centred around provision of student academic writing support, knowledge of and assumptions about students' prior academic writing experiences, and standards and assessment criteria applied to students' written work. In most cases these were linked to the challenges students faced with academic writing. It seems therefore that interviewees were candid in their responses. Finally, due to the tacit nature of their knowledge or lack of awareness, there is a possibility that both students and lecturers could not fully articulate, for example, their perceptions of the students' academic writing challenges, or their understanding of the requirements of academic writing. This may have resulted in selective reporting.

#### 3.4.3 Piloting of research instruments

Prior to administering questionnaires and conducting interviews, both the questionnaire and interview schedules were piloted with students and lecturers at the Polytechnic College from the same faculties and disciplines where some of the target participants were recruited. Piloting of the instruments involved two subject lecturers from accounting and journalism disciplines, and three, third year education and accounting students who had one year experience of academic writing at university. These participants were involved because their attributes matched those of the target group. The student participants were mature entrants enrolled in similar programmes as those of some of the target participants, and the lecturers had experience of teaching mature students on some of the programmes the target students were enrolled. Thus, it was believed that the participants' responses and feedback on the question items would help inform the revision of the instruments.

The main goal of piloting was to ensure that the researcher and respondents shared meaning of the questions, as well as response items for the questionnaire. Therefore, after completing the questionnaire and taking part in an interview, I sat down with each participant to seek feedback on their interpretation of each question, responses to closed questions, and instructions for answering questions. Specifically, they were asked to identify questions, response items, and instructions for answering questions which lacked clarity, explain what they thought contributed to lack of clarity, and suggest ways of improving meaning.

Based on participants' responses to the questionnaire and interview questions, as well as the feedback they provided during our discussions, I was able to make several changes to the instruments. The most notable were rewording questions, instructions, and response items which seemed vague, replacing technical vocabulary with everyday words, eliminating questions which elicited redundant responses, and separating questions/items which were collapsed (Appendix 19 provides a commentary on the problematic areas noted on the piloted version of the student questionnaire and lecturer interview schedule, and changes made thereafter).

#### 3.5 Procedures of the study

In March 2017, permission was sought from the vice-principal of the Polytechnic College to recruit students and staff members as participants of my study (see Appendix 2 for the letter of request for permission to conduct the study at the college). Subsequently I was granted permission to conduct the study and involve staff and students at the college (see Appendix 3 for letter of approval to conduct the study at the college).

## 3.5.1 Recruitment of student participants

Students were drawn from various disciplines of two faculties: commerce, and education and media studies. Drawing students from various disciplinary backgrounds presented an opportunity to explore a wide range of students' perceptions of their academic writing experiences. Moreover, this study took place between May to August 2017, in semester one of the 2016/17 academic year when student participants were in the final year (i.e. 4<sup>th</sup> year) of their studies. This means that students who joined their programmes in year two had been in university for at least two years, and third year entrants for one year. The timing of the research when students were approaching completion of their studies is crucial. It allowed them to reflect on their writing experiences since entry into university, and thus enabled them to share valuable information concerning their writing experiences at university.

Invitation to participate in the study and complete a questionnaire was extended to 119 of the 130 final year mature students on various programmes in the faculties of education/media studies and commerce. A total of 98 responses were returned, representing an overall

response return rate of 82%. Table 6 presents a summary of number of students invited to complete the questionnaire, the number of returned responses, and the disciplinary areas from which students were drawn.

Recruitment of students was done in two ways. When data collection commenced, classes for holiday students (accounting and business administration) were in session; hence, these students were asked to participate in the study and complete a questionnaire through an open invitation extended during class time. They were approached at the end of a lecture as this was considered the ideal time to talk to the students in order not to disrupt class activities. In addition, I was certain that towards the end of the lecture most of the students would be present thereby allowing me to recruit as many students as possible. This would have probably not been the case at the beginning of lectures when attendance is likely to be low.

I informed the students about my study, its purpose and potential significance of research outcomes. I also explained why I was interested in having them as participants while emphasising the voluntary nature of participation. The participants were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity. I then proceeded to distribute the questionnaire and information sheet with details of the study (See Appendices 5 and 6 for the student questionnaire and participant information sheet respectively). The students were given opportunity to read the information sheet and ask questions related to the study.

Discipline	Participants invited	<b>Returned responses</b>
Accounting	35	27 (77%)
Business administration	17	14 (82%)
Education	2	2 (100%)
Internal auditing	23	20 (87%)
Journalism	19	18 (95%)
Procurement & logistics management	nt 23	17 (74%)
Total	119	98 (82%)

 Table 6: Overview of questionnaire respondents and their disciplinary areas

Although the questionnaire was administered in the classroom, it was not completed and returned to me immediately. Instead I gave the students a considerable period to respond to the questionnaire and to do so at a time which was most convenient to them. This was done because I was aware that students were more likely to respond to the questionnaire superficially if they were given shorter duration to complete it as they would not have had sufficient time to reflect on the questions, especially the open-ended ones. Given that the

questionnaire was distributed at the end of a lecture, students would have been eager to leave the classroom; hence the likelihood of respondents leaving out certain questions, especially the open-ended ones, unanswered was high. In addition, since I had given their non-holiday counterparts some considerable time to complete the questionnaire, I thought that the holiday students needed to respond to the questionnaire under more or less similar conditions.

I asked the students to return their completed questionnaires to me via their class representatives. The class representatives were requested to place all the questionnaires in an envelope marked only with the name of programme. I thought that this arrangement was beneficial because by not asking students to complete the questionnaire in my presence and personally return it to me, they were given opportunity to respond to the questionnaire under non-threatening conditions. That is, they were likely not to be coerced into participating in the study considering that they were aware that the researcher is an academic member of staff at the college. Moreover it was possible for them to choose not to take part in the study without fear of negative consequences on their part. I followed up with students who did not respond to the initial solicitation. For both holiday and non-holiday groups, reminders to complete the questionnaire were sent through text messages and email (see Appendix 7 for sample reminder email message).

The non-holiday students were on a semester break and geographically dispersed. Therefore, the most feasible way of recruiting them was via email. These students were identified through class lists which were obtained from the college's admissions office. With the help of class representatives, I obtained students' email addresses. I sent the questionnaire and information sheet as attachments to an e-mail message which served as an invitation to participation (see Appendix 4 for a sample email message). The participant information sheet with details about the study was included in order to enable respondents make an informed decision about participating in the study. I also asked students to contact me by email or telephone for any questions concerning the study and what would be required of them should they choose to participate. Students were requested to download and complete the questionnaire and subsequently return it to the researcher preferably as an attachment through email. To enable students to give more thoughtful and time-considered answers, they were offered ample time to complete the questionnaire. Although most respondents returned the questionnaire by email, few students opted to return printed copies probably because they

were unable to return them online. Whilst some students submitted printed copies via a class representative and an administrator of the department which the researcher is affiliated with, others returned their copies in person to the researcher.

Students were requested for an interview through the questionnaire. At the end of the questionnaire I informed students that I was interested to talk to them in more detail about their academic writing experiences in an interview with me. To facilitate this recruitment process, I asked those who were interested to provide their name, phone number, and email address which I could use to contact them to arrange an interview at a time and place which was convenient to them (See appendix 5 for the student questionnaire). In addition, in the participant information sheet I indicated that on the day of the interview those interested in taking part in the interview would have to bring along a copy of two different types of marked assignments with feedback comments (if available) which they had recently submitted for different modules as well as any other documents related to the chosen assignments (see Appendix 6 for student participant information sheet).

A total of 35 students volunteered to be interviewed. As shown in Table 7 below, the interviewees comprised of both holiday (9) and non-holiday (26) entrants on various programmes, and whose entry into university was either in second (14) or third year (21) (details of each interviewee can be found in Appendix 8). Engaging students from diverse disciplinary areas provided access to a cross-section of participants, which was one of the objectives of this study. Engaging both second and third year entrants on holiday and non-holiday programmes ensured that students from all the disciplinary areas were represented. For example, had I focused on second year entrants only, it would have meant excluding students from education, internal auditing, and procurement and logistics management. Similarly, involving non-holiday students only would have been done at the risk of excluding the majority of accounting students and all business administration students whose classes were held during college holidays.

Class	Study programme	Year	of entry	Total		
attendance		2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>			
times						
Holiday	Accounting	2	2	4	9	
	Business	2	3	5		
	administration					
Non-holiday	Accounting	2		2	26	
	Education		2	2		
	Internal auditing		6	6		
	Journalism	8		8		
	Procurement &		8	8		
	logistics management					
Total		14	21	35	35	

Table 7: Overview of interviewed students and their disciplinary areas

Most of the student interviews took place within two weeks of returning their completed questionnaires. One student was interviewed at his workplace, and the rest of the interviews took place at the Polytechnic College campus, either in the researcher's office or the College library. The interviews lasted between 25 and 100 minutes (average 44 minutes). It should be noted that the duration of interviews was largely determined by how detailed participant responses were and the number of follow-up questions asked.

Before commencing the interview, they were informed that although the interview would be primarily conducted in English, they were at liberty to use Chichewa, the native language shared by the students and the researcher. Most of the students preferred to speak English throughout the interview although a few code-switched between English and Chichewa; but their use of the latter was not extensive. It is possible that on certain occasions, these students chose to use Chichewa because it enabled them to communicate with their "entire linguistic repertoire" (Fukao & Fujii, 2001, p. 36), and not feel constrained by limited linguistic resources. Permission was sought from students to make copies of the documents they had brought with them and to audio-record interviews.

#### **3.5.2 Recruitment of lecturer participants**

An invitation to participate in the study was sent to 20 lecturers in the two faculties via email (see Appendix 9 for a sample email message). A questionnaire and a participant information sheet with details of the study were attached to the email. Lecturers were informed that participation involved filling in a questionnaire and subsequently taking part in an interview

which would be arranged at a time and place most convenient to them. I also asked them to return their completed questionnaire via email (lecturers' information sheet and questionnaire can be found in Appendices 10 and 11 respectively). In total twelve questionnaire responses were returned via email. Table 8 presents the details of lecturers who completed the questionnaire and took part in the interviews according to disciplinary area.

Discipline	Invited	<b>Completed</b> questionnaire	Interviewed
Accounting/internal auditing/	8	5	4
business administration			
Education	4	3	3
Journalism	8	4	4
Total	20	12	11

Table 8: Lecturers and their disciplinary areas

Eleven of the lecturers expressed interest in taking part in an interview which was held in their respective offices. The interviews took place within one to four weeks of returning their completed questionnaires. The duration of interviews ranged from 14 to 46 minutes (average 32 minutes) (interview duration per participant can be found in Appendix 8).

## 3.6 Data analysis procedures

This section presents the following: transcription process for interview data, coding and analytical procedures for interview data and responses to open-ended and closed questionnaire items.

#### 3.6.1 Transcribing interviews

Interviews were conducted predominantly in English, but a few students code-switched between English and Chichewa (see section 3.5.1). However, Chichewa was not used very extensively. The researcher translated the non-English expressions into English when transcribing the interviews. Since the translation was not extensive, it was deemed unnecessary to obtain a second opinion on the quality of the translation from another Chichewa native speaker. While transcribing the interviews, participants' identity was anonymised. Thus, both students and lecturers are identified by their respective disciplinary areas.

Transcription is a selective, interpretive and representational process (Green, Franquiz, Dixon, 1997). Hence researchers bring their subjectivity to the transcription process as they

have to decide on what to include and omit from the transcript, as well as how to represent what is heard (Bucholtz, 2000; Lapadat, 2000). For the purposes of this study, the transcripts are presented in a denaturalised format whereby most "idiosyncratic elements of speech" such as pauses, involuntary vocalisations, and nonverbal expressions are excluded (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005, p. 1273). This means that although every attempt was made to represent interviewees' views as accurately as possible, it was not possible to include everything that was captured on the audio-recording in the transcript. This is in line with the analytic interest of this study which is primarily the content of what was said (discourse content), rather than the intricacies of spoken discourse.

Therefore, I have presented verbatim depiction of what was said. That is, I have included the actual words of the interviewees but have omitted some features of speech such as fillers for example "errs, uhs, and ums", as well as other paralinguistic features such as pauses or those showing emotion such as laughs, sighs (see Appendices 15 and 20 for the transcription guidelines and coded samples of student and lecturer interview transcripts respectively). After transcribing and anonymising the data, I imported the interviews into software programme, MAXQDA (www.maxqda.com) for coding and analysis of data.

Prior to conducting interviews, participants were informed that they would be emailed transcripts for reviewing. Therefore, transcripts were sent to participants as an attachment to an email two months after completion of data collection and before data were coded and analysed for member checking (see Appendix 14 for sample email message accompanying interview transcript). They were asked to review them with the purpose of checking whether the contents represented what is believed to have been discussed during interviews. Interviewees were also given opportunity to add comments to the transcript if they wished to do so. They were asked to return their feedback and transcripts which they had commented on within two weeks. To aid their understanding of how their spoken discourse was transformed into written discourse, I sent them transcription conventions which were used to transcribe interviews (refer to Appendix 15 for interview transcription conventions).

Sharing transcripts with participants can be one way of empowering them; that is, they are given "a feeling of propriety over the product and control over the printed word" (Mero-Jaffe, 2011, p. 236). Moreover having the opportunity to revise or even withdraw their responses, and approve or disapprove the transcript reinforces their rights as participants (Hagens,

Dobrow, & Chafe, 2009; Mero-Jaffe, 2011). However, one of the major concerns of sharing transcripts with participants is that those unfamiliar with transcribed representations may be more concerned about how the transcripts are presented rather than the accuracy of the content (Forbat & Henderson, 2005). For example, it has been observed that participants may feel threatened, embarrassed, and anxious if they think that they are being presented as inarticulate due to the presence of language-related errors in the transcript (Forbat & Henderson, 2005; Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Therefore, to allay such potential concerns I highlighted the distinction between spoken discourse and written discourse in the email message (see Appendix 14). I pointed out that since the former is naturally characterised by errors, false starts, hesitations, repetitions, and incomplete statements, they needed not to be dismayed if they saw these features in their transcript.

Despite asking them for feedback on the transcripts, the response was limited, even though most of them had in principle indicated that they would respond. None of the lecturer interviewees responded. Only four out of the 35 student interviewees responded. It is possible that some participants did not read the transcripts due to reasons unknown to the researcher or they may have read the transcripts but did not see the need to add comments to the transcript or send feedback to the researcher. This can be considered as one of the limitations of sharing transcripts with participants. There is no guarantee that participants will respond to transcripts; that is, that they will review or comment on them. Nevertheless, students who responded indicated that they had reviewed their transcripts and that they were satisfied with their contents; that is, they had no revisions to make because they thought that what was presented in the transcripts reflected what had been discussed in interviews. Such approval is reflected in comments such as "I have gone through it and I am ok with it" (PLMSI1). Other interviewees wrote "I have gone through it and I honestly have no problem with anything. It seems everything that is here was truly discussed" (JSI7); "I have read the transcript, and it truly reflect (sic) what I spoke then. I don't have any comments about the script. Everything is just okay, and fine" (IASI3).

## 3.6.2 Coding and analysis of interview data and open-ended questionnaire responses

Interview data and open-ended questionnaire responses were coded separately. Whilst coding of interview data was facilitated by MaxQDA, questionnaire responses were coded manually (see Appendix 24 for an illustration of manual coding). It should be noted that in this study

coding was not employed as merely a mechanical process of organising or labelling data, but rather as an analytic and heuristic process which facilitated reflection about and interpretation of the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Due to its heuristic and iterative nature, coding involved several rounds of reading the transcripts in order to make sense of data.

Initially six student and three lecturer interviews, one per discipline area, were read recursively whilst looking for patterns among participants' accounts. The outcome of this process was a starting list of codes and their definitions. These coding categories were then applied to the rest of the interviews. Coding involved assigning short phrases to data chunks in the interviews. These phrases were deemed as representing the essence and "salient attributes" of the data (Saldaña, 2014, p. 5). The focus of coding was the ideas (concepts) suggested by the data rather than topics of individual participants' responses. This means that the meaning that is symbolically represented by the codes is "broader than a single item or action" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 119). The value of using this coding technique is that analysis is not limited to obtaining results which apply to a specific study, but the aim is to "transcend the local and particular of the study to more abstract or generalizable contexts" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 120). This coding method is illustrated in Figure 1 below using an excerpt from a student interview (also see Appendix 20 for samples of coded transcripts).

As a way of ensuring consistency in applying codes to data, the content of codes was defined so that they were distinct and unambiguous. These definitions were continuously revised as new cases pertaining to the codes were encountered in order to make sure that the codes covered as many text passages as possible. To illustrate this process, I will refer to two codes whose meanings evolved as the coding process proceeded. Table 9 presents the initial and revised definitions of these codes: lecturer feedback and writing standards/writing requirements/lecturer expectations. A full list of codes together with definitions of their content is included in Appendix 21.



## Figure 1: A screen shot from MaxQDA illustrating a coded interview excerpt

Key: IAS2: Internal Auditing Student 2 coding stripe (symbolising a code attached to text) a memo

Later, the coded data were clustered into five broader categories which were particularly related to research questions of the study. A list of these categories, definition of their content, and the codes they subsume are presented in Table 10. The analytic process through which categories are created entails examining fragments of coded data for comparable features that group them together (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). MaxQDA's 'MAXMaps' was used as an analytic tool to not only draw links between coded segments of interview data but also to foreground and visualise the complexity of relationships evident in the data (see Appendix 22 for a visualisation of links among codes generated using 'MAXmaps'). This offered direction as regards relationships which needed to be analysed closely. The analytic process was also aided by memoing. As an analytic tool which is carried out simultaneously with coding, memoing serves as means through which researchers record their thought processes during analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In this study, besides using memos for recording content of codes and categories, memoing was used as a "sense-making tool" (Miles et al. 2014, p. 96), and the goal of writing analytic memos was to record, among other things, my reflections about the meaning of the data and draw links with previous literature (see Appendix 23 for a sample memo). The value of writing analytic memos is that they are constantly revised as the analysis proceeds and subsequently can be incorporated in the final research report (Saldaña, 2016).

Code	Initial definition	Revised definition
Lecturer feedback	Students' views on lecturer feedback (solicited/ unsolicited) they received/did not receive on their written work	Students' views on lecturer feedback (solicited/ unsolicited) offered/ not offered on their written work; includes how feedback was conveyed and what it focused on; students' reaction to or attitude towards feedback and/or marks awarded (i.e. how they felt about feedback, what they learnt, their expectations/ preferences, their interpretation of feedback, and action taken/not taken as a result of feedback/lack of feedback). Also refers to suggestions pertaining to quality of lecturer feedback.
Writing standards/ requirements/ lecturer expectations	Variation of writing standards and requirements expected of students	Provision of writing standards /writing requirements/lecturer expectations to students, includes students' access to and understanding of these; also refers to comments pertaining to perceived variation/ inconsistency in these aspects

 Table 9: Illustration of evolving meanings of codes

The student's responses to open-ended questionnaire items were coded manually using the same codes applied to interview data. Coding was done directly onto data on both hard copy questionnaire printouts and soft copies. In the latter case, the Microsoft Word's comment tool was used to code text passages and insert a comment which contained a code pertaining to the datum (see Appendix 24 for an illustration of coding of open-ended responses on soft copy questionnaires). A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was used to organise data and their accompanying codes. Columns contained codes, whilst rows held each respondent's identification number and data relevant to each code. Microsoft Excel's comment tool was also used for memoing. In memos, the following information was recorded: initial thoughts about data and specific survey questions participant responses referred to. Figure 2 is a snapshot of the Excel spreadsheet with sample coded responses.

	Category	Definition	Codes
1	Understandings of	How students and lecturers	Developing argument, content
	requirements for student	make sense of writing	knowledge, resources, addressing the
	writing	requirements which they	(task) question, structuring/organising
		identified	text, presentation, feedback, professional
			writing experiences, academic writing
			support, writing standards/lecturer
			expectations, previous writing
			experiences, comparison with traditional
			students, academic calendar, life
			commitments, learning behaviours
2	Writing experiences	Writing experiences students	Writing experiences from previous
	students bring to their	bring to their academic writing	learning, professional writing
	academic writing from	and affordances these	experiences, academic writing support,
	professional contexts and	experiences offer students for	comparison with traditional students,
	prior learning	meeting requirements of	lecturer feedback, resources, critical
		academic writing	thinking/evaluating subject content,
			presentation
3	Students' academic writing	Factors perceived as detrimental	Writing experiences from previous
	challenges	to development of students'	learning, professional writing
	e	academic writing	experiences, resources, academic writing
		5	support, lecturer feedback, writing
			standards/lecturer expectations, learning
			behaviours, relations/ interactions with
			lecturers/peers, life commitments,
			academic year/ calendar, comparison with
			traditional students, lecturer feedback,
			academic writing support, critical
			thinking/evaluating subject content,
			presentation
4	Access to writing	Students' strategies for	Writing experiences from previous
	requirements	accessing and making sense of	learning, professional writing
	1	writing requirements and	experiences, resources, academic writing
		lecturer expectations in the	support, relations/ interactions with
		context of writing specific	lecturers/peers, lecturer feedback, writing
		assignments, as well as the	standards/ lecturer expectations,
		challenges regarding accessing	comparison with traditional students, life
		and interpreting of writing	commitments, academic calendar,
		requirements	learning behaviours, content knowledge,
		1	critical thinking/ evaluating subject
			content, presentation
5	Support for students'	Suggestions pertaining to	Writing experiences from previous
ĩ	academic writing	provision of writing support for	learning, professional writing
	development	developing students' academic	experiences, resources, academic writing
	at . oropinoin	writing, as well as addressing	support, writing standards/lecturer
		academic writing challenges	expectations, relations/interactions with
		they encounter.	lecturers/peers, life commitments,
			comparison with traditional students,
			presentation, learning behaviours
			presentation, rearning benaviours

 Table 10: A list of conceptual categories with definitions

		Coding open ended student s	survey responses 27-02-18 [0	Compatibility Mode] - Microsoft Excel						
Hom	e Insert Page Layout Formulas	Data Review View				🕜 💷 📼 🗙				
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A214	A214 - 🖉 🏂 Student ID									
A	В	С	D	E	F	e				
	Academic writing support	Academic year/calendar	Addressing the (task) question	Comparison with traditional students	Content knowledge	Developing				
215 BASS8	Lecturers do not have enough	Lecturers do not have enough								
216	time to teach us because	time to teach us because								
217	we have limited time.	we have limited time.								
218	The university should introduce									
219	short courses for workers from									
220	different organisation for writing									
221 222										
222										
223										
225										
226 BASS9		We do not have enough time		We do not have enough time for our studies compared to	•					
227		for our studies compared to		the normal entry students.						
228		the normal entry students.		Access to the library is minimal because our classes are						
229		Access to the library is minimal		intensive and the library is not open during odd hours						
230		because our classes are intensive		e.g. After 4pm						
231		and the library is not open during								
232		odd hours e.g. After 4pm								
233		-								
234 BASS10	We need to be given the guidelines	We have limited time to learn		We have limited time to learn things as compared to the						
235		things as compared to the normal		normal entry student. Therefore most of the things are						
236		entry student. Therefore most of		left untouched.						
237		the things are left untouched.								
238										
		I think normal-entry students have		I think normal-entry students have						
240	instructions or lessons in writing.	more advantages than us, since		more advantages than us, since						
241		they are given more time to learn		they are given more time to learn						
242		from their lecturers compared to us		from their lecturers compared to us						
243		(mature students). Our time is		(mature students). Our time is						
244		always limited.		always limited.		•				
245	heet1 Sheet2 Sheet3 Sheet4 🖓		I							
Ready					BOU 80% - (	J (				

Figure 2: A screen shot of a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with coded students' responses to open-ended questionnaire items

## 3.6.3 Analysis of quantitative data

Prior to computing quantitative data from student and lecturer questionnaires using a statistical software programme, SPSS, response categories were coded. This involved giving a number to each response group to facilitate statistical analysis (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Non-responses (missing data) were also given a code (a standard procedure with SPSS). Although coding involved converting respondents' answers into numbers, it went beyond merely attaching a number to a category. The most important aspect of coding was generating a coding frame, containing each variable and "specifications for every possible value" that a variable could take (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 199). Part of the coding frame is shown in Table 11.

Variable	Levels	Codes
Gender	Female	1
	Male	2
Age	Below 25	1
	25-30	2
	31-35	3
	36-45	4
	Above 45	5
Study programme	Accounting	1
	Business administration	2
	Education	3
	Internal auditing	4
	Journalism	5
	Procurement & logistics management	6
Usefulness of workplace	very helpful	1
writing experiences	quite helpful	2
	neither helpful nor unhelpful	3
	not helpful at all	4

Table 11: Part of a coding frame for variables derived from student questionnaire

These codes were used to compute data for each respondent. Descriptive statistical analyses (frequencies) were applied to the computed data. The outcome was frequency distributions (counts and percentages) of responses for each variable displayed in frequency tables. These frequency distributions provided insights into the participants' demographics and general tendencies regarding the following: requirements expected of students' writing, the means through which the mature students learnt about what was required of their academic writing and lecturers' ways of communicating these requirements, and the students' perceptions of what contributed to the development of their academic writing. Cross-tabulations were also done to examine the relationships among some variables. For example, for the student data, the variables labelled discipline/study programme and work experience were cross tabulated (see Table 15). Similarly, discipline/study programme was cross tabulated with entry qualification, year of entry, and times for class attendance (see Table 14)

#### 3.7 Researcher's positioning in the research context

To be reflexive means to be aware of, and be able to provide an "explicit, situated account" (Starfield, 2015, p. 141) of, the influences or implications of one's role or position in the research and the research process itself on the findings, their interpretation, and presentation (Pillow, 2010). My positioning in this study can be described as being both an insider and outsider. My insider status as a member of staff at the College presented several advantages. I was familiar with the general institutional context in which the students experienced academic writing; that is, the context in which learning about academic writing took place and students' texts were produced and evaluated. This knowledge facilitated my understanding and interpretation of participants' accounts. The drawback of this positioning is that some participants assumed that I was familiar with students' academic writing experiences; hence at times they seemed not to see the need to share certain information. Moreover, as an academic member of staff at the College (also see section 3.8 on ethical considerations), students could have seen the researcher as belonging to the same community of their lecturers and as part of the system. To some students I may have come across as threatening, thus creating a distance between us. This could have influenced their accounts in terms of the nature of information they were willing to share with the researcher.

On the other hand, as a non-member of the participants' departments and discipline areas, I had a status of an outsider who lacked prior/background knowledge of students' departmental/discipline-specific academic writing experiences. This enabled me to probe interviewees' responses in an attempt to obtain details and develop understanding of their accounts. Besides having no teaching and assessment responsibilities for the students, I did not know the students and had not interacted with them before the study began. Students could have considered me as a stranger and non-threatening, which prompted them to talk about their writing experiences with a greater degree of candour. Conversely, participants' lack of familiarity with the researcher could have prevented them from developing rapport with the researcher, and consequently influenced their responses.

#### 3.8 Ethical considerations

Permission to conduct the study was sought from the vice-principal of the Polytechnic College and was granted (see Appendices 2 and 3). This study was also granted ethical approval from the University of Reading's School of Literature and Languages Ethics
Committee on February 14, 2017 (see Appendix 12). All participants were clearly informed that participation was entirely voluntary and that they had a right to withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to do so. They were also assured of anonymity and that their responses would be treated confidentially. I also informed them that when reporting their responses, I would not identify them by name; rather pseudonyms would be used.

Including participants' verbatim responses, such as interview excerpts, in a report makes it possible for their "voices and positions to emerge" (Abasi & Graves, 2008, p. 223). Therefore, participants were informed about how their data would be used and were given assurance that any direct quotation of their responses or textual data would not compromise their anonymity. Moreover, it was mentioned that the focus of data analysis would be on identifying recurring themes across data rather than individual perspectives. For completing the questionnaire, students were offered a 30 minute-tutorial on academic writing; and for the interview, they were offered K5,000 (equivalent to £5) mainly to help cover their travel expenses (See student and lecturer information sheets in Appendices 6 and 10 respectively).

It needs to be acknowledged that although the voluntary nature of participation was emphasised, several factors could have influenced participants' decision to take part in the study. Firstly, from the outset, participants were made aware of my identity as an academic member of the language and communication department at the Polytechnic College. This was disclosed during face-to-face recruitment (for holiday students) and in recruitment emails (for lecturers and non-holiday students). Therefore, some participants might have felt obligated to assist the researcher by participating in the study. This could have especially applied to students although I was not in a direct dependent relationship with them in terms of having teaching and assessment responsibilities for the students.

Several measures were taken to ensure that ethical principles of conduct were followed during data collection, processing, and reporting of findings. At the beginning of both students' and lecturers' questionnaire, participants were clearly advised that completing and returning the questionnaire meant that they were giving consent for their responses to be used for the purposes of the study. Before commencing the interview, a written consent was sought from participants and audio-recording of interviews proceeded with their consent (see Appendix 13).

To ensure anonymity of participants, their identity was anonymised when transcribing interviews. I also anonymised all information deemed sensitive and which could compromise the anonymity of individuals. This includes names of individuals, organisations, modules, and titles of assignment tasks mentioned in the interviews. Thus both lecturers and students are identified by their respective disciplines and a number. Table 12 below illustrates the notation used to refer to participants in excerpts.

Source of data	Notation example	Notation translation						
		Discipline	Participant	Data source	Number			
Interview	JSI1	Journalism	Student	Interviewee	1			
	JLI1	Journalism	Lecturer	Interviewee	1			
Survey	JSS1	Journalism	Student	Survey	1			

Table 12: Notation for referring to participants

#### **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the outcomes of data analysis and a discussion of the findings derived from questionnaire and interview data of both students and lecturers. In line with the mixedmethods approach adopted in this study (see section 3.3), quantitative and qualitative findings derived from 35 student and 11 lecturer interviews and questionnaires are combined to answer the research questions. Table 13 summarises data sources drawn on to answer each research question. Since there were not many identifiable differences in students' reported academic writing experiences on the basis of their disciplinary area, the majority of the students' writing experiences presented in this chapter are those they had in common. The findings will also foreground areas of agreement and differences between lecturers and students which cut across different disciplines. However, where the reported experiences are discipline-specific, and comparisons are drawn between students and lecturers within a discipline, this will be pointed out. Tables will be used to display quantitative findings. Data excerpts that best illustrate qualitative findings will be presented. These quotations will be selected from both students' and lecturers' interview data and students' responses to open-ended questionnaire items.

The results and the discussion of the findings are presented according to the research questions which guided the study. Findings pertaining to each of the five research questions posed in chapter one are discussed in relation to relevant literature. Conclusions derived from interpretation of the findings are also highlighted. Descriptive statistics about participants are presented first. The chapter then goes on to discuss findings pertaining to research question one which examines how mature students and their lecturers interpret requirements of student writing. Next is a discussion of results for research question two which explores how mature students learn about what is required of their writing. This is followed by a discussion of findings for research question three which probes the perceived affordances of discursive resources from workplace contexts mature students bring to bear on their academic writing. Next is an interpretation of results for research question four which aims to uncover factors accounting for the academic writing challenges faced by mature students. The final section discusses findings for question five which examines strategies suggested by students and their lecturers for developing academic writing of mature students.

Re	search question	Data sourc	e		
		Questionna	aire	Semi-stru interview	ctured
		Student	Lecturer	Student	Lecturer
1.	How do mature undergraduate students and their lecturers in a Malawian context interpret requirements for student writing?	~	~	✓	~
2.	How do these mature students learn about what is required of their writing?	<b>√</b>	~	~	
3.	What are the perceived (by students and lecturers) affordances of discursive resources from professional contexts which these mature students bring to bear on their writing?	~		<b>√</b>	~
4.	What reasons do these students and their lecturers give for mature students' academic writing challenges?	~	~	~	~
5.	What strategies for developing the academic writing of mature students do these lecturers and students suggest?	<b>√</b>	✓	~	✓

Table 13: Data sources drawn on to answer research questions

### 4.2 Participants' demographics

Two groups of participants were involved in the study, namely 98 final year mature undergraduate students who were enrolled for the 2016/17 academic year and twelve full-time lecturers responsible for teaching and assessing the students' work.

### 4.2.1 Final year undergraduate mature students

The study involved 98 final year students and non-native speakers of English who were enrolled in varied fields that constitute the social sciences, namely, accounting, internal auditing, business administration, procurement and logistics management, journalism, and education. The duration of degree programmes for these fields is four years. There were slightly more female (52%) than male (48%) students, and as shown in Figure 3 below, most of these students (around 46%) fell in the 25-30 age group, followed by 31-35 (25%) and 36-45 (24%).



Figure 3: Age distribution of students

Table 14 shows that over half (58) of the students commenced their studies in year three and 40 entered their programmes in the second year of their four-year programmes. Most of them had a diploma (68%) or advanced diploma (25%) as university entry qualification. While 61 students attended classes in semester time, 37 had their classes held during college holidays. Journalism students were second year entrants and all students on education, internal auditing, and procurement and logistics management programmes were enrolled in year three. Accounting and business administration students joined their programmes either in year two or three.

Of the 98 students who completed the questionnaire, 48 reported that they were working while studying, while the rest indicated that they had undertaken employment in the past. As shown in Table 15 below, these students came from a variety of employment backgrounds. Some students had work experience in professions related to their field of study. For example, the majority of journalism students (14) had worked as news reporters, editors, and programme producers for newspapers, television, and radio; whilst most of the accounting students (19) had experience working as accountants or bankers.

Times for class	Study programme	Year entry	<i>v</i> 1						
attendance		2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Diploma	Advanced diploma	Degree	Graduate diploma		
College holidays/	Accounting	8	15	20	2	-	1	23	37
weekdays	Business administration	11	3	5	9	-	-	14	
Semester time/ weekend	Journalism	17	-	17	-	-	-	17	61
Semester	Accounting	3	1	4	-	-	-	4	
time/	Education	-	2	1	1	-	-	2	
weekdays	Internal auditing	-	20	18	1	1	-	20	
	Journalism	1	-	1	-	-	-	1	
	Procurement & logistics management	-	17	1	11	-	5	17	
Total		40	58	67	24	1	6	9	8

Table 14: A summary of student participants per programme: Entry qualifications, year of entry, and times for class attendance

#### Table 15: A summary of students' employment backgrounds by discipline

Work experience		Discipline*						
	А	BA	Е	IA	J	PLM		
News reporting (print/TV/radio)	-	-	-	-	11	-	11	
News editing	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	
Programme production (TV/radio)	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	
Accounting	10	1	-	9	-	-	20	
Banking	9	3	-	1	2	3	18	
Auditing	1	-	-	5	-	-	6	
Insurance	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	
Revenue/debt collection	1	1	-	1	-	-	3	
Marketing (business)	1	1	-	1	1	2	6	
Human resources/administration/	1	7	-	1	1	2	12	
management								
Procurement/logistics	1	-	-	-	-	7	8	
Teaching	-	-	2	1	-	1	4	
Customer service	2	-	-	-	-	1	2	
Entrepreneurship	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	
Police service	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	
Total	27	14	2	20	18	16	97	

Key: Discipline\*: A: Accounting; BA: Business Administration; E: Education; IA: Internal Auditing; J: Journalism; PLM: Procurement & Logistics Management

Note: 1 PLM student did not indicate employment background

#### **4.2.2 Lecturers**

Besides the students, the study involved twelve lecturers who taught and assessed mature students' written work. The lecturers were drawn from the same disciplinary areas as the students. Seven were from the faculty of education/media studies in the disciplines of journalism and education; while five were recruited from the faculty of commerce in the disciplines of accounting/internal auditing and business administration. These lecturers had a range of experience of teaching both mainstream and mature students. Two of the lecturers had taught for less than 5 years, four for 5 to10 years, two for 11-15 years, and four for more than 16 years. All, but one, taught into the final year of their respective programmes. Ten were lecturers and two associate professors.

# 4.3 Research question 1: How do mature undergraduate students and their lecturers in a Malawian context interpret requirements of student writing?

This question examines mature students' and their lecturers' ways of interpreting generic requirements of student writing. In the questionnaire, both students and lecturers were asked to identify five attributes which lecturers looked for in students' written work and rank the chosen five according to order of importance (see section 3.4.1). Tables 16 and 17 display the frequency distribution of students' and lecturers' responses respectively. It should be noted that due to rounding, the total percentage in some cases does not equal 100. In addition, the response category 'least important' does not necessarily mean that a particular writing requirement is 'not important', but rather it features last in the ranking of the participants' preferences.

In the interviews, both students and lecturers were asked to provide their understanding of each of the five writing requirements which they had identified in the questionnaire. It should be noted that for data analysis purposes, some requirements listed in Tables 16 and 17 were combined on the basis that they were deemed related. Therefore, 'using source texts' subsumes several requirements, namely reading widely/research on assignment question, not plagiarised, evaluating quality of source texts, referencing, and synthesising source texts. Another example is 'structuring', which includes expressing ideas logically and text cohesion. Finally, language use/writing style subsumes presentation/formatting. The outcome of this process was the following seven requirements: developing an argument, critical thinking/evaluation of content knowledge, structuring, language use/writing style, addressing

the (task) question, content knowledge, and using source texts. In the sections that follow, students' and lecturers' understanding of each of these requirements will be presented and discussed. For each requirement, areas of shared understanding and discrepancy between students and lecturers across different disciplines will be highlighted.

### 4.3.1 Developing an argument: A binary or 'multi-voiced' argument?

Results in Tables 16 and 17 indicate that a small number of students (33%) and lecturers (4) identified developing an argument as an attribute which was required of students' writing. Moreover, a very low percentage of these students and none of the lecturers considered this attribute as most important.

	Generic writing Frequency count/percentage								
	requirements	Most important	Important	Quite important	Slightly important	Least important	Out of 98 returned questionnaires		
1	Addressing the question	43 (61%)	12 (17%)	7 (10%)	4 (6%)	4 (6%)	70 (71%)		
2	Wide reading/research on assignment question	18 (31%)	19 (32%)	5 (9%)	9 (16%)	7 (12%)	58 (59%)		
3	Logical expression of ideas	3 (5%)	17 (30%)	15 (27%)	14 (25%)	7 (13%)	56 (57%)		
4	Not plagiarised	7 (15%)	10 (22%)	10 (22%)	4 (9%)	15 (33%)	46 (47%)		
5	Proper use and citation of source texts	5 (11%)	7 (15 %)	5 (11%)	12 (26%)	17 (37 %)	46 (47%)		
6	Content knowledge	10 (22%)	12 (27%)	14 (31%)	6 (13%)	3 (7%)	45 (46%)		
7	Critical thinking/ evaluation of content knowledge	9 (18%)	5 (13%)	9 (24%)	10 (26%)	7 (18%)	38 (39%)		
8	Developing argument	2 (6%)	3 (9%)	7 (22%)	13 (41%)	7 (22%)	32 (33%)		
9	Presentation/ formatting	1 (4%)	2 (8%)	7 (27%)	6 (23%)	10 (39%)	26 (27%)		
10	Language use/writing style	2 (10%)	3 (15%)	3 (15%)	4 (20%)	8 (40%)	20 (20%)		
11	Evaluation of quality of source texts	-	2 (11%)	6 (32%)	5 (26%)	6 (32%)	19 (19%)		
12	Synthesising source texts	-	2 (18%)	6 (55%)	3 (27%)	-	11 (11%)		
13	Structuring/organisati on of ideas	-	3 (38%)	-	3 (38%)	2 (25%)	8 (8%)		
14	Text cohesion	-	-	2 (33%)	3 (50%)	1 (17%)	6 (6%)		

 Table 16: Generic requirements of student writing: Student questionnaire responses in rank order according to total number of responses

These findings appear to be inconsistent with the notion that argumentation should be seen as the essence of scholarship at university (Andrews, 2000, 2010), and thus a core requirement of academic writing (Wingate, 2012a). In academic writing, the centrality of argumentation lies in its epistemic role. What this means is that if argumentation is not foregrounded in students' writing, then they are denied a chance to engage with disciplinary knowledge and participate in disciplinary debates. They are deprived of the opportunity to progress from participating in the disciplinary discourses "peripherally" and "vicariously" to contributing directly ("generatively") to meaning making or knowledge construction (Northedge, 2003b, p. 21). Thus, students may not develop the capacity to progress from, what Marinkovich et al. (2016, p. 98) describes as, a "reproductive" form of writing to one which is "elaborated and epistemic".

	Generic writing	Frequency count							
	requirements	Most important	Important	Quite important	Slightly important	Least important	Out of 12 returned questionnaire		
1	Logical expression of ideas	2	2	2	2	1	9		
2	Critical thinking/ evaluation of content knowledge	3	3	-	1	1	8		
3	Content knowledge	1	2	3	1	-	7		
4	Addressing the question	5	1	-	-	-	6		
5	Not plagiarised	1	1	2	-	2	6		
6	Proper use and citation of source texts	-	1	-	2	2	5		
7	Text cohesion	-	1	2	-	1	4		
8	Developing argument	-	1	2	-	1	4		
9	Structuring/organisati on of ideas	-	1	2	-	1	4		
10	Wide reading/ research on assignment question	-	-	1	2	-	3		
11	Synthesising source texts	-	-	-	2	1	3		
12	Language use/ writing style	-	-	-	1	1	2		
13	Presentation/ formatting	-	-	-	-	1	1		
14	Evaluation of quality of source texts	-	-	-	1	-	1		

 Table 17: Generic requirements of student writing: Lecturer questionnaire responses in rank order according to total number of responses

Student and lecturer interview responses reveal that students had a certain level of awareness of some of the aspects of argumentation which corresponded to their lecturers' understanding, namely, articulating the writer's stance and providing support for one's claims. Twelve out of the 14 students who, in the questionnaire, had identified developing an argument as an attribute required of student writing described the writer's position in such terms as "conclusion, idea, stand, position, side, fact, and issue". Five of these students recognized that development an argument involves supporting one's claims. Out of the five who acknowledged the need to support one's claims, only two students (both from journalism) explicitly indicated how such claims could be supported. Without identifying the source of evidence, one student mentioned provision of convincing reasons, as is described in the following excerpt:

"you have to make a stand and then defend it throughout the essay. In terms of defending...it's more like when you are given two sides to choose, to agree or disagree and in my case I've chosen to disagree, that means I will have to find other reasons why am disagreeing with the current notion or the question and then those reasons they should be convincing" (JSI4)

The other student talked about using examples to 'expound' one's ideas:

"we should be able to... expand the facts, not just answering like a oneword answer but we should be able to give the examples and even expound the fact that you are stating in that particular question." (JSI8)

Like the students, two lecturers mentioned articulation of and support of ('backing', 'qualifying', 'justifying', 'defending') a writer's stance (a 'statement', an 'idea') as aspects of argument development. This understanding is reflected in the following quote from an education lecturer:

"An argument can be perhaps more or less like a summary of a statement but it needs to have some backing. It cannot just be an independent statement without the claims to that argument." (ELI2)

Evident in the findings are differences in the lecturers' and students' understanding of argument development. On the one hand, responses from two lecturers suggest that

demonstrating awareness of the epistemic function of academic writing is an important aspect of argumentation. For instance, engaging with evidence from sources for meaning making and knowledge creation or extension, rather than simply recounting existing disciplinary knowledge, is regarded as central to argument development. Engaging with evidence was also associated with evaluation of its relevance and applicability to a given context; that is, rather than simply describing evidence, students should engage with it in order to develop their own perspectives on a subject. This comment by a journalism lecturer illustrates this view:

"The point is the knowledge and the issues am engaging with what do they mean? And I think that's the pathway to generating new knowledge. You are saying this is what we know now, but how have we come to this? What is the meaning of all this that we are engaging with as a student? .... The key point is to identify how far one has gone beyond the sources that you have used to generate that knowledge. So I look at if A, B, C, D as authors said this, have you just regurgitated what they said? Or you have only marginally gone beyond their arguments to make some less meaningful arguments? So it's a question of how far you've gone in extending their arguments and knowledge.... I think how far you go in expanding on what others have said is really key in you making a convincing argument on area of interest." (JLI1)

On the other hand, students' responses reveal misconceptions about the nature of argumentation which is required at university. A few students' accounts (5) suggested that an argument is developed based on two opposing perspectives (e.g. 'negative/positive', 'for/against'), and that developing this two-sided argument involves establishing and justifying a position which is developed on the basis of comparison of two viewpoints. The extract below captures this view:

"you will always have the arguments which are both for and against.... you have to take a side, present your arguments, and then you also have to recognise the other opposing views, but then you always have to make a preference at the end of the day, that much as these other two or three researchers are saying this ... I am forced to side with these guys.... So when it comes to developing an argument, to me it's where you have to recognise both arguments which are for and against and then you have to choose a side" (JSI3)

Students' thinking that an argument is developed on the basis of comparison of two opposing positions is consistent with what Wingate (2012a) found in her study, whereby most students held a binary rather than a 'multi-voiced' or 'dialogic' view of argument (Andrews, 2000, p. 13). It is difficult to conclude whether this perception is a remnant of literacy practices from prior learning or that it is due to the inadequacies of the writing guidance students were offered or which they sought from other sources. These factors have been implicated in other studies which have explored students' understanding of argumentative writing at university (e.g. Wingate, 2012a; Andrews et al., 2006). However, what seems clear is that if students' misconceptions about discursive practices they are expected to engage with are not addressed, for example through writing instruction or lecturer feedback, they can become consolidated and persist into later stages of their studies. The consequence of not addressing misconceptions which students may have about disciplinary practices can be the widening of gaps in how students and lecturers understand argument development.

#### 4.3.2 The opacity of critical thinking/analysis

From Tables 16 and 17, it can be seen that most of the lecturers (8) chose critical thinking/evaluation as a valued attribute of academic writing in comparison with less than half of the students (39%). Despite offering varied meanings of critical thinking/evaluation in the interviews, the lecturers and the students seemed to agree that exercising criticality requires going beyond simply summarising ideas from source texts or reproducing content knowledge. Generally, the lecturers thought that criticality is marked by making claims and constructing meaning or knowledge based on engagement with and understanding of subject material, drawing links between theory and practice, as well as transferring or applying acquired concepts to new contexts. For instance, two lecturers from journalism and education associated critical thinking/evaluation with argument development and participation in academic debates. They described critical thinking/evaluation as an activity which requires a certain level of understanding of subject content and involves making a 'judgment' or expressing a 'position' in relation to one's analysis of subject knowledge. The excerpt below illustrates this understanding.

"they [students] should go beyond regurgitating.... when you talk about critical thinking it means they have actually understood the matter. They have analysed it in such a way that they can now come up with something which is a judgment of their own.... a student has to make a judgment and take a position." (JLI3)

Critical thinking/evaluation was seen by other four lecturers across different disciplines as key to constructing knowledge and meaning making. Emphasis was placed on the need for students to recognise that new (disciplinary) knowledge is the outcome of active engagement with existing knowledge, which one journalism lecturer described as "raw material" or the "foundation" for "building" or "generating more knowledge".

"if you want to be involved in generating new knowledge, you should be able to think beyond what is there now.... this is the status of knowledge as we see it today but...we should be able to use the present knowledge just as a foundation for generating more knowledge. So you can only do that if you just use the current knowledge as a raw material for building more knowledge for the future." (JLI1)

The ways in which the lecturers conceived criticality can be linked to Gibbs' (1992) 'deep' learning approach. According to Gibbs (1992), students who adopt a deep approach to learning are likely to engage in, among other processes, making sense of concepts, developing own perspectives of the subject matter, and transforming knowledge. This approach is contrasted with the 'surface' approach which usually entails rote learning and is manifest in the regurgitation or reproduction of material. Elements of the 'deep' learning approach were also evident in students' conceptualisation of 'criticality' such as positioning oneself in relation to existing knowledge or developing perspectives of subject knowledge, constructing own meaning, and drawing links between conceptual knowledge and practice. As explained in the following response, three students (all in the internal auditing discipline) thought that critical thinking/evaluation is manifested in the ability to draw implications of theory for practice or apply acquired knowledge to areas beyond the immediate learning context.

"we have to apply everything we have learned in a practical situation...whether it's a theory or a model, whether it's applicable or whether it is not applicable.... much of the questions which we were asked maybe in fourth year were much to do with practical experiences, practical examples. So they had to test first the knowledge of the content, subject content and then if you are able to apply it in a practical situation, in a certain scenario." (IASI1)

Responses from three students (in journalism and internal auditing) also suggest an understanding that critical thinking/evaluation involves engaging with, rather than simply reproducing or describing, subject knowledge. Analysing subject knowledge was considered necessary for positioning oneself in relation to existing knowledge or developing one's perspective on subject knowledge, as well as constructing one's own meaning. This way of conceptualising critical thinking/evaluation is illustrated by the following quote:

"If it's an essay then you want to have a stand. So which are the points that will capture your stand? So it's where you have to evaluate or...critique the subject to make sure that you have a point which you stand by." (JSI2)

However, some students (journalism and internal auditing) thought that critical thinking/evaluation means going beyond the scope of given task demands and entails drawing on content knowledge exceeding what is acquired in the classroom. This understanding was manifest in some of the expressions students used to describe critical thinking/evaluation, for example, "think outside the box/question", and "think beyond what you have been given".

"lecturers would want you to think beyond what you have been given because you have to... say sometimes things that you were not even taught in class. So it mainly applies... in case studies." (IASI2)

Merely drawing on content knowledge derived from sources beyond the classroom, without any engagement with it, suggests a 'surface' learning approach. A pedagogical implication of the misconception that these students had about criticality is that this attribute needs to be developed in students' writing. Foregrounding criticality in students' writing is necessary given that results in Table 16 show that not many students identified this aspect as what was required of their writing. Although criticality can be taught, as suggested by Quinn and Vorster (2016), through requiring students to deconstruct assignment exemplars which typically depict criticality such as argumentative essays, assessment task design can largely 108 influence the extent to which students' learning of criticality is promoted. Designing tasks that do not promote reproduction of knowledge, but rather argumentation and application of knowledge to new contexts could enhance students' capacity for critical thinking/evaluation. In accordance with Gibbs' (1992) recommendation, setting assessment criteria which heavily reward understanding and criticality rather than knowledge reproduction can encourage students to engage in criticality.

Evident in the findings are varied meanings which students and lecturers attached to 'criticality'. Multiplicity in interpretation of what constitutes criticality may denote difficulty in pinning down its meaning. It could also mean that exercising criticality in one's work necessitates developing a range of abilities. Diversity in the abilities which students need to develop in order to achieve criticality in their work is also evident in the literature. These competences, which centre on engagement with source texts for developing arguments, include positioning oneself in relation to other voices on a subject (Wu, 2006) by articulating an attitude or stance on source material (Andrews, 2010; Groom, 2000; Hood, 2004), establishing alternative perspectives through comparison of source texts (Andrews, 2010), and evaluating how theoretical concepts apply in practical contexts (Quinn & Vorster, 2016).

#### 4.3.3 Structuring: Essential for meaning-making

Results in Tables 16 and 17 indicate that whilst the majority of the lecturers (9) picked out logical expression of ideas as a requirement expected of student writing, more than half of the 98 students identified this quality of writing as what most of their lecturers looked for in their written work. The results also provide a glimpse of how students and lecturers understood the role of structuring in academic writing. In the interviews, a common understanding of lecturers and students was that a logical structure is necessary for facilitating an audience's meaningful understanding of the writer's ideas. Specifically, a coherent text was seen as necessary for guiding readers through text and enabling them to follow a writer's thoughts. Generally, students and lecturers responses suggest an understanding that structure is integral to the meaning-making process. Specifically, as is evident in the following student (IASI3) and lecturer (BALI1) comments, they seemed to recognise the importance of making one's writing accessible to readers by directing them to the meaning which needs to be conveyed.

"you have to structure your ideas in such a way that the one who is supposed to mark your assignments has to be able to follow and even be able to decode what you have written, meaning to say you have to order your ideas in such a way that it could bring something else to the reader of your assignment." (IASI3)

"Their ideas, the facts to the question they should come out logically, making sense, flowing from one point to the other.... The reader should be able to follow where the discussion is coming from and where it is going." (BALI1)

One lecturer's response also suggests that a logical structure is essential for the advancement of a writer's stance on a subject. Specifically, this lecturer held the view that through a proper structure, writers can demonstrate to the reader the relevance of a stance they have adopted on a subject. This lecturer's understanding seems to be consistent with Wingate's (2012a) view that the structure of a text should reflect how writers develop their position in an argument.

"for you to succeed and convince somebody through writing that the position that I've taken is most appropriate given all the possible alternatives, you need an appropriate structure and that's why the ideas have to come together, not just as a compendium of ideas" (JLI3)

A number of students understood the need to write coherently, and several strategies on how writers can create coherence in their texts emerged from their interview comments. For instance, four students thought that logical sequencing of text using the essay-like schematic structure (i.e. introduction, middle, and conclusion) would enable a writer achieve coherence of text, as this quotation illustrates:

"The ideas or the answers... has to flow in chronological order, from the introduction, to the body, and the conclusion. You have to show that this is...an introduction, what is it that you're going to discuss in the body, and in the body what is it that you are discussing relevant to the topic, linking (to) your topic, and indeed on the conclusion you have to summarise what is it that you've written in the body" (ASI4)

Others (4) thought that achieving text coherence necessitates arranging ideas chronologically, for example, according to their degree of relevance.

"The ideas have to flow, like the very most important thing at the beginning" (IASI6)

Two students' responses revealed that coherence of text can be attained through clear marking of topic shifts. One of these students mentioned that these topical shifts can be signalled by addressing each new topic or idea in its own paragraph.

"when you are writing ideas...you don't have to mix them. When you want to write a certain idea write it in a different paragraph, another one and on and on." (JSI7)

The students' perceptions of what contributes to text coherence points to either lack of knowledge of the various cohesive devices or a difficulty in explaining what coherent texts look like. Whichever is the case, the way the students understood how coherence is established in texts suggests the need for the students to receive instruction in coherence/cohesion. Since coherence is a complex construct (Bublitz, 1999), teaching students how to achieve coherence in their texts cannot be accomplished by explanation only. Student assignment exemplars should be incorporated in instruction about coherence and cohesion. Students should be given an opportunity to analyse texts which their lecturers rate as coherent or less coherent. That is, students should be enabled to make evaluative judgements of what makes certain texts more coherent than others. Tai, Ajjawi, Boud, Dawson, and Panadero (2018) define evaluative judgement capacity as the "capability to make decisions about the quality of work of self and others" (p. 471). Tai et al. (2016) have identified two interrelated components which are regarded as essential to making an evaluative judgement, namely: (a) understanding what constitutes quality and (b) applying this understanding through an appraisal of own or others' work (p. 659). Therefore, the focus of such an analysis should be on identifying the various means which writers use to create coherence for their readers, and more importantly, how such devices contribute to the coherence of the texts.

#### 4.3.4 Language use/writing style: Making content more accessible to readers

The results in Tables 16 and 17 show that a small number of students (20% of the 98 questionnaire respondents) and lecturers (2 out of 12) chose language use/writing style as a requirement for student writing. A plausible explanation for these results is that when

marking students work, some lecturers pay less attention to form in comparison to students' knowledge of subject content. In the interviews, several students and lecturers mentioned that some lecturers were less interested in how students communicated content knowledge since their main concern was what students were writing about (see section 4.6.4.2). Overlooking how students are communicating meaning could be due to the lecturers' perceptions of their role in developing students' academic literacy. They may have felt that, as subject content lecturers, marking students' use of language is not their primary responsibility or that they lack expertise in this area. However, as Hyland (2013a) has argued, by disregarding "rhetorical aspects" in students' work, lecturers risk sending the message to students that subject content or meaning is "created independently of the language which conveys it" (p. 182). This means that both what is communicated (content) and how this content is expressed contribute to knowledge creation or meaning making. In addition, by not commenting on form, lecturers miss the chance to develop students' competence in appropriate ways of communicating disciplinary knowledge.

In the interviews, students demonstrated that they understood the requirement of language use/writing style in varied ways. As explained in the following excerpt, use of appropriate register, specifically, the ability to communicate technical content when writing for both specialist and non-specialist audiences in one's field, as well as distinguish between spoken and written registers was regarded as a feature of good writing style.

"we were told...the type of writing style that the university wants.... It should be for example, for us, technical. We use technical language for accountants. Basically the assignments that we write are basically technical, and we also have to define the technical terms.... the writings that we write should be technical but we should define what we are writing for people who are not accountants, who are not conversant with what we are writing." (ASI5)

Two of these students also understood that the type of genre of an assignment determines which writing style is appropriate in a given context; that is, they acknowledged variation in writing styles for different written genres such as examination, essay, and research paper.

"every academic writing given has its own style. The way we write research [paper] is different to the way we can write an essay, because an essay it's a brief writing while research it's an extensive study on a subject matter, and they are different also to the way we can write in an exam because an exam it's impromptu answers". (ASI4)

Other students (6) identified strict observance of mechanics of writing, namely, text formatting (e.g. font size and type, spacing, paragraphing, layout, schematic structure of genres) and conventions of citation as a defining feature of an appropriate writing style:

"They [lecturers] need consistency on this one [citation conventions]. If it's APA referencing it should be APA. If it's Chicago you should maintain that Chicago thing" (JSI5)

Students' and lecturers' accounts also revealed an area of overlap in their understanding of the requirement of writing style and their lecturers' conception of this attribute, namely, language competence. Use of "good language" was seen by two students as necessary for achieving clarity of meaning.

"You should use a good language...The English [language] should be well understood so that the lecturer should not be confused what you mean. It should be clear." (ESI2)

Similarly, interviews with two lecturers (journalism and education), who in the questionnaire had identified language use/writing style as a requirement for student writing, revealed that appropriate use of language (in terms of choice of vocabulary, and use of syntax, grammar, and spelling) was regarded as important for achieving clarity of meaning. These lecturers also mentioned language accuracy, as well as simple language and sentence structure. Some of these attributes are depicted in the excerpt that follows.

"sometimes when we are writing academically we tend to think that the more difficult the sentence structure is, the vocabulary is, then the more educated you are.... the most important thing is whatever ideas they have, they have to be clearly said because if they obscure them in language that is bombastic then you lose the reader... even when you have complex ideas they should be able to simplify them in terms of clarity." (JLI3)

These lecturers' views suggest a recognition of the need for student writers to help readers of their texts understand what they are writing about by paying attention to how they are conveying their ideas. This means that making content more accessible to readers is seen by the lecturers as an important aspect of meaning-making in academic writing.

#### 4.3.5 Addressing the task question

The results, as shown in Tables 16 and 17, indicate that addressing the task question was not only identified by the majority of students (71%) as an attribute which their lecturers looked for in their writing, it was also highly ranked in terms of importance by most of the students (61%) and almost half of the lecturers. This could be an indication that answering the question was one of the most emphasised qualities in the assessment of students' writing. The greatest overlap in students' and lecturers' understanding of writing requirements was found for addressing the question. In the interviews, both students and lecturers highlighted the importance of unpacking the demands of an assessment task. This was regarded as a prerequisite for providing a relevant answer or properly addressing a task question. A common view of both students (22 out of the 24 who, in the questionnaire, had identified addressing the question as an attribute of academic writing) and lecturers (4) was that in order to answer the question, students needed to use appropriate content material. The following responses were typical of students' and lecturers' comments regarding this writing requirement:

"understanding what the lecturer is trying to tell you to do is the most critical thing because the moment you understand that question, you understand what he's looking for from you and then you will be able to address that question. If you don't, then chances are you just ramble and ramble around that topic without necessarily hitting where he wants you to and the chances are you will not get anything right." (JSI3)

"They have to give me the information that is pertaining to that particular question.... So I expect a student to provide facts of the question that they have been given." (BALI1)

Besides providing content relevant to the question asked, two students (journalism and procurement) and one lecturer recognised the importance of interpreting and responding appropriately to assessment task terms ('demand words'/'key words'). Moreover, the

following student and lecturer responses suggest awareness that different assessment terms entail different task demands.

"we were told that we should first understand the demand words and when we understand the demand words we need to address those words. If it is to evaluate it's different from to explain for example." (JSI1)

"I expect them to address the requirement of the question. The question will start with how, when, why, discuss.... If the question say discuss, it's different to a question say compare and contrast." (ALI2)

It is interesting that most of the participants did not consider responding to the demands of task words as an important aspect of addressing the question, taking into account that these words are an integral feature of higher education 'assessment discourse' and that students' familiarity with usage of these terms in their disciplines is deemed vital to successful completion of assessment tasks (Richards & Pilcher, 2013; Williams, 2005). It is possible that most of the students did not think that interpreting task words is of paramount importance because lecturers did not pay much attention to how students understood and addressed these words in their assignments. That is, in comparison with provision of appropriate content material, students' response to the task words was not emphasised in the criteria lecturers used to assess students' work. The tendency of some lecturers to prioritise assessment of students' learning of subject content and overlook their knowledge of norms and conventions of academic writing was reported by some students and lecturers (see section 4.6.4.2).

#### 4.3.6 Content knowledge: The purpose of student writing

In the interviews, a common view amongst students (14) and lecturers (5) was that the attribute of 'content knowledge' entails demonstrating understanding of theoretical concepts pertaining to a subject and providing relevant content material derived from source material or experience. Students also associated content knowledge with the breadth of reading about subject matter. As illustrated in the following quote, the students believed that the purpose of writing assignments was to enable lecturers determine the extent of students' understanding of subject content acquired in and beyond the classroom.

"the lecturers by giving us the assignments they want to see if what they have taught has been understood by us. Not only what they have taught but they also want to see if we have been able to acquire more knowledge" (PLMSI8)

The lecturers' views, on the other hand, suggest that a certain level of understanding of subject knowledge is necessary for provision of information related to assessment task.

"we expect the student to demonstrate that he has knowledge. He is aware of the content that he is writing about. He or she should not be off-track, because sometimes you can have good writing but the writing is not matching with the content of the subject matter." (JLI4)

Other students (5) also drew connections between content knowledge and demands specific to writing tasks. Their views suggest that appropriate interpretation of task demands is central to the identification, selection, and provision of relevant content material for a writing task. A certain level of subject knowledge is necessary if students are to be able to engage with it.

"first of all you need to understand the question. After understanding the question you need to know the things or the contents that you need to explain, you need to express." (IASI5)

Whilst the majority's views suggest a lack of acknowledgement of the need for students to go beyond demonstrating understanding or acquisition of subject content in their assignments, one student and one lecturer recognised the inadequacy of simply displaying subject knowledge. A business administration student pointed out that besides demonstrating subject knowledge derived from sources, what lecturers looked for was students' ability to use source material as a springboard for developing new ideas or substantiated opinions.

"apart from that you will be sourcing the information from elsewhere, you need also at least to put your input, like the way you are thinking of whatever you've said....I source [information], then I have to now to bring in my opinions towards that assignment." (BASI5)

Similarly, as explained in the extract below, the journalism lecturer's view suggests that rather than expecting students to simply demonstrate their subject knowledge, emphasis should be on their ability to act on knowledge. For instance, students should be able to use the present knowledge as the basis for generating new insights, and thus contributing to disciplinary knowledge.

"it's [subject knowledge] the foundation for everything else but ultimately...that's not the most important thing because it [student assignment] can simply capture the knowledge as it is now but add little to it.... ultimately you need people to get that knowledge. But the most important thing is what do they do with that knowledge? So they should have that knowledge as a basis for the other things." (JLI1)

The students' interpretation of the attribute of content knowledge provides useful insights into their understanding of the purpose of student writing in the disciplines. Their views that they were assigned writing tasks so that lecturers could gauge the extent to which they had learnt a subject or read about an assignment topic could be a consequence of assignments which mainly require students to give back knowledge which they have acquired in the classroom or have sourced elsewhere, rather than those which foreground criticality and argument development. In section 4.6.4.2, both students and lecturers pointed out the tendency of some lecturers to assess students' writing mainly for content (subject concepts) without regard for other qualities of their texts. Specifically, the student views point to assignments which do not require students to analyse and evaluate content knowledge in order to develop their own perspectives of the subject matter and "position themselves in disciplinary debates" (Wu, 2006, p. 330). The students' view that they needed to display knowledge from other sources in order to prove that they had acquired subject knowledge shows lack of awareness of the need to strike a 'balance' between their own voice and other voices (Groom, 2000).

#### **4.3.7 Using source texts: Pedagogical functions**

There was variation in how students conceptualised the rationale for, and pedagogical functions of, source text use in academic writing. Students' interview accounts revealed that academic integrity and avoidance of punitive consequences for unacceptable source appropriation featured prominently. It was evident from accounts of 12 students (out of the 25 who remarked on use of source texts) that transgressive source appropriation was perceived as a serious academic malpractice and that students were concerned about the consequent penalties (e.g. poor performance or failure). This is reflected in the various expressions students used to describe improper citation behaviour. For example, three students used terms such as "totally unacceptable" and "not ethical" to imply that

inappropriate textual borrowing is not morally correct. Six students used terms with criminal connotations such as "serious offence", "academic theft", "crime", and "using material illegally". Three students used generic words such as "penalise" and "punishment" to refer to the ensuing consequences of inappropriate usage of source material. Three other students were more specific about the consequences of transgressive textual borrowing as reflected in terms such as "deduct marks" or "lose marks", and "degree...taken away". The students' responses also suggest that these perspectives could have been influenced by their lecturers' discourse about source appropriation. The students' portrayal of appropriation of source texts as a malpractice and their reference to lecturers' advice about textual borrowing can be seen in the following comment.

"if you have plagiarised and then without citing it's like an academic offence. That's according to what they [lecturers] have been preaching to us. They say it's an academic offence. You have to get punished for that" (JSI5)

For nine students, citing source material was perceived as a means through which lecturers could confirm that a student's work is evidence based, and verify the source and quality of information used, as well as the scope of research or reading on an assignment topic. These views are reflected in the following comment:

"when answering a question maybe an essay or any assignment you have to refer to what others wrote so that the lecturer should also go back and refer to them if what me as a student wrote on that one is true. They just want to make sure that we do the research." (BASI3)

In addition, source texts were seen as resources for meaning making. For example, three students from different disciplines thought that an important aspect of writing from sources is selecting relevant information from sources and synthesising material from different source texts for purposes of constructing meaning and generating ideas. The following quote illustrates these views:

"it's all about trying to understand...different perceptions from different schools of thought. For example, someone on the same topic he said something and someone on the same topic he also said something.... We try to combine all those things and...it helps us to think and we can be able to come up with our own interpretation of what we have gotten from the other readings" (JSI5)

Two other students (business administration and journalism) also understood that when integrated with their writing, appropriate source material could give authority to their work. However, as noted by a business administration student in the extract below, this requires a purposeful choice of source texts.

"we need to look into the ones [source texts] which are relevant to the subject and the ones that can be meaningful when am writing... So don't choose any other ordinary writers...but the main ones.... so that the content should be worthy enough. So the quality matters the most because you are getting ideas from...people who are so significant in terms of those fields." (BASI5)

Like students, in the interviews, lecturers expressed varied perspectives regarding use of source texts in academic writing. Generally, lecturers expected students to demonstrate awareness of the epistemic function of source texts in their writing. For instance, one journalism lecturer stressed the need for students to engage with information from the literature for purposes of not only gaining exposure to wide-ranging and diverse perspectives on a subject, but also and more importantly, generating 'new insights' on a subject.

"You have to read a lot to make sure that your understanding of issues is not kind of pigeon-holed into a certain section of knowledge. You should be able to understand the issues broadly. But then that understanding in itself is not adequate for you as a student. You should be able to go beyond that understanding of the issue. You may have read lots of stuff, twenty books, thirty books. You have that knowledge. But what do you do with it? Do you simply memorise and stop there? Or you want to use it as a basis for developing new insights of that issue?" (JLI1)

Other two lecturers (journalism and education) expected students to use source texts as a basis for developing their own voice in an academic debate. That is, they expected students to generate their own meaning from multiple perspectives derived from source texts, express a stance in relation to other authors' views, and use source material to support their own ideas.

"I would expect the person to go and read and then maybe agree or disagree with authors and bring these authors into the write-up itself, what they are writing, so as to be able to say I have a point and this particular point has been emphasised before by person X and I agree with that person." (JLI2)

Being able to distinguish between the writer's own voice and alternative voices in the literature was considered important by three lecturers (in journalism and education) as it ensures clarity of the writer's contribution to an academic debate. On the other hand, as explained in the quote below, they observed that inappropriate attribution of other authors' voices can obscure writers' own voice, which makes it difficult for the reader to evaluate the writers' views.

"at times where the students are extracting information or facts from other sources, you can't see themselves clearly in the presentation, in the writeup with regards to... their view as individuals maybe doing the write-up" (JLI2)

Like students, in four lecturers' responses, academic integrity, particularly proper textual appropriation and warnings of punitive consequences of failure to attribute source texts appropriately, was foregrounded as an important element of using source texts. Their answers suggested that they valued originality in students' work.

"they should be able to maybe come up with their own work and if anything if they've taken something from somebody, then that should be acknowledged properly....They shouldn't take somebody's work and say this is my work. That will be...an academic offence I think." (ALI1)

The students' interpretation of what source text use in academic writing entails suggests awareness of intertextuality as a distinctive feature of academic writing at university. However, for most of the students, their knowledge of functions which intertextuality serves in academic writing appeared to be confined to averting plagiarism and the ensuing punitive consequences. These students' views appear to confirm what has been found in previous research (e.g. Angélil-Carter, 2000; Bharuthram & McKenna, 2012; Hendricks & Quinn, 2000; Hutchings, 2014) namely that due to lack of knowledge of core pedagogical functions of referencing, students' use of source texts can be largely motivated by the need to avoid 120 being penalised for plagiarising and to satisfy assignment requirements or lecturer expectations.

In this study, the students' ways of understanding the rationale for referencing in academic writing may reflect lecturers' own perceptions of source text use which could be manifest in the guidance offered to students through, for example, feedback, assessment guidelines, and writing instruction. The results suggest that some students' understanding of plagiarism as a malpractice, the punitive consequences of inappropriate textual borrowing, and the need for proper source attribution in order to demonstrate academic integrity and avoid punitive consequences of plagiarism, emanated from lecturers' advice on textual borrowing. From this perspective, it can be concluded that students' understanding of source text use is likely to be influenced by the functions of intertextuality lecturers emphasise.

The results also indicate that with the exception of very few students who conceived citation as a resource for meaning-making, most of the students did not recognise the epistemic role of intertextuality in academic writing; that is, its knowledge "contestation and construction" functions (Hutchings, 2014, p. 321). This function of referencing was alluded to by three lecturers who saw referencing as a resource that would enable students to articulate their own voice and participate in academic debates. Most of the students' lack of recognition of the epistemic role of citation suggests lack of familiarity with this aspect of source use. This could be an outcome of not foregrounding the knowledge construction function of citation in the advice about academic writing which students were offered. As Abasi and Graves (2008) have observed, not foregrounding the epistemic function of citation, for example in assessment, disadvantages students as they are not socialised into acceptable ways of knowledge construction in their disciplines. Thus, it can become difficult for students to develop the capacity to contribute their own voice to academic debates in their fields. Hutchings (2004, p. 312) has described voicing, which emerges through processes of 'weaving together' different voices (Andrews, 2000) and 'balancing' other authors' views with the writer's own (Groom, 2000), as a complex but essential element in academic conversations. From a pedagogic perspective, not acquainting students with the epistemological aspects of citation is denying them opportunity to learn how to engage with other voices in their fields and participate in academic debates of their disciplines.

# **4.3.8** Summary of findings on students' and lecturers' understanding of requirements for student writing

Questionnaire results indicate that most of the students (71%) and about half of the lecturers (5) picked out addressing the (task) question as an aspect of academic writing lecturers looked for in students' assignment responses. Whilst most of the lecturers (8) chose critical thinking/evaluation as a valued attribute of academic writing, less than half of the students (39%) selected this requirement. The findings also show that a smaller number of both students (33%) and lecturers (4) identified developing argument as what was expected of student writing.

Findings from interviews reveal that gaps between students' and lecturers' understanding of identified attributes of academic writing are more pronounced for the following: developing argument, source text use, and content knowledge than for addressing the (task) question and language use/writing style.

- Developing argument: Whilst some students hold the view of a two-sided argument developed from comparison of two opposing perspectives, a few lecturers' understanding of this attribute foreground the epistemic function of writing.
- Source text use: In terms of pedagogical functions of source material, generally, lecturers understand use of source texts in terms of the epistemic role of writing, and intertextuality as a resource for establishing and developing writers' voice. Many of the students' responses, on the other hand, foreground use of source texts as a means through which lecturers establish the scope and quality of students' research or reading on an assignment topic, as well as a means of achieving academic integrity and avoiding punitive consequences of inappropriate source attribution.
- Content knowledge: Whilst, generally, lecturers link understanding of subject or disciplinary knowledge with provision of relevant response to assessment task demands, a number of students hold the view that displaying the scope of understanding of subject matter acquired in the classroom and beyond is an important aspect of content knowledge.

# 4.4 Research question 2: How do mature students learn about what is required of their writing?

In both student and lecturer questionnaires, a closed question was used to establish how students learnt about what is required of their academic writing. Student and lecturer responses are displayed in Tables 18 and 19 respectively. Although in the interviews students were not asked a direct question about ways in which they learned about academic requirements, analysis of their accounts revealed four strategies which students reported drawing upon in order to unpack academic writing requirements for successful completion of assessment tasks: using peer exemplar assignments, through lecturer feedback on their written work, interaction/dialogue with other students, and through assessment task briefs. The students' views pertaining to these strategies are illustrated by extracts from interview data.

#### 4.4.1 Using exemplars of student work to enhance understanding of quality of writing

It can be seen from Tables 18 and 19 that a small number of both students (9%) and lecturers (5) chose use of exemplar assignments as a means through which writing requirements were regularly shared. Interview accounts of a small number of students (5) from different disciplines revealed that these students consulted successful classmates' assignments which they obtained from peers in order to make sense of what lecturers looked for in their responses to assessment tasks. Consulting high-achieving peers' work was based on an assumption that work which was awarded high marks satisfied writing requirements and lecturer expectations, hence the conclusion that such work could offer insights into academic writing requirements. Lack of access to good quality exemplars can be a possible reason why many students did not identify assignment exemplars as a means through which they gained clarity about task requirements and lecturer expectations.

Another plausible explanation is that although students had access to these exemplars, they faced difficulties discerning qualities of writing which lecturers expected of their work. Consistent with Handley and Williams' (2011) observation, students' difficulty in identifying the nature of quality required of their writing can be linked to lack of engagement with these exemplars, for example, through lecturer-facilitated discussion of the exemplars. In this study, lack of lecturer-facilitated discussion of exemplars is evident in one lecturer's interview account which reveals that students who sought clarification on what was expected

in their writing were simply referred to successful classmates' assignments so that they could self-assess the quality of their own writing against peers' work (see section 4.6.4.3).

	Ways of learning	Frequency count/percentage							
	about writing requirements	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Out of 98 returned questionnaires			
1	Discussion with/advice from students (same year group)	69 (71%)	17 (18%)	9 (9%)	2 (2%)	97 (99%)			
2	Task instructions given in the classroom	56 (58%)	31 (32%)	9 (9%)	-	96 (98%)			
3	Key words/cues in assignment question	46 (50%)	23 (25%)	19 (21%)	4 (4%)	92 (90%)			
4	Marking criteria offered on marked assignment	42 (45%)	27 (29%)	17 (18%)	7 (8%)	93 (91%)			
5	Marking criteria shared with task brief/description	41 (44%)	35 (37%)	11 (12%)	7 (7%)	94 (92%)			
6	Feedback on (own) marked assignment	35 (37%)	35 (37%)	16 (17%)	9 (10%)	95 (93%)			
7	Individualised advice (face to face meeting with lecturers)	26 (27%)	26 (27%)	33 (34%)	12 (12%)	97 (95%)			
8	Writing guidelines from source texts	25 (26%)	35 (37%)	26 (27%)	10 (10%)	96 (94%)			
9	Feedback on draft assignment	24 (26%)	32 (35%)	22 (24%)	13 (14%)	91 (93%)			
10	Guidance from colleagues at work	9 (10%)	18 (19%)	24 (25%)	44 (46%)	95 (93%)			
11	Discussion with/ advice from students (other year groups)	9 (10%)	28 (30%)	32 (34%)	25 (27%)	94 (92%)			
12	Exemplar assignments	8 (9%)	32 (35%)	33 (36%)	19 (21%)	92 (94%)			

Table 18: Students' ways of learning about requirements of academic writing: Questionnaire responses in rank order according to total number of students who chose 'often'

Table 19: Lecturers' ways of communicating requirements of academic writing to students: Questionnaire responses in rank order according to total number of lecturers who chose 'often'

	Ways of communicating writing requirements to		Freque	ncy count			
	student		Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Out of 12 returned questionnaires
1	Task ins classroo	structions given in the	12	-	-	-	12
2	Feedbac assignm	ck on marked lent	8	1	2	1	12
3		rds/cues in ent question	6	4	1	1	12
4	Exempl	ar assignments	5	-	2	5	12
5	Marking criteria shared with task brief/description		5	2	2	3	12
6	Individualised guidance (face to face meeting with students)		5	4	3	-	12
7	Feedbac assignm	ck on draft ient	4	4	3	1	12
8	Marking	g criteria offered on assignment	4	3	4	1	12
9	Writing guidelines from source texts		3	4	3	2	12
10	Other	Writing requirements offered in module outline	1	-	-	-	1
		Departmental writing guidelines	1	-	-	-	1

In the interviews, a small number of students described the benefits derived from consulting peer assignment exemplars. For these students, assignment exemplars of classmates enabled them to gain clarity about what was expected and not expected in their assignment, especially in the absence of lecturer written feedback on their work. The students indicated that it was through appraising their own work retrospectively against other students' assignments that they were able to understand how their work fell short of satisfying the expected standards which were met in other students' assignments. Their appraisal was also forward-looking in terms of identifying areas of improvement and learning how writing requirements could be applied successfully in future assignments. The excerpt below best illustrates these views:

"when you look at other people's work you appreciate what they have written and then you start to come with your own conclusions on what you were supposed to write and what you are expected to write." (JSI6)

This finding supports Hendry, Bromberger, and Armstrong's (2011) observation that exemplars can help 'concretise' standards and criteria. That is, exemplars can make standards more comprehensible for students. O'Donovan et al. (2004) have argued that meaningful understanding and internalisation of writing requirements and standards emerges when students actively engage with processes for supporting transfer of these standards. In this study, the ability of the few students to understand what lecturers were looking for in their work, how their work fell short of satisfying task requirements, and how these were successfully addressed in the assignment exemplar, could be considered as the outcome of active engagement with assignment exemplars of peers. The ability to appraise their own work in order to attain understanding of writing requirements and standards positions these students as self-regulators of their learning. As Nicol, Thomson, and Breslin (2014) have observed, reviewing their own writing against peers' work increases students' capacity to generate feedback about how their writing can be improved. Their ability to evaluate own work also means that these students were capable of autonomous learning which, as McConlogue (2015) has argued, limits students' dependence on lecturers to interpret writing requirements and standards on their behalf and to judge the quality of their work.

To be effective in appraising their own work against assignment exemplars, students would need to have some knowledge of criteria and academic standards which are used to evaluate the quality of their work. These criteria can serve as a benchmark of quality or success. Therefore, if students are not aware of and do not understand criteria and standards, as was reported by several students in this study (see section 4.6.3.2), they may not have a basis on which to make informed judgements about the features of quality present or absent in their work in comparison with those which can be perceived from assignment exemplars of other students' work.

For one student, assignment exemplars facilitated drawing of inferences from incomprehensible lecturer feedback comments about what was expected or not expected from students' responses to a task. As explained in the excerpt below, the student's immediate reaction to a lecturer's comment perceived as confusing was to refer to other students' 126

assignments in order to work out the meaning of the marker's comment. The comment obtained from the student's assignment was in a form of a reflective question: "is this another type of (cs) [competitive strategy]?" This finding lends support to Orsmond, Merry, and Reiling's (2002) argument that exemplars can be used to "contexturise" lecturer feedback.

"when I was writing this kind of assignment...I had a picture in mind that I was writing the right ideas or the right way. So after I saw this [lecturer comment], I wasn't sure of whether I had really put a good point or whether the lecturer was trying to tell me whether this was supposed to be there or not... the first instinct that I got after seeing this was let me see what others had wrote...because I couldn't just judge on this statement [lecturer comment] and make conclusions of it.... That's why I was able to see that I indeed didn't make a good point of it.... after seeing what others had wrote I concluded that...I indeed did not do much on this particular kind of point." (IASI1)

## 4.4.2 The potential of lecturer feedback to facilitate and constrain the bridging of gaps between lecturers' and students' interpretation of writing requirements and standards

Results in Table 19 show that eight of the twelve lecturers indicated that they regularly communicated writing requirements to students through feedback offered on marked work. A good number of students (37%) also chose lecturer feedback on marked assignments as a means though which they often learned about requirements (see Table 18). In the interviews, almost all the students reported that they gained clarity of writing requirements through lecturer feedback on their marked assignments. Specifically, lecturer feedback exposed gaps in their interpretation of standards of quality. Students' awareness of gaps in their understanding of requirements for specific assignments was revealed in such comments as "I was responding to something else not what she was looking for", "I was addressing the question the wrong way", "I thought I knew what I was writing", and "I thought I had answered the question". Students' discovery of gaps in their interpretation of writing requirements through lecturer feedback is illustrated in the following excerpt in which a student is reacting to lecturer comments on his work:

"I thought I understood the question, but what the lecturer now told me when it came to the feedback...was that I just talked about everything on the [assignment topic] without addressing the actual question he asked me. So I ended up almost repeating everything he taught in class.... But when it comes to the critical analysis of [assignment topic] which he asked me to, he says...I did not even touch on that element." (JSI3)

These results imply that the students developed meaningful understanding of task requirements through feedback after submitting their work for assessment. If feedback is to be used by students to identify and bridge gaps between their interpretation of requirements and that which is expected of them, then it can be argued that it is more effective when offered whilst students are engaged in assignment tasks than on the end product. The efficacy of formative feedback lies in its potential, as Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) have argued, to enable students to self-regulate their own work.

Results also indicate that certain qualities of lecturer feedback are more likely to enable students notice gaps in their interpretation of requirements and standards. The students valued feedback which (a) drew their attention to how and why their writing came short of satisfying standards, as well as how the required standards could be applied successfully in subsequent assignments:

"it [feedback] indicated where I didn't do well and it also indicated why I didn't do well. So the remarks that I got on this...particular exam, were helpful...because they were indicating on the areas that I had to work on. I think on the exam that followed after this one I did much better because I followed what the lecturer wanted. I wrote to his needs, to the lecturer's needs, what he was really looking for." (IASI1)

In addition, the students valued feedback which (b) enabled them to reflect upon the impact of their writing strategies on the quality of their work. For example, as explained below, through lecturer feedback, this journalism student was able to appraise the effectiveness of her composing or revising strategies in terms of how these impeded the production of highquality work:

"I noticed that sometimes I just write an assignment and then maybe just check for spelling and grammar and then submit it. But I never go through my points or arguments as in to go through them and read them again or try to understand what I was writing. So if given another assignment I would do that" (JSI4)

The students also cited feedback which encouraged them to (c) engage in further learning activities aimed at improving their writing and performance in subsequent work, for example, further reading or research on issues identified in feedback. This positive attribute of feedback is best illustrated by the following extract from a procurement student who is commenting on the benefits of feedback received on a research project proposal.

"The feedback was just coming in like a question. How do you intend to do this? .... Like not giving me the direction to say on this one you have to do it like A, B, C, D.... that feedback...has assisted me to go and find out more...because if I were told just to say write this and that and that, I don't think that would have assisted me. But now I have a deep understanding on my research that am doing because I had to go and find out on my own... other than maybe if he would have just given me to say do this and that. I think that would have been a problem." (PLMSI1)

These attributes fit in with two of Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick's (2006, p. 205) suggested qualities of good feedback practice which can enhance students' capacity to self-regulate development of their academic writing. Attribute (a) corresponds to feedback practice which helps "clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards)". Attributes (b) and (c) correlate with the feedback practice which "facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning".

Qualities of lecturer written feedback which did not facilitate bridging of the gap between lecturers' and students' knowledge of writing requirements were also identified by several students (4). Firstly, it was felt that vague and less detailed feedback did not help students to understand writing requirements which they were supposed to address in their assignments but were unable to do so. This comment illustrates this view:

"It says the paper is good but it has not addressed fully the key issues of the assignment.... the way he wrote it's so (general) because if...some areas I am not good at, he was supposed to specify. I was expecting you to also go through these areas, you did not, so that I should know. But by saying that you don't fully... what kind of fully then? ....So it's like...the remarks they don't hit the nail on the head. Rather than just say at the end you know you could have done fully this, which area, what, and where?" (BASI5)

Secondly, it was felt that feedback which was more retrospective (highlighting weaknesses) rather than forward-looking (focusing on how to improve quality of work in future assignments) was less useful in helping students internalise writing requirements. As explained in the excerpt below, although the feedback which the student was offered highlighted areas of weakness (i.e. what went wrong), it did not dwell on what the student needed to do to improve his writing and performance in subsequent work.

"By looking at the comments that I got, I think they were not... much helpful because it was rather indicating where I didn't do well... I would have preferred if the lecturer would have put in some remarks that maybe after this point, this and this and this would have followed. But it was rather indicating why it was wrong. So I think it wasn't helpful in such a case because it rather made me see why I didn't get much more marks. But it didn't indicate how I could get more marks....I would have preferred if it could have been a point where the lecturer would have said if you could have wrote this and this, you could have got more marks. I would have loved to get much more remarks than I actually did get." (IASI1)

What could have contributed to the ineffectiveness of such feedback as a tool for conveying requirements to students goes beyond its qualities. It points to, as O'Donovan et al. (2004) have argued, the inadequacies of using a single technique, namely written feedback, to communicate requirements to students. In this context, lack of opportunities to engage with the feedback, for example through discussions with lecturers or peers and use of assignment exemplars, could have compounded students' difficulties in making sense of the requirements expected of their writing.

Students may have also found lecturer written feedback inadequate in helping them make sense of writing requirements because they did not understand these requirements whilst writing their assignments. In this study, several students highlighted difficulties in 130
interpreting writing requirements and lecturer expectations and successful application of these in their assignments (see section 4.6.3.2). This observation is in accordance with Handley and Williams' (2011) argument that if students do not share meanings of evaluative criteria with lecturers, then reference to such criteria as "context for the feedback" (p. 96) may prove futile since students may not fully understand the feedback.

Besides written feedback, other students sought to enhance their understanding of writing requirements through dialogue with lecturers. Several students (8) reported that after their marked assignments were returned, they discussed their written work with lecturers in one-to-one meetings. This particularly applies to cases where students did not understand or were not satisfied with their performance on an assignment, and thus consulted lecturers in order to obtain a justification for the marks awarded on their work. Others initiated dialogue with lecturers because they were acting on lecturer feedback received on their assignments. This was done to obtain clarification on lecturer feedback based on an understanding that improving quality of their work and performance in the next assessment was dependent on gaining clarity of writing requirements and lecturer expectations.

"the way I wrote my assignment I felt I will pass. So when I got the results that I got, seven out of twenty-five, I was like how? So I had to go to the lecturer and find out....So he explained that to me and I said oh! This is what I was supposed to do?" (PLMSI2)

Whilst some students were keen to gain clarity on requirements expected of their writing through individualised lecturer feedback in one-to-one meetings, and thus actively sought such feedback, others indicated that they did not adopt such a strategy. Instead, they opted for feedback from other students to which they attached significance. Data analysis revealed two factors which accounted for students' reluctance or inability to consult lecturers for clarification of expectations for assignments, particularly while writing assignments, namely: inaccessibility of lecturers and power differential between students and lecturers. Lack of opportunities for consultations outside of the classroom due to inaccessibility of lecturers is one of the factors which hampered students' attempts at obtaining personalised feedback. Several students commented about lecturers' busy schedules which made it difficult to accommodate those who sought to discuss their writing with lecturers in face-to-face meetings.

"You have to go to his or her office. Sometimes they are busy. Some maybe will need you to book an appointment. So those are some of the challenges." (IASI2)

Responses from other students (4) suggest that power differential between students and lecturers could have deterred some students from seeking lecturer feedback in one-to-one meetings. These students' sense of unequal power balance between lecturers and students is evident in their reference to the knowledge gap between lecturers and students, which was considered as a possible contributing factor to students' fear and anxiety about soliciting lecturer feedback in face-to-face meetings. For instance, one of these students described how soliciting feedback in one-to-one meetings with lecturers was face threatening. The explanation below suggests that the student felt inadequate in terms of knowledge and believed that one-to-one interactions with lecturers were likely to expose inadequacies of his knowledge to lecturers. Instead, feedback from fellow students, with whom they had equal power relationship, was regarded as more accessible.

"Am just not comfortable to consult a lecturer. Am comfortable maybe consulting my friends....Because these are friends, we talk every day. They are peers unlike the lecturer.... Sometimes you just feel like maybe they [lecturers] will know that I don't know. You have that feeling. But... your friends, you are very comfortable to talk to them." (IASI2)

Another student cited lecturers' unapproachable personality or attitude as what accounted for some students' reluctance to ask for individualised feedback in one-to-one settings.

"Other lecturers they are not as friendly. So we just have fear to approach [lecturers]. I don't mean they cannot answer us but they are not friendly. Others they show themselves as they have knowledge. They are intelligent.... So yourself you say when I can go to ask that lecturer maybe he can't give me feedback or the good response. That's my challenge. So I had that feeling of fear to ask, to go and ask." (ASI3)

# 4.4.3 Peers as mediators of other students' understanding of requirements of academic writing

The frequency distribution of students' responses displayed in Table 18 suggests that in order to make sense of requirements of academic writing, most of the students (71%) often relied on advice from peers in the same year group. This was corroborated in interviews where several students (14) mentioned that they valued dialogue or interaction with fellow students especially when writing assignments as it enabled them to deepen their understanding of writing requirements in the context of writing assignments. Specifically, these students (both traditional and mature counterparts at the same or different level of study) provided a forum in which they could obtain clarification on how to approach, or respond to, unfamiliar writing tasks and their demands, as well as what strategies to use in order to meet the demands of a specific writing task.

"Sometimes when we have an assignment we discuss in class just to have hints on what we are supposed to do and later it gives you direction on how to read and which books to read and what information is required of you to come up with the assignment." (PLMSI2)

During these interactions, peers also acted as an audience to each other's work before it was submitted for assessment. As explained in the following excerpt, the benefit of discussing work with peers in the course of writing assignments resides in the different perspectives which they bring to draft assignments.

"I usually work with my colleagues. Even when they give us an assignment, after I write it I sit down with my colleague and say can we try to discuss this. So we brainstorm ourselves. After brainstorming you find that my colleagues are thinking differently." (IASI4)

One of the obvious reasons which could help explain the students' tendency to seek guidance from peers, particularly whilst writing is in progress, is that they found such guidance readily available in comparison to lecturers'. It could also signal that opportunities to discuss their work with lecturers whilst writing was in progress were not common. This would not be surprising given the current HE environment with large student enrolments. It is also possible that although opportunities to interact with lecturers were available in the context of writing

assignments, students were not able to utilise such opportunities to deepen their knowledge of writing expectations. In this study, some students expressed reluctance or inability to seek advice from lecturers in one-on-one meetings due to inaccessibility of lecturers. Instead, they opted to solicit advice from fellow students.

These findings suggest that students could play a vital role of mediating other students' academic writing during the assignment writing process. That is, the outcome of peer interactions or consultations can be enhanced awareness of academic writing demands. The feedback which students receive from peers, in their capacity as an 'immediate audience' (Devet, Orr, Blythman, & Bishop, 2006), can help students refine the quality of their work prior to submitting for assessment. More importantly, these findings imply that students can play an active role in their own learning about academic writing. One of the benefits of students giving and receiving writing guidance from peers, as Sambell, McDowell, and Sambell (2006) explain, is promotion of students' independent learning and reduction of their dependence on lecturer guidance. Notwithstanding the importance of fostering student autonomous learning, it needs to be acknowledged that it would not be expected that students' guidance should replace lecturers' support. Rather, peer guidance should complement that of lecturers. As has been established in this study, it appears that most students still value lecturer feedback. For example, feedback was regarded by many students as what helped them the most to improve their writing in comparison with feedback from fellow students. Lecturer feedback offered in the context of dialogue or interaction with lecturers was seen by students as what could help improve their writing (see section 4.7.3).

# 4.4.4 Impact of quality of task briefs/rubrics on students' understanding of requirements and standards of academic writing

Results displayed in Tables 18 and 19 show that more than half of the students (58%) and all the 12 lecturers specified that writing requirements were usually shared through assessment task instructions given out in the classroom. This was corroborated in the interviews whereby several students (9) reported that they learned about writing requirements prior to submitting work for assessment through instructions for completing assignments which were presented orally or in written form. As explained in the following excerpt, in certain cases, students derived requirements or expectations for assignments from task questions, particularly well phrased ones; that is, the task questions themselves provided clues on task demands.

"sometimes the questions are very clear to say this is what the lecturer is looking for. So you would get...most of the information...from the question. The questions are specific to say they are looking for these things." (IASI2)

However, the 9 interviewees also felt that assessment task briefs did not always prove useful in terms of clarifying writing demands and enabling students to complete assignments successfully. Specifically, vaguely worded and less-detailed task briefs were cited as unhelpful as they did not furnish students with enough information regarding lecturers' expectations for an assignment.

"in most cases you find that the question itself may not exactly be clear. You may not be able to know what exactly the lecturer is trying to ask you to do.... At the end you find that you've written say an essay...of maybe five, six pages and then you have not tackled the question. You come back the lecturer says no I didn't ask you to do this.... This thing you didn't do...and that's why you've gotten say for example seven out of twenty." (JSI3)

Moreover, oral assignment briefs were regarded as an ineffective way of sharing writing requirements with students. Two students felt that lack of written guidelines did not facilitate internalisation of writing requirements. As explained in the extract below, the risk of misinterpreting requirements and lecturer expectations for a task, as well as failure to address task demands, is high in the absence of written guidelines.

"Sometimes lecturers would just give us assignments orally to say write an assignment on such, such a topic and give the instructions on how the assignment should be written.... So you will be writing. Some will not write. They would say ah! I think I can remember this. It's easy. But with time... you tend to forget some of the instructions that you have been given. And sometimes lecturers will come back to you to say no, I did not say this. I said I was looking for this. Sometimes you argue to say no, but you said this.... You said you were looking for this. We did that. Today he was telling us something different. So it's one of the challenges." (IASI2) What is clear from these results is that sometimes lecturers gave out assignment topics and explained task requirements in class. However, what is not evident from the students' reports is whether these assignment briefing sessions went beyond presenting students with details of assessment tasks. That is, the study has not established whether lecturers and students engaged in class activities aimed at clarifying requirements and standards expected of students' writing, such as discussion of the evaluative criteria and use of exemplars to illustrate what quality looks like. Nevertheless, what is apparent in the findings is that students did not always find task guidelines in oral or written format useful. This perceived lack of efficacy of task briefs is also evident in students' recommendations on what could support the development of their academic writing. Several students expressed desire for lecturers to specify requirements and standards of academic writing in assessment task briefs for each assignment (see section 4.7.4). The implication of these results is that use of rubrics without any form of interpretation by lecturers is not an efficient method of communicating expectations to students. This finding also lends support to observations made by Rust et al. (2003) that when used exclusively to facilitate students' understanding of what is required of their writing, the utility of verbal descriptions is limited. Rust et al. have identified vagueness and susceptibility to varied interpretations as the main factors which undermine the efficacy of verbal descriptions of standards.

Students' perceptions of the usefulness of the task briefs suggest that lecturers should consider using additional methods to enhance students' understanding of standards expected of their work. Prior studies have shown that use of processes which allow students to actively engage with expected standards of quality can help bridge the gap between students' and lecturers' understanding of such standards and enable them to apply these to their own work. These processes include those which enable students to practise applying standards to their own work, such as marking exercises, in which they assess assignment exemplars or their own work, such as marking exercises, in which they assess assignment exemplars or their own writing against expected standards (e.g. Harrington, Elander, Lusher, Norton, Aiyegbayo, Pitt, Robinson, & Reddy, 2006b). Other processes such as analysis and discussion of assignment exemplars with lecturers or peers can enhance students' ability to identify standards of quality or what is required of their writing (e.g. Rust et al., 2003). Therefore, rather than using assessment briefing sessions to merely present students with details of assessment tasks, they should be seen as an appropriate context for lecturers to gauge students' understanding of standards of quality, identify gaps in students' and

lecturers' interpretation of standards, and provide students with opportunities to address these gaps.

#### 4.4.5 A summary of findings on students' ways of learning about writing requirements

- Students seek to make sense or increase their understanding of writing requirements and lecturer expectations through lecturer feedback on their written work, interaction and dialogue with fellow students, peer exemplar assignments, and assessment task briefs.
- The following factors are implicated in the extent to which students are able to bridge the gap between their understanding of academic writing requirements and that of their lecturers': quality of lecturer feedback, quality of assessment task briefs, power differential between students and lecturers, and availability of opportunities for consultation with lecturers outside the classroom.

# 4.5 Research question 3: What are the perceived affordances of discursive resources from professional contexts which mature students bring to bear on their writing?

To explore perceived (by students and lecturers) affordances of discursive resources from professional contexts which mature students bring to bear on their writing, in the questionnaire, students were asked to comment on the following: how helpful they found their workplace writing experiences when writing assignments, as well as the advantages which being a mature student afforded them in terms of the writing required at university (refer to section 3.4.1). To follow-up on their response about the kinds of workplace writing which were required of them, in the interview, students were asked to draw a comparison between professional and academic writing demands. Similarly, lecturer views were derived from their comparison of academic writing of mature students and traditional students, and the strengths they identified in mature students' writing. It should be noted that some participants' remarks concerning mature students' prior writing experiences were not a direct response to these questions.

Students and lecturers reported that mature students entered university with different forms of discursive knowledge acquired from the workplace. The following sections present findings pertaining to the nature, and perceived affordances, of three forms of discursive resources which participants reported mature students entered university with and appropriated in their

academic writing. These resources are antecedent workplace genre knowledge, knowledge of professional practice, and knowledge of valued qualities of professional writing.

# 4.5.1 Knowledge of antecedent workplace genres aids students in producing professional-oriented academic genres

Findings from the questionnaire revealed that a good number of students (38) across all disciplines reported that they used workplace genre knowledge as a resource for responding to academic writing demands. Antecedent genre knowledge was regarded as particularly useful when responding to assignment tasks which simulated real-world workplace writing relevant to their professions. Examples of antecedent workplace written genres per disciplinary area which students reported they brought to and drew on in their academic writing are listed in Table 20. It should be noted that these antecedent genres were not derived from students' responses to a direct question which probed into their workplace genre knowledge which were brought to the academy. Rather these were extracted from students' questionnaire responses (31) and interview responses (3) pertaining to affordances of their workplace writing experiences when engaging in academic writing.

Students' accounts revealed that these antecedent genres facilitated successful production of workplace-oriented genres in their disciplines. For example, journalism students reported that they did not find writing news stories or programme scripts difficult because of their experience producing these genres at work. Accounting students identified their prior knowledge of writing reports (e.g. financial) and memos as useful when required to produce similar genres in their discipline. The following response from an education student is typical of the comments from students regarding their familiarity with workplace-related genres:

"It [workplace writing experiences] really helps since some [of] the work we do like writing schemes of work and lesson plans is also part of my course and I find it easy since it's my everyday work." (ESS1)

In agreement with students, two lecturers from journalism observed that familiar workplace genres were a resource for mature students in their discipline when required to produce genres like those of their profession such as news/feature stories and editorials. Thus, antecedent genres enabled mature students to produce more successful texts in comparison with their peers who entered university through the traditional route and lacked professional experience related to their study programme.

"when they are doing the actual journalistic tasks they are normally way ahead of the other class, the normal entry class [traditional students]... even in terms of performance, you may see that for example if they have to write a story it's a little more solid than the other guys." (JLI1)

Discipline	Genres	Number of students who mentioned workplace written genres		
		Questionnaire	Interview	
Accounting	Reports (financial/ accounting/ transactional/ research/field), memos, proposals	6		
Business administration	Reports, memos, letters	4		
Education	Schemes of work, lesson plans	1	1	
Internal auditing	Reports (audit, budget), proposals	4		
Journalism	Programme scripts (television/ radio), concept papers, news/ feature stories, articles, reports (electronic/print)	7	1	
Procurement & logistics management	Reports, memos, (meeting) minutes	9	1	
Total		31	3	

Table 20: Antecedent workplace written genres by discipline

It is probable that having knowledge of workplace genres relevant to their field of study in their repertoire benefitted mature students. As pointed out by Devitt (2007), if students are familiar with genres which are quite like those of a new situation they are writing in, the process of negotiating through a new genre can be eased. In addition, having a range of discursive resources such as antecedent genres at one's disposal implies a wider choice of resources to draw on when encountering unfamiliar writing demands (Devitt, 2007).

The students' ability to successfully draw on workplace genres to produce workplaceoriented texts suggests three things. First, students did not probably experience extreme discontinuity when producing the profession-oriented texts since the gap between the professional and workplace-based academic genres was minimal. As Devitt (2007) has 139 argued, antecedent genres which are likely to serve the writer well are those which are not considerably different from the genre a writer is attempting to produce. Second, students should have been able to perceive similarities between the demands of academic genres which they were required to produce and those of the professional genres they drew on. One of the conditions which is considered necessary for successful transference of discursive resources across domains is the ability to engage in what Perkins and Salomon (1988) have called 'high road order' transfer; that is, a "deliberate mindful abstraction of knowledge from one context for application in another" (p. 25). In this context, students should have been able to work out the relevance of antecedent genre knowledge from workplace contexts in professional-oriented academic tasks. Finally, Devitt (2007) has argued that the ability to utilise prior genre knowledge in a new situation implies successful acquisition of antecedent genres in the 'initial learning' context. Taking this into account, it can be inferred that students in this study had a good command of the professional genres which were required of them in their disciplines.

#### 4.5.2 Knowledge of professional practice affords students alternative means of meaningmaking

Findings from the questionnaire reveal that a lower number of students (32) mentioned that by virtue of their work experience in professions relevant to their area of study, they had accumulated knowledge of professional practice. Such knowledge afforded these students alternative means of meaning making. That is, unlike traditional students who may have lacked knowledge of professional practice, mature students were not limited to drawing on the sanctioned traditional academic resources such as disciplinary knowledge for evidence to support their arguments. Their meaning making was enriched by insights tapped from professional practice and linking theory with practice. In addition, having knowledge of professional practice in their repertoire helped mature students to effortlessly meet task demands which required exploiting knowledge of professional practice, and consequently to excel at such tasks, for example, case studies. The excerpt that follows illustrates these views:

"Mature entry students often write from experience and that they are not limited (writing within the referenced academic books) ...the 2 years' experience which is a requirement for enrolment, gives the mature entry students broad and practical knowledge to apply on academic writings." (IASS7)

The students' sentiments were shared by four lecturers (accounting, business administration, journalism) who noted that some mature students, unlike the traditional ones, demonstrated ability to link theory and practice and bring real-world insights into their writing. The extract below best represents these views.

"for some of them the media experiences have in a way exposed them to a lot of knowledge in terms of how the media operate.... Those insights are really important when they are trying to match what theory says and what actually happens in the industry. So that's one of the major advantages and we benefit a lot from them when they are trying to link theory and practice." (JLI1)

It seems that mature students' status as members of their knowledge communities shifts in cases where students show their capability to successfully exploit their knowledge of professional practice. Rather than novices, these students are positioned by their lecturers as experts of their profession whose knowledge can be of benefit to both fellow students and lecturers. Some lecturers mentioned that they benefitted from mature students' expertise in professional practice as they were able to gain insights into how links could be established between theory and professional practice. Based on these lecturers' perceptions, students' knowledge of professional practice seems to be legitimised and valued as a meaning making resource in disciplinary writing.

Despite accounts of students' successful exploitation of professional discursive resources in their writing, one business administration lecturer pointed out that unless explicitly cued to do so, mature students did not always make use of their discursive knowledge, particularly knowledge and experiences of professional practice in their disciplinary writing. As explained in the following extract, this was the case even though it was expected that by virtue of their workplace experiences, mature students would be able to integrate their knowledge of professional practice into academic writing or draw links between theory and professional practice.

"I expect them to provide more relevant examples since they are already experienced. They have worked before. They have knowledge of the industry. I expect to see more of examples, more of practicality of the concepts that have been taught to them. But usually it doesn't work like that unless you ask them a question that is specifically saying tell us about your organisation, then they may fit in one or two things about their organisation. But otherwise most mature entry students they have problems to express themselves based on the experience that they have had." (BALI1)

Although this is an idiosyncratic view held by one lecturer, it is worth considering and discussing. This finding can be linked to what other studies (e.g. Quick, 2012; Tran, 2010) have established about the challenges which students experience with utilising their knowledge and experiences of workplace genres and professional practice when producing academic texts. Possible explanations which have been offered in the literature to account for this behaviour could apply in the present study. For example, as pointed out by Quick (2012), students may not recognise that knowledge of professional practice can be employed as a resource for meaning making in academic contexts.

It is also possible that students may be aware of the relevance of their professional experiences in academic contexts but not sure of whether their workplace experiences should be integrated with disciplinary knowledge. This observation relates to what was found in Tran's (2010) study that if students are not given explicit instruction about the integration of prior professional experiences in writing tasks, they may not consider drawing links between disciplinary knowledge and their professional experiences as an acceptable academic practice. What this means is that if students do not understand lecturer expectations or task requirements pertaining to use of professional knowledge in disciplinary writing, they may face challenges drawing on this knowledge.

Another related plausible explanation is that students may not see the relevance of applying their knowledge or experiences of professional practice due to assignment task design which does not afford them opportunity to draw on such resources for meaning making. Writing tasks which can constrain students' ability to tap into their professional experiences are those which require students to simply reproduce disciplinary knowledge, for example to summarise or synthesise conceptual material, instead of applying subject concepts to new contexts. A typical example of assignments which would foster knowledge reproduction is 142

examination questions which elicit construction of short responses. On the other hand, case study or problem-solving oriented questions can allow students to apply subject knowledge to practical or real-life-like situations. Lastly, students may not be confident enough, as scholars, to be able to draw implications of theory for practice. As Quick (2012) has argued, the ability to relate a writing task to professional knowledge calls for students to make an "intellectual leap" (p. 247).

The pedagogical implication which can be derived from this discussion is that it cannot be expected that mature students will automatically see the value of workplace experiences as meaning making resources just because they possess such knowledge. If lecturers wish to enable students to exploit discursive knowledge from the workplace domain in their writing, then it would be necessary to make this known to students through assessment criteria, instead of assuming that the relevance of, and the need to draw on, professional knowledge and experiences would be readily apparent to students.

#### 4.5.3 Valued qualities of professional writing

Students reported that they drew on qualities of writing valued in professional communication to compose academic texts. Table 21 summarises students' reported general features and valued qualities of writing in their respective professions, using a categorisation scheme of general features/qualities of workplace writing derived from Knoch et al. (2016). As illustrated in Table 21, students (22) across the disciplines reported in the questionnaire that the professional writing they experienced was predominantly characterised by such support processes as collaboration with more knowledgeable or experienced colleagues. When producing texts in unfamiliar genres, these colleagues offered guidance. They also provided feedback to support the revision process aimed at improving quality of work. Besides collaboration, in both the questionnaire (22 respondents) and interviews (8), students mentioned that the writing process at work was mediated through templates or existing texts and highly standardised formats which facilitated and expedited text production. Moreover, in professions such as accounting and procurement, production of texts was also largely mediated by technology.

Regarding features of writing, a few (4) business administration and internal auditing students who were interviewed distinguished between academic and professional writing in

terms of use of templates. Whilst the writing process in the workplace was perceived to be mediated through templates, the students noted that academic writing is not based on preexisting texts which they could model after or adapt for their own purposes. The students' distinction of academic and professional writing is illustrated by the following comment:

"the writing at work mostly it's simple and it's routine work....You can just have a draft, say a requisition letter it's like this way. You just do the changes. So it doesn't involve much of like thinking because you just use the same template now and again.... So it doesn't involve...critical thinking, while assignment there's critical thinking. You need to source information. So it is so involving....While this other stuff [workplace writing]...you write it unconsciously." (BASI5)

Students also compared some of the perceived valued qualities of professional writing with those of academic writing. For instance, use of a formal register was regarded as a quality shared by both professional and academic writing contexts. A small number of student interviewees (3) across different disciplines noted that both professional and academic writing contexts demanded a certain level of formality, for instance in language use (lexical choices, vocabulary) and text presentation.

"One of the similarities being we are required to present the information in a formal way, use of correct words not short words like the ones that we use when texting" (PLMSI8)

Students also demonstrated awareness of differences between valued attributes of writing in disciplinary and professional contexts. For example, in business administration and internal auditing disciplines, the type of writing they did in their professions (e.g. reports) was depicted by four students as simplistic, less extensive, template mediated, software generated, and based on highly standardised formats (refer to Table 21 for excerpts illustrating students' views regarding these general features/qualities of workplace writing). In contrast with the nature of professional writing they had experienced, the students portrayed disciplinary writing as more elaborate and not based on pre-existing texts which could be adapted.

"the kind of reports that I often did at work, they were just some single paragraph in certain instances or maybe two paragraphs. They were not much words in it. But here in academic setting you can't just write for a lecturer in a certain assignment...a few words or a few sentences. You had to make explanations as to why you are making that kind of report. You have to put in much more details than in an office environment." (IASI1)

General features/ valued qualities	Disciplines							
	Accounting	Business administration	Education	Internal auditing	Journalism	Procurement & logistics management		
Template-based/ use of similar existing texts	"Most of the reports at work are already in the system, one does not need to think on how to go about writing them. All what is needed is for one to retrieve a relevant report and edit it accordingly." (ASS6)	"Normally the writing at the workplace you just do what others have already done. You just change the details from the previous reports and punch in yours." (BASI4)		"I have always found it easy writing these reports at work. They have been standardised, with templates already in place, hence we used to produce them very quick" (IASS1)		"Reports, work plans they are easy because we use standard templates" (PLMSS12)		
Standardised formats	"These reports have the formats to be used For example if it's an internal issue within the organisation you are sure that what you are going to write is a memorandum which have its format." (ASS8)	"The format of the report, it's compulsory to follow the procedure of the report No room for creativity." (BASS10)		"I find reports easy to write because it has a format already prescribed to be followed" (IASS19)	"The scripts does not require a lot of research, it just involves some guideline that I have to follow during the program presentation" (JSS13)	"Mostly in organisations they have got a standard of writing reportsso you have to follow that one. You cannot come up with a new report." (PLMSI7)		
Computer mediated/ software generated	"Financial reports they are easy due to the reason that they are formatted in the system." (ASS16)					"some reports are generated using a certain software. You just feed the information and the report automatically comes out." (PLMSI4)		
Simplicity: Use of non-technical register for non- expert audiences	"At workplace, whenever you are required to write report you are required to write in standard content that everyone without the prior knowledge would understand." (ASS9)				"in journalism writing we really have to use the normal everyday language for most part of the write- up." (JSI1)			

Table 21: Students' reported general features/qualities of workplace writing bydiscipline: Exemplar quotes from interviews and questionnaires

General features/ valued qualities	Accounting	Business administration	Education	Internal auditing	Journalism	Procurement & logistics management
Writing tasks' authenticity /goals for writing				"the[audit report] at office is more practicalAt office we tackle real issues, something which is practical, which has really happened." (IASI6)	"at work you write it [proposal/concept paper], maybe after two or three days the management considers it and then they take action on the issue, or maybe they get back to you." (JSI4)	"at work you do give people your point of views and it carries more weight as long as it is making sense and if it can bring some improvement to the organization operations" (PLMSI8)
Collaborative writing	"The finance manager was directing me how to write and even the partner or supervisor was telling us how to write the management letter, and the field report." (ASS11)	"When am done with the SDC Report before I submit it to the Executive Members I always ask our lawyer to check." (BASS8)	"Most of the times we rely upon the services of our communication teachers for direction." (ESS2)	"After writing the reports our supervisor checks and make all necessary amendments prior to sending it to intended users of the reports" (IASS18)	"When I write for broadcasting the copy goes through a number of copy editors who improve and second eye the report before it goes on air." (JSS9)	"if you are at a junior level whenever you write a report you give it to a supervisor who normally checks and he can change here and there He can put in his input on that one and send it" (PLMSI1)
Routine/iterative	"I find these introductory letters easy to write because they are mostly routine." (ASS26)	"The writing at work mostly it's simple and it's routine work. So we do the same." (BASI5)		"A company report it's a repetition of events." (IASS19)		
Conciseness/ Brevity	"Reportsneed to be concise and straight but at the same time it should give the reader or the intended recipients the required information." (ASS26)	"the report from workplace it was really short sometimes We couldn't explain much maybe on the information that we wanted to tell our bosses." (BASII)		"The kinds of reports I was making to my seniors did not require me to explain things in detail, they were rather written in short and straight to the point without the inclusion of unnecessary words." (IASS12)	"as a journalist am trained to be very economical with words and I wouldn't be repeating things that I've already said." (JSI1)	
Clarity					"The issue at hand must be clearly articulated in a news story at work if it is to secure any space in a paper." (JSS12)	
Attribution of sources: Less precise attribution					"In news writing you do not necessarily have to precisely attribute everything. You can just say critics, analysts or commentators say this" (JSS12)	

Journalistic writing was distinguished from academic writing in terms of writing style, citation practices and conventions, and how knowledge from sources is perceived and used as evidence (also see section 4.6.2). For example, two journalism students noted that brevity, which seems to emanate from the need to be 'economical' with words and space, is a quality of writing valued in their profession. In contrast, providing details even at the risk of sounding repetitive was seen as a norm in academic writing.

"even the research that we are doing... each chapter has got its own conclusion and the conclusion ties back to your introduction. In some cases almost repeating whatever you have said. Now as a journalist am trained to be very economical with words and I wouldn't be repeating things that I've already said... I find it to be a waste of space... to me it sounds like redundant and tautology. But that's what academics believe in." (JSI1)

The writing style in journalistic and academic writing was also distinguished in terms of ways of paragraphing. Two students observed that whilst organising text in very short paragraphs is permissible in journalism, this was considered an anomaly in academic writing where relatively detailed or fully developed paragraphs are expected. According to one of the students, in journalistic writing, presenting information in short paragraphs is required because of space constraints and the need to facilitate editing of text.

"A paragraph has to be maybe two lines or maybe three.... Even though it's the same idea but you should find a way to break them so that there's small paragraphs. They might not have like enough space in the publication. So it should be easy for them to just move out a certain paragraph without distorting the whole idea.... So we are advised to keep the paragraphs short...unlike in the classroom where you are supposed to...expand the idea using as much information as you can put in it" (JSI2)

One journalism lecturer, however, thought that short paragraphs in journalistic writing are used in order to accommodate the needs of an audience. Specifically, short paragraphs were deemed effective for sharing information quickly with readers and facilitating reading or digestion of ideas. "the type of paragraphs, even the style itself, for the purpose of news you want to as quickly as possible to give out information that will help the reader understand the issues. And then if they decide to quit they can quit the reading while at the same time they have grasped already the issues. Then they can come back later to read." (JLI2)

Disparity and conflict between citation norms in journalistic and academic writing were acknowledged by three journalism students. As described in the following excerpt, the need for precise attribution of source texts in academic writing sharply contrasts with citation practices in journalistic writing, where less specific citation of sources is acceptable.

"[in academic writing] every borrowed thought must be attributed from the source, publisher and year of publication. In news writing...you do not necessarily have to precisely attribute everything. You can just say critics, analysts or commentators say this, this, this. But that is not allowed in academic writing." (JSS12)

Another journalism student highlighted the disparity in citation practices between the two writing contexts in terms of the type of knowledge which requires attribution. Commenting on lecturer feedback received on an assignment, the student noted that the notion of common knowledge was interpreted differently in these two contexts. For instance, unlike in academic contexts, in journalism, factual information such as historical material is viewed as public-domain knowledge which does not need to be attributed to a particular source.

"in journalism we know that some issues are universally accepted and they are facts. We don't have to waste time saying...Dr David Livingstone came to Malawi in... according to... no ... that's a fact of history. But in academic writing we don't take assumptions. So he said quotes. He wanted me to be using citations at least on everything that I wrote." (JSI1)

The reported disparities between attributes of writing valued in disciplinary and professional contexts highlight discontinuities in discourse practices mature students may experience when they transition from workplace to academic writing. These disparities also attest to the gap in epistemological assumptions or orientation underlying knowledge or meaning-making practices and rhetorical conventions of academic and professional discourse communities, which Dias et al. (1999, p. 223) have argued renders writing in these two contexts "different 148

activities" in terms of motive for writing. In this study, contrasting assumptions underlying certain professional and disciplinary discursive practices were noted by some journalism students and lecturers. For example, it was reported that in journalism, certain factual material is regarded as public-domain or common knowledge; hence, such information does not need to be attributed to an author. It was also noted that the basis for organising text in very short paragraphs (e.g. 'one-sentence paragraphs') in journalistic writing is that this style of writing is regarded as audience-friendly since it helps readers to grasp and digest information quickly.

# 4.5.4 A summary of findings on perceived affordances of discursive resources from professional contexts which mature students brought to bear on their academic writing

- The findings have shown that professional discursive knowledge mature students bring to bear on their academic writing present them with some affordances. Unlike peers who enter university through the traditional route and lack professional experience related to their study programme, having knowledge of workplace genres relevant to their field of study in their repertoire enhances mature students' capacity to produce unfamiliar written genres like those of their professions and enables them to meet writing demands.
- It has also been found that knowledge of professional practice affords mature students alternative means of meaning making. Unlike traditional students who may lack knowledge of professional practice, mature students are not limited to drawing on the sanctioned traditional academic resources such as disciplinary knowledge. Their meaning making is enriched by insights tapped from professional practice and linking theory with practice.
- The findings reveal disparities between attributes of writing valued in disciplinary and professional contexts. For instance, the type of writing they did in their professions (e.g. reports) is depicted by students (accounting, business administration, internal auditing, and procurement and logistics management) as template mediated, simplistic, less extensive, software generated, and based on highly standardised formats. This is contrasted with academic writing which they depict as not based on pre-existing texts they could model after or adapt for their own purposes.

• Journalistic writing is distinguished from academic writing by students and lecturers in terms of writing style, citation practices and conventions, and how knowledge from sources is perceived and used as evidence. For example, the need for precise attribution of source texts in academic writing is sharply contrasted with citation practices in journalistic writing, where less specific citation of sources is acceptable.

### 4.6 Research question 4: What reasons do students and lecturers give for the academic writing challenges of mature students?

Challenges which mature students experienced with academic writing and factors which were perceived to account for these challenges were explored through student questionnaire and interviews with both students and lecturers (see sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2). Data analysis yielded four factors which can help explain the academic writing challenges which mature students encountered, namely: lecturer assumptions about students' previous writing experiences, students' difficulties in transitioning from professional discursive practices to academic writing practices, students' difficulties in unpacking academic writing demands and lecturer expectations, and lack of systematic academic literacy support programmes for mature students.

# 4.6.1 Detrimental effects of lecturer assumptions about students' previous writing experiences

One of the recurring issues in the data concerns lecturer assumptions about writing experiences which students brought to academic writing (see section 4.5 for details of previous writing experiences mature students brought to their academic writing). In both interview accounts (7 students) and questionnaire responses (13), students felt that lecturers held unrealistic assumptions about their knowledge of academic literacy practices. A common view of these students was that due to the training received in prior learning, lecturers assumed that mature students should already be academically literate on entry to university. Students also noticed that assumptions about their conversancy with academic writing were based on the expectation that their writing experiences from work and previous study are adequate preparation for the writing demands of the academy. Students reported that these assumptions were evident in lecturers' lack of emphasis on socialising students into academic literacy practices through assessment or writing instruction (also see section 4.6.4.1). Students believed that these assumptions led to insufficient support for mature

students unlike traditional students whom, it was felt, lecturers treated as novices in academic discourses. These views are illustrated by the following comments:

"Lecturers take it for granted that all students are conversant with writing hoping that this was already covered in their previous studies from wherever they were learning." (PLMSS14)

"we are not taught the right way of writing since most lecturers say that you have experience of what you do at your workplaces, yet we do things differently." (ASS26)

These students' views were corroborated by three lecturers from different disciplines (journalism and business administration) who mentioned that it was assumed that students learned about academic writing during their training for the diploma qualification. Therefore, it was expected that they would enter their degree programmes with a certain level of familiarity with academic literacy practices.

"ideally a diploma is like halfway through a degree. So in terms of the basics of academic writing one should be able to have mastered them at that point" (JLI1)

The most plausible reason for the lecturer assumptions is lack of clarity on the nature of writing knowledge and experiences students brought along to university. This could have given rise to lecturers' high and unrealistic expectations about what such resources should afford students when writing in the academic context. It is also possible that lecturers assumed that students have the capacity to readily utilise discursive resources from workplace or previous learning in disciplinary writing; hence the expectation that students who enter university with these resources would not experience much difficulty transitioning to academic genres and literacy practices of their disciplines. However, this expectation contrasts with findings reported in previous studies (e.g. Quick, 2012; Rounsaville et al., 2008), noted in section 2.4.2, where it was concluded that undergraduate students experience difficulties to fully utilise their repertoire of discursive resources from other domains in their disciplinary writing. In this study, these difficulties, as reported by journalism lecturers, mostly relate to students' capacity to draw on appropriate professional discursive resources when producing academic genres (refer to section 4.6.2).

The findings of this study have shown that lecturer assumptions and expectations about students' prior academic writing experiences do not often match students' realities. For instance, contrary to lecturers' expectations, in this context, students are likely to enter university not fully equipped with literacy competences to enable them meet disciplinary writing demands, mainly due to disjunctures in academic practices at FE and HE levels. Disjunctures between the kinds of writing demands students encountered in prior learning and university courses are acknowledged by both students and lecturers. Five lecturers from different disciplines pointed out that the training mature students are offered at the diploma level does not prioritise academic writing; rather, emphasis is on mastery of subject knowledge (see Table 1 for a list of academic institutions which award entry qualifications for degree programmes of student participants). Therefore, lecturers felt that professional oriented courses students do at the FE level and which are used as entry qualifications into degree programmes do not afford students adequate preparation for the kind of writing demands they encounter at university. Both insufficient level of engagement with academic writing and lack of writing instruction were implicated in the inadequacies of students' socialisation into academic literacy practices in prior study. For instance, as described in the following excerpt, lecturers suspected that on these professional courses, students are neither taught academic writing nor provided with ample opportunities to engage in specialised discourses through writing assignments.

"Most of them have done professional courses that were taught elsewhere. Especially for the groups that I teach, they are taught ABE [The Association of Business Executives qualifications] .... So usually those professional courses they don't give assignments.... there's no teaching of academic writing in any way. So most of them they don't have any experience in academic writing." (BALI1)

Moreover, one of the accounting lecturers indicated that mature students, whose diploma courses offered professional communication courses, entered university with knowledge or experience of workplace related genres rather than academic genres. As evident in the quote below, the focus of the communication courses is to socialise students into the writing practices and written genres of their profession. Therefore, this lecturer suspected that

students who go through these courses are more likely to be conversant with the theory of professional writing and production of workplace written genres.

"The communication that they did when they were doing the diploma was...very theoretical...They would learn what is communication, types of communication...how to write memos, without doing much of practising.... So what is academic writing to them they don't know. What they know is writing a memo, writing a letter, how you should write a letter.... So writing those kind of things is what is emphasised and ...communication theory. That's what is examined. But academic writing is not there." (ALI3)

In interviews (10 students) and questionnaire responses (7 respondents), students agreed with lecturers' observations that the training they received for their diploma qualifications did not afford them adequate level of preparedness for the writing demands of the university. Like lecturers, they mentioned that they were not offered writing instruction and that much attention was focused on enabling students to acquire subject knowledge:

"I did a diploma in accounting, the ACCA [Association of Chartered Certified Accountants]. We didn't have communication. There was no communication in our syllabus. It was just basic management, accounting, cost accounting" (ASI5)

These students identified a disjuncture between the kinds of writing demands they encountered in prior learning and university courses. For example, it was acknowledged that in their prior learning, developing students' academic literacy was not prioritised, for example, through provision of ample writing opportunities which could have exposed them to and familiarised them with academic genres and literacy practices such as writing from sources. Moreover, it was reported that the writing required of students in prior learning was mainly assessed for their ability to demonstrate learning of subject knowledge.

"I did up to advanced diploma but...these courses...you are never involved in an assignment like the university ones. So the assignments they are just maybe for solving; writing, I don't remember the way I wrote an assignment for a lecturer." (BASI5) Interview accounts of several students (7) suggest that gaps between previous literacy practices and those of the university became apparent when they were assigned their first writing assignment or when they encountered an unfamiliar academic genre.

"First assignment at year three the lecturer just came in class. That time we didn't learn about how we can write a report, how we can write an essay. He just came in. This is an assignment. I want an essay but the academic writing. So I asked myself what is this thing called academic writing? How are we going to do that?" (ASI2)

Mature students are likely to be disadvantaged by their entry route to university when, as in the context of this study, they are not afforded opportunities to develop their academic writing for instance through academic literacy instruction which is offered to their peers who enter university through the traditional route (see section 4.6.4). This observation accords with how direct entrants' transition experiences to disciplinary practices are depicted in the literature. For instance, Barron and D'Annunzio-Green (2009) and Christie et al. (2013) have pointed out that the transitioning process of direct entry students can be more challenging partly because they are expected to quickly adapt to the academic demands of the university and be on a par with year one entrants who, by the time they are joined by the direct entrants, have had one or two years to make a similar adjustment. This study has also established that in contrast to what is usually required of students at university, at FE level (their immediately preceding exposure to academic study), it was typical for these students not to engage in extensive writing, that students were mainly required to produce workplace related genres rather than academic genres, and students' writing was mainly assessed for ability to demonstrate subject knowledge rather than engaging in literacy practices such as referencing. Such examples of disparity between academic cultures of the university and prior educational contexts, which have also been reported in other studies (e.g. Christie et al., 2013), exacerbate the challenges which direct entrants experience when transitioning to academic practices of the university.

The findings of this study also underscore the detrimental effects lecturer assumptions can have on socialisation of students into discourses and practices of their disciplines. As was also found in Richards & Pilcher's (2013) study, the outcome of lecturers' inaccurate and misinformed assumptions can be exclusion of non-traditional students from the support, or

provision of inadequate support, they need to write successfully and subsequently meet academic demands of their disciplines. These assumptions also mean that by virtue of their entry into the university through the non-traditional route and at an advanced level, mature students are either not treated as novices in disciplinary discourses or they are probably seen as established novices in comparison with their peers who transition from school and enter in year one. This kind of thinking goes against the argument that all students, traditional and non-traditional, are novices in discourses of their discipline communities (Wingate, 2015). Although mature students may have expertise in professional writing, they are novice writers in their academic disciplines. This means that, regardless of prior writing experiences they enter university with, mature students are equally in need of academic literacy support which would enable them to access discourses and practices they are expected to engage with.

Ideally, direct entrants would be considered as 'peripheral' participants of their discourse communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991), given that they join their peers (whose studies commence at year one) at a time when the latter have had a year of exposure to, and participation in, discursive practices of their disciplines. Given that traditional and non-traditional students join their academic communities at different levels, it would be expected that lecturers would recognise that different groups of newcomers would vary in the extent to which they understand, and participate in, the discourses of their disciplines. As Northedge (2003b, p. 29) has observed, there are "multiple levels of participation" in a discourse community, with some of the community members participating "more centrally" (p. 21) and others peripherally.

Therefore, what these findings imply is that how lecturers perceive mature students' knowledge and experiences brought from outside of the university context is likely to influence the quality of academic literacy support they offer to this group of students. In addition, different entry levels and route paths to university probably have an impact on how students are perceived as members of their discourse communities; that is whether they are treated as new-comers to disciplinary discourses and thus in need of being socialised towards discursive practices of the discipline or not.

# 4.6.2 Students' difficulties in transitioning from professional discursive practices to academic writing practices

Concerns were raised, particularly by participants in the journalism discipline, about workplace discursive resources students drew on and applied in their writing. A common sense amongst three students and all the four lecturers from this discipline was that the challenges students experienced with transitioning to academic writing were to some extent due to their tendencies to draw on professional discursive practices which are not appropriate in disciplinary writing. For instance, two students acknowledged the potential interference which discursive practices acquired from the workplace could have with their transitioning to practices valued in the academy. One of these students described such familiar practices as 'baggage' which needs to be unlearned in order to pave way for learning of new practices, but was also quick to admit that unlearning previous practices can be challenging:

"Mature students, we are in a kind of a fix because we come with our baggage of experience and then we have to take that one out and bring something new. Now it's like teaching old dogs new tricks. It's not easy." (JSI1)

The other student recognised the consequence of failure to distinguish between practices of different writing contexts, namely transference of conflicting practices across professional and academic domains.

"Since my work involves extensive writing, the work and academic styles crash (sic) with each other often. I find myself using academic writing in journalistic works and vice-versa." (JSS12)

Similarly, as explained in the following comment, the lecturers acknowledged that the transitioning process to academic practices can be challenging and prolonged for students who enter university already habituated to professional writing norms and practices. The challenges highlighted by the lecturers are lack of awareness of the disparities in discursive practices of different domains and a propensity to draw on inappropriate professional practices as meaning making resources in academic writing.

"Some of them mostly they are working in the industry and they've been kind of raised at least professionally. They've been raised to believe that this is the way we do writing. This is the way we present content.... Now when they come to the university and you tell them that this is not good enough, some of them I think it takes them time to adapt to the new environment." (JLI1)

As suggested in one of the lecturers' comment, lack of cognitive awareness of the domain in which one is writing and incapacity to 'switch' to appropriate practices of a particular context could have contributed to the students' challenges with transitioning from writing in professional contexts to academic writing.

"a lot of the people in the media they would have challenges coming up with proper academic writing because to transit is very difficult. You need a constant reminder that you now have to switch to the other type of writing." (JLI2)

Lecturers, therefore, felt that this lack of distinction between professional and academic practices led students to indiscriminately draw on workplace discursive practices, some of which were thought to be inadequate for meaning making at university (refer to section 4.5 for details on reported discursive practices which students brought to bear on their writing). For instance, it was believed that internalised professional discursive practices largely influenced how students perceived and used source texts. Commenting on students' use of evidence or source texts and citation practices, the journalism lecturers mentioned students' tendency to perceive and present information derived from sources as factual; hence their inability to engage with and subject source material to critical evaluation. These views are captured in the following excerpt:

"most of the time they will rely on what people have said... they just believe that once somebody has said it, they report that they've said it. They do not go deep enough to start critically analysing what cuts through somebody's speech." (JLI3)

Furthermore, it was noted that due to the influence of professional norms of writing, students were confused about the type of knowledge which requires attribution and that which does not in academic writing. Also, in their writing, they had challenges clearly distinguishing their own voices from other authors'. As explained by one lecturer in the excerpt below, the students' tendency not to attribute certain kind of knowledge, such as information perceived 157

as factual, was regarded as a familiar practice of their profession, and which they merely transferred into their academic writing.

"when they are in the industry most of the time they cite the sources that they have interviewed...and the type of citing or attribution is not academic. So to move from that it becomes a problem. And most of the time they are used to something like narration as if it's all coming from their head. So when you say...source, question mark, sometimes they are confused. They don't understand between what is their own and what is not, what they are getting from somebody else...in journalism there are certain things that we consider to be fact that we don't have to [acknowledge]. So that type of thinking they tend to take that to here, and when you say source, sometimes... they say but this is a fact. But I say no, a fact says who? Who says this because you cannot just write it anyhow" (JLI4)

Besides use of sources, it was reported that the students' difficulties in transitioning to academic writing were apparent in their writing style, which the lecturers believed was shaped by professional discursive practices. For example, two journalism lecturers noted that students' ways of developing paragraphs reflected qualities of writing valued in journalistic writing, namely brevity and conciseness. These qualities were manifest in students' ways of organising text in shorter paragraphs (e.g. 'one-sentence paragraphs'). However, the paragraphing practices in journalistic writing in terms of structure, function, and length. For example, lecturers expected that the organisational features of a typical paragraph in academic writing will include a thesis statement, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence. A clear marking of paragraphs which serve different functions in a text (such as introduction, middle, and concluding paragraphs) was also expected. The following extract illustrates these views:

"The majority of them they are already rooted in journalistic writing....So you will see a lot of these students they fail to graduate or maybe to switch from writing for the media to writing for academic purposes, the essay. So you are reading an essay it sounds like a newspaper article, especially the paragraphs, the way they are developed. Maybe in journalism we would allow somebody for example to have a one-sentence paragraph....But in academic writing...you expect like a paragraph that has a thesis statement, then backing statements, then maybe a closing sentence... And maybe on a single page maybe you are looking at a variation in the paragraph length as well as sentences. So some of the students especially the mature ones have difficulties maybe adjusting themselves to that." (JLI2)

Students' lack of understanding of differences in epistemological positions from which disciplinary and professional writing operate can compound challenges which they experience when transitioning from workplace to academic writing. Pedagogically, this implies the need for students to appreciate disjunctures in discourse practices emanating from differences in epistemological positions from which disciplinary and professional writing operate, and that these discontinuities make certain discursive practices valued in the workplace inadequate as resources for meaning making in academic writing. As Devitt (2007) and Pardoe (2000) have observed, and as is evident in the findings of this study, failure to recognise such discontinuities can lead students to draw on discursive knowledge which has served them well in the workplace, but is deemed inappropriate in academic contexts, and thus leads to unsuccessful academic writing.

In addition, the disparities between valued attributes of writing in disciplinary and professional contexts mean that developing the capacity to successfully transition from discursive practices of the workplace, or to switch between practices as was the case for almost half of the participants in this study who were 'straddling' academic and workplace writing contexts (see section 4.2.1), necessitates not only learning discourse practices of their academic communities, but also more importantly developing a critical awareness of epistemological positions informing such practices and being able to switch from one to the other. Discontinuities which students might experience when they transition from writing at work to academic writing draw attention to the notion of students negotiating both discourse practices and identities constructed by these practices. Negotiating identities is particularly crucial for students who straddle academic and professional discursive worlds, as was the case for some of the students in this study who were simultaneously studying and working (see section 4.2.1 for the profile of student participants). For these students, crossing

successfully the discursive boundaries of disciplinary and professional communities requires learning to "exchange discursive identities" (Northedge, 2003b, p. 27).

Considering that these students may enter university already invested in the membership of their professional communities and which they possibly primarily identify with, the question that can be raised for this context is whether students feel conflicted or ambivalent about engaging in discursive practices and taking on identities of their disciplinary communities which are at odds with those of their professional communities. From a pedagogic perspective, when the possibility of students feeling conflicted or ambivalent about disciplinary discourses they are expected to identify with is taken into account, raising students' critical awareness of discontinuities in both literacy practices and identities when crossing boundaries of academic and professional 'discursive worlds' becomes an important aspect of socialising students into disciplinary discourses. As suggested by Lea (2004), what could be brought to students' attention are the implications of adopting academic literacy practices on their other identities they bring to academic writing. For instance, students could be made aware that engaging in discursive practices and genres of their disciplines does not necessarily mean renouncing or relinquishing identities of their professional practice. Rather, students need to learn that inhabiting multiple discourse communities involves switching between discourse practices and identities. It is necessary that the socialisation process addresses these issues if students are to be committed to engaging in discourse practices of their disciplinary communities and students' resistance in adopting disciplinary discourse practices is to be minimised. This may be particularly crucial in cases where, as was found in this study, students are actively involved in discursive practices, and enacting identities, of their professional fields; as well as when students are socialised towards academic practices which are at odds with literacy practices of the workplace and the latter are considered inappropriate for meaning making in academic writing.

Drawing on professional practices indiscriminately could also mean that the students assumed that since the practices served them well in the workplace, employing similar practices could result in successful texts; hence the 'wholesale transfer' of the familiar practices. As Schwartz et al. (2012) have observed, failure to perceive differences in practices of distinct domains or communities can lead students to indiscriminately apply practices from other contexts in their writing. Such behaviour could also be a consequence of students'

inability to engage in "intentional mindful abstraction" of workplace discursive knowledge (Perkins & Salomon, 1989, p. 113) for application in disciplinary writing, as well as adapt or reshape (DePalma & Ringer, 2011) professional practices to fit the demands of disciplinary writing. Drawing on professional discursive practices inappropriately could also be a consequence of unfamiliarity with disciplinary practices. That is, students had not yet developed awareness of practices which were considered as acceptable in their discipline, so much so that it was difficult for them to discern discrepancies between professional and academic practices. This links with Quick's (2012, p. 232) argument that successful application of knowledge and skills from one context to the other depends on one's acquaintance with the "rhetorical situation and expectations of the situation" in which one is writing.

As is evident from these findings, the lecturers doubted the legitimacy of professional literacy practices students brought to bear on their writing. For instance, they questioned the writing style adopted by students, how they perceived the nature of knowledge (acknowledged vs. unacknowledged) and engaged with source material. These practices were found wanting for meaning making in their discipline as it was felt that they impeded students from producing successful writing. These lecturers' questioning of the validity of professional literacy practices supports Paxton and Frith's (2014) observation that not all prior literacy practices students enter university with are valued as legitimate meaning-making resources in the disciplines. This particularly applies to those which considerably conflict with disciplinary practices (Paxton & Frith, 2015), as they fall short of enabling students to meet disciplinary writing demands and constrain their learning of unfamiliar practices.

In this study, both journalism students and lecturers recognised how difficult and prolonged the process of adjusting to academic literacy practices can be for mature students who are already habituated to professional writing. This adjustment process is likely to be more challenging for mature students who straddle professional and academic discursive worlds. This is because these students should learn to cross boundaries of academic and professional discourse communities and negotiate their respective "discursive identities" and meaning making practices (Northedge, 2003b, p. 27).

Adjusting to academic literacy practices and genres required at university may necessitate dropping prior professional practices which are at odds with disciplinary practices they are expected to engage with. Discarding these practices may be less problematic for students who do not need to utilize them elsewhere. However, the notion of undoing or unlearning prior practices becomes complicated when it is viewed from the perspective of mature students who straddle academic and professional contexts and switch between these writing contexts, as was the case for almost half of the participants in this study (see section 4.2.1). These students cannot be expected to discard practices which, although they do not count as valid in their disciplines, may serve them well in professional writing. Also, in vocationally oriented disciplines, where producing professional genres is part of academic writing demands, antecedent professional genre knowledge and discursive practices may prove useful to students. In this context, both students and lecturers pointed out that having antecedent professional genre knowledge in their repertoire of discursive resources was an advantage for mature students as they were able to produce genres like those of their profession without much difficulty (see details in section 4.5.1).

Instead, mature students need to be enabled to become cognitively aware of the domain in which they are writing and develop capacity to successfully switch between academic and professional writing contexts. This would require that students develop "metacognitive awareness" of what makes writing in these two domains distinct (Michaud, 2011, p. 256). However, to consciously switch to and draw on appropriate literacy practices of a domain they are writing in can be arduous for students who do not have command over practices of domains they straddle. This implies that students need to develop competence in disciplinary practices in order to distinguish practices valued in academic and professional domains. In addition, as suggested by Lea (2004), students need to be made aware of how practices they bring from the workplace relate to disciplinary practices in terms of enabling and constraining meaning making. This necessitates, as suggested by Lea (2004) and Paxton and Frith (2014, 2015), that lecturers increase their knowledge of the literacy practices mature students bring from work.

Whilst journalism lecturers held the view that internalised professional discursive practices hampered mature students' transitioning to academic writing, accounting and business administration lecturers thought that lack of or limited workplace writing experiences is what accounted for students' transitioning challenges. For example, an accounting lecturer believed that most mature students who are recruited into accounting degree programmes (e.g. accounting and internal auditing) come from a professional background which does not involve extensive writing. Rather, their junior positions mainly demand technical accounting knowledge, such as ability to produce and process numerical data.

"The mature students normally we pick those who... as part of their job, they don't write reports.... So they are more of data entry clerks.... They are just entering the figures. It's the managers who does the work.... They are more of accounts assistants. So...they haven't experienced higher level writing, and in fact most of them if you ask them, they haven't written or ...they don't usually write reports. What they do is to enter data, to do a reconciliation of the figures." (ALI3)

Moreover, it was felt that if at all the students engaged in some workplace writing, then the type of writing required of them was less demanding. For instance, it was pointed out that the reports they usually produced were narrative in nature, which largely involved explanation of numerical data. Also, the writing demands of their profession did not require citation of source texts as is required in academic writing.

"what seems to be their [student accountants] major task is production of the figures and providing narratives, not much, just interpretation of what they have written. So they don't write too much. It's brief without perhaps referencing. All that it's not followed." (ALI3)

These sentiments were echoed by a business administration lecturer who suspected that the writing challenges students faced at university reflected lack of extensive experience of writing at work. The lecturer's assumption was that students exposed to professional writing would not experience much difficulty transitioning to, and engaging in, academic literacy practices. These views are reflected in the following comment:

"I don't think most of those that I have encountered that... they were at all involved in writing at the workplace.... from my own experience I feel they would have no problems at all here. But if they are here and then they are still having problems, then I don't think there's anything happening worthwhile at the office. There's a direct link. I feel they are unable to even commit themselves properly at the workplace." (BALI1) The following conclusions are derived from the results pertaining to students' reported use of discursive resources from professional contexts in disciplinary writing:

- Having a range of discursive resources from which to draw on can enrich mature students' meaning making if exploited appropriately. At the same time, these resources can be constraints to successful meaning making in disciplinary writing if considerably at odds with conventional practices.
- The extent to which mature students are motivated to draw on and apply discursive resources acquired from the workplace is probably determined by the nature of writing tasks assigned to students. That is, certain kinds of tasks such as those which simulate real-world workplace writing or allow students to draw links between theory and practice can most likely afford students opportunity to make use of a range of discursive resources in their repertoire.
- Mature students' ways of constructing academic texts are interdiscursive in nature. That
  is, the texts they construct are a product of "appropriating or exploiting" (Bhatia, 2010,
  p. 35) a range of discursive resources (genres and practices) from both professional and
  academic contexts.
- Unfamiliarity with disciplinary literacy practices can be linked to mature students' inclination to inappropriately draw on and apply discursive resources from workplace settings in disciplinary writing.
- Mature students' ability to cross between borders of professional and academic communities and draw on discursive resources of the workplace to meet academic writing demands attest to the "permeability of boundaries" (Barton & Hamilton, 2012, p. 10) of these discourse communities. That is, the porousness of borders can result in practices of professional domains permeating academic domains. The interaction of these two domains is a testament that practices of academic discourse communities are not "hermetically sealed off" (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 19) from outside influences.
- Writing contexts from which mature students are transitioning need to be considered when lecturers seek to understand the challenges students experience adjusting to, and engaging in, disciplinary practices.

# 4.6.3 Students' difficulties in unpacking academic writing demands and lecturer expectations

Two key issues concerning students' difficulties in unpacking academic writing demands and expectations emerged from the participants' responses, namely: variation in academic writing demands and lecturer expectations, and lack of access to, and difficulty in interpreting, writing requirements.

#### 4.6.3.1 Variation in academic writing demands and expectations

Results indicate that students were concerned about variation in lecturers' perceptions of what constitutes good quality academic writing. Specifically, in the interviews, 10 students reported experiencing difficulties figuring out what seemed to be idiosyncratic academic writing demands of lecturers and switching from one lecturer's writing requirements to those of another within the same discipline. As the journalism student explains in the following extract, individual lecturer preferences were evident in source attribution conventions required of students' writing.

"you find that they (lecturers) have different styles of writing. They have different preferences. It may be in terms of content but...they also have different preferences...when it comes to attribution itself. Some they say here we use APA. Someone will come and say no we use Harvard.... So when it comes to the referencing itself you may have the actual citations and everything but how do you use... you find that you get confused. What does this lecturer want? ... and then you always have to attribute the way that specific lecturer told you to and it becomes problematic....We find that say three, four lecturers have different preferences and chances are you always get it wrong in one way or the other." (JSI3)

These students' concerns were shared by one lecturer in journalism who pointed out that students were sometimes confused by differences in academic writing requirements of lecturers.

"the lecturers normally come from diverse backgrounds and when the students come sometimes they are confused because the other lecturer says you have to do this in APA, the other lecturer says you have to do this in Harvard. There is no standard way of doing it in... this university. So sometimes it becomes very difficult." (JLI2)

These findings are consistent with what has been established in other studies (especially Lea & Street 1998; van Schalkwyk, 2007) that what compounds students' academic writing challenges is the need to accommodate to writing demands of individual lecturers, especially if their understanding of what constitutes disciplinary writing differs. Lea and Stierer (2000) offer a plausible explanation for the variation in lecturer requirements and expectations within disciplines. Their argument is that as mediators of students' writing, what constitutes (good) academic writing or acceptable ways of writing in disciplines is partly "a matter of individual lecturers' preferences or interpretation" of disciplinary requirements (p. 4). That is, although they are the custodians or "gatekeepers of disciplinary discourse" (Andrews, 2000, p. 11), they bring to bear their idiosyncratic interpretation of what counts as appropriate writing in their disciplines on students' writing. Therefore what's at stake for students is not only their ability to determine the epistemological stance of their disciplines (i.e. what is perceived as knowledge and how it is constructed and represented) (Harrington, 2011; Lea & Stierer, 2000), but more importantly to figure out individual lecturers' interpretation of these.

The findings also indicate that due to the perceived idiosyncrasies in lecturer expectations, some students realised that it was futile to transfer writing requirements across assignments written for different lecturers. They discovered that attempts to apply writing advice or feedback obtained from one lecturer to subsequent assignments written for other lecturers resulted in unsuccessful texts. For example, three students in different disciplines noted that whilst some lecturers expected students to explain key concepts or terms in their writing, such practice was deemed inappropriate by other lecturers, as is explained in the excerpt below:

"In terms of say the structures of the essay, someone will come and say you need to be defining these things [concepts/terms]. Someone will say no don't define, just come and present the argument which you have regarding the question. So, such kind of discrepancy, such kind of differences in terms of the demands of different lecturers leave the students confused. They end up putting the recommendations of another
lecturer in another lecturer's assignment and they are always getting it wrong" (JSI3)

Similarly, in the extract below, another student contrasts lecturers' preferences regarding the type and quality of source material students were required to use in their texts. The student observes that whilst one lecturer expected students to refer to recently published, scholarly sources, another lecturer was not particular about the nature or quality of source texts students used in their writing.

"as we were doing the module [research methods] ... we could refer to different material, whichever year the material was like. We were not even queried on that one. But now this one [another lecturer] wants...the period of the reference material should not go beyond maybe fifteen years.... So it's like I was just borrowing that aspect into this one. Secondly the material that I had to put as referencing in our module [research methods] we could just pick from like research papers that other people had already written. But...this...one [another lecturer] I was told no...you don't just have to refer to whatever.... go for...journals because they are like approved." (PLMSI1)

Students are likely to assume transferability and utility of writing advice or feedback across assessment tasks particularly if they perceive similarities in assessment tasks and they are not clear about what is required for tasks. This calls for the need to raise students' awareness of the contested nature of academic writing conventions and the implications of varied lecturer expectations on transferability of requirements of writing and feedback across assignments written for different lecturers. In addition, as was also suggested by students (in section 4.7.4), lecturers should articulate their expectations for assignment tasks.

### 4.6.3.2 Lack of access to, and difficulty in interpreting, writing requirements

The difficulty in figuring out what contributes to successful or unsuccessful texts was seen by several students as a factor which exacerbated the challenges they experienced with academic writing. Eighteen students from different disciplines, who commented on the challenges of interpreting writing requirements for assessment tasks, implicated vaguely worded and less-

detailed task briefs for the gaps between students' and lecturers' interpretation of task demands (also see section 4.4.4). The following quote illustrates these views.

"The academic writing at the University is sometimes difficult because you are not sure what the lecture (sic) is looking for. You try to respond to the question but the lecture marks in a different way" (ASS26)

A notable implication of lack of shared understanding of writing requirements between students and lecturers was students' failure to appreciate how the quality of their work was judged. For instance, in the interviews, a few students (4) felt that their level of performance in assignments was not justified, which led to speculation about lack of transparency of assessment criteria which lecturers used to evaluate their writing. The students also suspected bias and inconsistency in lecturers' marking practices. They thought that lecturers judged the quality of their work based on intuition. Students noticed inconsistencies or lack of transparency in lecturers' marking practices when they compared their marked work with peers'. They were suspicious of their lecturers' marking practices particularly when their grades were lower than they had expected. The following comment captures these sentiments:

"you find that in a class there are maybe forty students. Sometimes we share these marked scripts. What has the lecturer given you? You find that it's a variety of responses and all of them were like marked correct, and you sometimes you even wonder to say why did the lecturer mark me wrong on this? So sometimes it's not clear what the lecturer is looking from students. So that also poses a challenge." (IASI2)

These findings can be linked to Bharuthram and McKenna's (2012) study where students have expressed similar concerns about the seemingly 'mysterious' nature of writing expectations. However, as Catt and Gregory (2006) have observed, "obscure or cryptically worded" (p. 25) task briefs do not benefit students. They argue that students' inability to figure out task demands necessary for producing an acceptable response due to "inexplicit guidance and obscurity of expression" can compound their frustrations. On the other hand, Catt and Gregory (2006) believe that "well phrased and carefully explained" task briefs can foster 'intellectual engagement' (p. 26).

Gaps between students' and lecturers' interpretation of writing requirements highlight the tacitness of writing requirements and standards, and the challenges which lecturers face in making this tacit knowledge explicit for students (Jacobs, 2005). Students' difficulties in making sense of task requirements also foreground their opacity. That is, although they may be presented as self-evident (Lea & Street, 1998), writing expectations are not 'common sense' knowledge and "transparently meaningful" to students (Lillis & Turner, 2001, p. 58). Moreover, although it is more likely that the initial stages of students' studies are marked by uncertainty about standards expected of their writing, this study has established that this indeterminacy can continue throughout their studies. This means that some students can progress up to later stages of their studies without having navigated standards and requirements of writing in their disciplines. Therefore, lack of shared understanding of requirements widens the 'epistemological gap' (Harrington et al., 2006a) between students' and lecturers' understanding of acceptable ways of writing in the disciplines, which can ultimately lead to students' prolonged and difficult process of gaining familiarity with, and their exclusion from participating in, disciplinary discourses (Lillis, 2001).

Besides their tacit and opaque nature, the means through which task requirements are shared can be implicated in the difficulties which students have in making sense of these requirements. In this study, the interviews with the students revealed that it is through lecturer feedback on their marked assignments that some of the students became aware of gaps in their interpretation of task requirements (see section 4.4.2). These results are corroborated by quantitative findings which show that a good number of students (around 37%) reported learning about writing expectations through lecturer feedback on marked assignments (refer to Table 18). These findings mean that these students gained clarity of task requirements after they had already written and submitted work for assessment. They also imply that some students wrote their assignments without adequate comprehension of task demands. Although the feedback might have helped students to gain knowledge of task requirements which they probably applied in subsequent assignments, such understanding was not obtained at a time when it was needed the most, namely, during the writing process.

Results in Tables 18 and 19 indicate that a good number of both students and lecturers identified marking criteria shared with a task brief, oral assessment briefing in the classroom, and assessment task words as ways through which task requirements were often shared. If

students had difficulties interpreting task requirements, it could be due to the ineffectiveness of these techniques in supporting students' internalisation of such requirements. Limitations of 'explicit knowledge transfer' methods like these, which rely heavily on verbal description or explicit articulation of writing standards and requirements, have been reported in O'Donovan, Price, and Rust's (2001) study which has examined the efficacy of verbal descriptors for facilitating students' understanding and application of assessment criteria in their writing. Due to the subjectivity and ambiguity of verbal descriptions, the exclusive use of 'explicit knowledge transfer' techniques has been found to be inadequate for conveying standards and requirements to students (O'Donovan et al., 2001; Rust et al., 2003).

A smaller number of students interviewed mentioned that reviewing successful peer assignments after receiving back their marked work helped them to understand task requirements and how to successfully apply these in their writing, and enabled them to selfappraise their own work in relation to peers' writing (see section 4.4.1). As can be seen in Table 18, a small percentage of students (9%) reported that they regularly learned about task requirements through assignment exemplars. In this context, students might have benefited from exemplars before writing their own assignments because they were able to contextualise what was expected of their writing. This links with the view that the efficacy of exemplars lies in their potential to concretise standards and criteria, as well as tutors' comments (Hendry et al., 2011; Orsmond et al., 2002). In addition, use of exemplars can promote independent learning or learner autonomy as students develop capacity to self-assess own work in terms of the extent to which it succeeds or falls short of addressing task demands. However, a plausible explanation for the smaller number of students who consulted assignment exemplars could be that either students had no access to these exemplars or they did not find the exemplars they had access to as useful as to provide clarity of task requirements. The latter was alluded to by two students (refer to section 4.4.1). This supports Handley and Williams' (2011, p. 104) observation that unless students have the capacity to "elicit tacitly what lecturers cannot say explicitly" or exemplars are mediated through discussion, students' comprehension of writing requirements or standards may not be enhanced by exemplars.

The findings indicate that students found task briefs with vague and less-detailed instructions ineffective for producing successful writing. They also expressed desire for lecturers to be explicit in what they expected to see in students' assignments (see section 4.7.4). Whilst it is

important that students should understand what is expected of their assignments if they are to succeed in addressing task demands and perform well, the limitations of explicitly articulated task requirements need to be acknowledged. As O'Donovan et al. (2001) have argued, providing students with increasingly explicit and detailed task requirements does not necessarily guarantee that students would attain a deeper understanding of requirements and apply these successfully in their own writing. In addition, the challenge which lecturers face is to offer students guidance which is enough to enable them meet assessment demands without risking encouraging the students to become overly reliant on lecturer guidance, as well as merely concerned with adherence to task demands in order to achieve good performance (Torrance, 2007). To address this dilemma, Norton (2004) suggests changing students' perception of assessment criteria from what they need to comply with in order to obtain good grades to something they can use to improve quality of their learning experience. What this means is that sharing task requirements with students would be more effective if they were also made aware of their intended function.

#### 4.6.4 Lack of systematic academic literacy support programmes for mature students

Exclusion of mature students from writing support offered to traditional students was another factor which was implicated in the writing challenges experienced by mature students, especially in the early stages of their studies. In their interview (8) and questionnaire responses (13), the students mentioned that they did not have access to academic literacy support like what was offered to their peers who entered university through the traditional route. These students felt that offering academic literacy support (e.g. in a form of induction or writing instruction) to one group of students (traditional students) and excluding others (mature students) disadvantaged the latter, as they lacked understanding of requirements of academic writing which the former were likely to be familiar with (see section 1.1.2 for details on the EAP course which is offered to year one traditional entrants). The following response is typical of the students' sentiments about the negative impact of their exclusion from academic literacy instruction and support:

"I joined the university in third year where there was no this thing about academic writing, the style of writing.... But our friends [traditional students] who joined in the first year I think they had to learn about all these things. So it was very difficult I can say when I was starting. It was

very difficult to put the facts in order, or to make references of the content... it was very strange to me. So that's why I was finding it very difficult to cope with the academic writing skills." (ESI1)

Several lecturers (7) in different disciplines also attributed mature students' unfamiliarity with academic literacy practices to lack of instruction in academic literacy practices. Two of these lecturers' responses suggest that due to early exposure to requirements and standards of academic writing, as well as lecturer expectations, traditional entrants were more aware of these than the mature students.

"by the time they join, you find that the basics for academic writing have already been covered at year one. So they join at maybe year two or year three. So they don't go into academic writing classes like communication studies. So because they are not aware of how to refer you find that they are falling into problems of plagiarism." (ELI2)

Interviews with students also revealed that the absence of writing support from lecturers and the institution, overall, led them to adopt several strategies to manage their writing challenges and to fulfil disciplinary writing demands. For instance, several students (11) mentioned that in the early stages of their studies, they leaned on guidance from peers and the capable others (e.g. traditional students and family members). Aspects of academic writing on which they sought guidance include how to write essays, particularly, citation, structuring/organising text logically, writing an introduction, as well as selecting appropriate source texts.

"When I came here I didn't know what the lecturer was looking for in an essay. It was through my effort asking these students [traditional entrants] how they write. It's when I had to know that oh! this lecturer needs this." (ESI1)

Interestingly, questionnaire results indicate that advice from peers was not considered by most students as instrumental in the development of their writing. Out of 98 respondents, 37 chose guidance from feedback and only 3% of these students marked peer advice as a form of support which played a major part in the improvement of their writing. In contrast, 67% of the 89 responses indicated lecturer feedback on written work as what contributed highly to development of students' writing (refer to Table 22). These results imply that despite its inadequacies (see section 4.4.2 for students' views of written lecturer feedback), students still 172

hold lecturer feedback in higher regard than peer feedback as a more effective form of support which can lead to improvement of their writing.

Besides relying on the guidance of peers and knowledgeable others, two students in journalism and procurement reported that they fell back on their antecedent genre knowledge from work in order to produce genres which they were not familiar with, such as report and proposal (also see section 4.5.1).

"We were told to write a proposal, and...the lecturer did not...tell us the format on how we were supposed to write it.... in my case I thought the proposal is the same way as a concept [paper] is supposed to be. So at work am normally assigned to write concepts on maybe developing a program idea.... So I just used the same format I use at work and then applied it to the proposal writing." (JSI4)

Others (5) reported that they relied on textbooks and online resources for guidance on academic writing. Three of these students also modelled their writing after other students' texts written in the UNIMA and other universities. These resources were instrumental in facilitating their understanding of requirements of academic writing and enabling them to produce unfamiliar academic genres, such as, essay, report, literature review, case analysis, research proposal, and dissertation, as well as to acquaint themselves with academic conventions such as citation.

"after seeing the grade that I had on the first report that I had written I had to check on some books like in the library to say what's the format like? How do reports look like? So such kind of books they also do assist. Even on the internet.... there are some formats already there on how to write a report. So using that maybe they really assist to improve on whatever we are doing." (PLMSI1)

Moreover, results in Table 22 show that 43 out of 98 questionnaire respondents attributed improvement of their writing to guidance on academic writing obtained from textbooks and the internet. The use of sources for advice on, and as models of, academic writing emphasise the view that the 'reading to write' or 'reading for writing' construct (Hirvela, 2004) is not limited to generating ideas/content for their texts (writing from sources), but extends to scaffolding students' writing. That is, as evident in this context, students use source texts as a 173

form of instruction in academic literacy in order to improve their competence in academic writing (reading to learn how to write), manage unfamiliar writing demands, or tackle writing challenges.

The value of reading source material, particularly texts written by other students, is that students can "pick up how the discourse works" and "how meanings are framed within it" (Northedge, 2003b, p. 30). This means that in order to benefit from these texts in terms of learning about disciplinary writing, students need to have the ability to identity discursive practices and rhetorical conventions which writers draw on to produce their own texts. Although not evident in this study, one of the major concerns surrounding students' use of texts as 'models' of disciplinary writing needs to be acknowledged. These texts have the potential to inhibit students' "meaning-making processes" and development of their own writing ability (Harrington, 2011, p. 54), mainly in cases where students idealise and imitate such texts (Handley & Williams, 2011) without understanding how and why they are constructed in a particular way. Since, as noted by Lillis and Turner (2001, p. 58), academic discursive practices are not "common sense" knowledge and "transparently meaningful" for students, it may be difficult for them to unpack discursive practices and rhetorical conventions embedded in the texts which they consult or model after. From a pedagogic perspective, students' capacity to analyse such texts and discern the practices and conventions required of their writing could be enhanced through, as per Handley and Williams' (2011) recommendation, 'intervening dialogue' with lecturers (p. 104).

In addition, as Paxton (2007) cautions, not all reading material can provide appropriate scaffolding for development of students' writing expected in their disciplines. She argues that the efficacy of source material as tools for developing students' academic writing is more likely to depend on whether these materials expose students to discourses and literacy practices necessary for knowledge construction or meaning making in their disciplines. This implies that the types of source material students read are likely to determine the nature and level of development of students' disciplinary writing. This discussion raises the question of what kinds of source material are most suitable for scaffolding students' learning of disciplinary writing.

The following factors were implicated in the lack of, or the provision of inadequate, support for developing mature students' academic writing: lecturer assumptions about students' prior writing experiences, failure to use assessment to induct students into academic literacy practices, and lack of systematic forms of academic literacy support for mature students.

### 4.6.4.1 Lecturer assumptions about students' prior writing experiences

Assumptions lecturers made about academic literacy competencies which mature students brought with them to university were implicated in the inadequate or, lack of provision of, academic literacy support for mature students. The findings suggest that students recognised that the quality of support lecturers offered students, especially early in their studies, was likely influenced by the extent to which students were perceived as novices in disciplinary discourses and literacy practices. As also mentioned in section 4.6.1, in the questionnaire, several students (13) attributed inadequacies in the writing support they were offered to lecturer assumptions about their prior academic and professional writing experiences. This view was reiterated in interview accounts of seven students. Some of these students observed that such assumptions led lecturers to believe that traditional students, who they thought were treated as novices in academic discourses, needed the support more than mature students. It was felt that such assumptions had negative impact on the quality of writing support offered to mature students and were detrimental to their socialisation into discursive practices they were expected to become familiar with. Moreover, these students recognized that just like their traditional counterparts, mature students are novices in academic writing, and thus require writing support. These views are illustrated by the following response from a journalism student:

"there's a difference on how mature students and the normal entry students [traditional entrants] are treated.... I think that being a mature student the lecturers assume that you know quite a number of things because you've been exposed to the industry. You've worked a little bit other than those just coming straight from the secondary school, and so they would maybe have time for them more than us, maybe as in guiding them...on how they are supposed to write things and how they are supposed to address the question. While for us they just assume that we know how to go about it...." (JSI4)

Findings from lecturers show that they did not draw a link between the quality of writing support provided to mature students and assumptions about their prior writing experiences.

However, a few lecturers acknowledged that it was expected that mature students would enter university with a certain level of knowledge of academic writing based on an assumption that they learned about academic writing when training for their further education qualifications (see results in section 4.6.1).

A major drawback of these assumptions is that lecturers can be misled into thinking that students who enter degree programmes with a further education qualification should not be treated as novices in disciplinary writing, and that unlike 'traditional' entrants, mature students' writing does not need developing at all. These assumptions also point to the need for lecturers to gain extensive knowledge about the literacy competencies students bring from both academic and professional contexts. One of the benefits of understanding students' prior writing experiences, as Artemeva and Fox (2010) explain, is that such knowledge can help lecturers to interrogate their own assumptions about students' prior knowledge in relation to students' realities. More importantly, as Paxton and Frith (2014, 2015) have noted, such knowledge provides a means through which lecturers can gain access to disjunctures between discursive practices students acquire from other contexts and disciplinary practices. From a pedagogic perspective, as per Paxton and Frith's (2014, 2015) recommendation, identifying and bridging these discontinuities should be at the centre of course and assessment design and pedagogy aimed at developing students' academic literacies.

Pedagogically, what is important is finding appropriate ways of identifying these discontinuities. In this study, a few participants suggested ways in which lecturers could acquaint themselves with the academic literacy competencies students enter university with (refer to section 4.7.5). One of these ways is conducting an analysis of students' writing needs on commencement of their studies by directly asking them about their knowledge of academic writing. Although this strategy could help draw out useful information from the students themselves, the limitation is that students may not always be consciously aware of the academic literacy competencies they possess, and which aspects of academic writing need further developing. In addition, they could experience challenges articulating such information.

Instead of using one strategy, a multifaceted approach could be adopted. For example, the first assignment, which ideally should be formatively assessed and carried out on commencement of study programmes, can be used to establish the nature of discursive 176

practices students bring to their writing on commencement of their studies. Findings from lecturers indicate that one lecturer was already using assessment formatively in the early stages of students' studies for purposes of gauging the level of their writing competence (see section 4.6.4.3). In accordance with Artemeva and Fox's (2010) suggestion, outcomes of 'diagnostic' or formative assessment can provide lecturers with useful data regarding which aspects of literacy competencies students require support the most. The feedback which lecturers offer on formative assessment could be used as a stimulus for discussions with students as regards their understanding and misconceptions concerning literacy practices expected of them in their disciplines. Adopting the 'talk around text' approach (Lillis, 2008) could help lecturers to draw out information which could not be fathomed from evaluating students' writing. Dialogue with students, whether one-on-one or in the classroom, could provide a forum in which the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the discursive resources they are drawing on in their writing can be brought to students' attention (see section 2.4.2 for some of the identified pedagogical functions which dialogue can serve in facilitating development of students' writing).

#### 4.6.4.2 Failure to use assessment to induct students into academic literacy practices

Findings indicate that both students and lecturers were aware of lack of emphasis on developing students' academic writing through assessment. A general perception amongst some students and lecturers was that assessment was not being used to support students' learning of literacy practices required of them at university, as lecturers were mainly interested in assessing students' knowledge of subject content. In interviews, four students pointed out that some lecturers' priority was assessing students' learning of subject content. As a result, these lecturers tended to overlook the quality of their writing, as was evident in lack of attention to students' knowledge of norms of academic writing such as source text use and language usage in assessment criteria or lecturer feedback.

"from my experience that I've had...I think the emphasis is not...on...how do you write something academically.... from what I've seen, the emphasis is on the content, if you are able to give back the right content.... They [lecturers] are more interested with what you write, not how you write it." (IASI2) Similar observations were made by six lecturers. Lack of emphasis on developing students' academic writing through assessment is highlighted in the following extract from an accounting lecturer:

"sometimes we emphasise on figures, calculations...not on writing. And when you give them a task to write your emphasis will be not on expression, how they are writing.... Sometimes you will tend to give them a benefit of doubt even if they have poorly explained, expressed. But if you are able to see that this one... has technical thinking, then you are able to mark them right.... we don't emphasise on academic writing. Whatever... they have written we mark it...as long as we are satisfied that they display that they understand the technical part of it." (ALI3)

As also pointed out in section 4.3.4, lecturers' perceptions of their role in developing students' academic literacy is a major factor which can help explain why assessment was not used as an opportunity to facilitate students' learning of academic writing. As generally acknowledged in the literature (e.g. Basturkmen, 2017; Jacobs, 2005; Zhu, 2004), it is possible that some lecturers may be constrained by the idea that developing students' writing is not a primary responsibility or area of expertise of subject lecturers despite the fact that they are insiders of their disciplines; hence their tendency to focus on developing students' subject knowledge and to overlook the quality of students' writing when assessing their work.

In this study, the idea that developing students' writing is not the main domain of subject lecturers seems to be reflected in the lecturers' suggestions on who should play the role of socialising students towards academic discourses. Whilst a small number of lecturers acknowledged that subject lecturers should share the responsibility of developing students' writing (see sections 4.7.1, 4.7.4), others seemed to delegate such a responsibility to library staff (see section 4.7.1). The latter perception contrasts with the views of proponents of integrating or embedding teaching of academic writing in subject curriculum and of the collaboration between literacy practitioners and disciplinary specialists in developing students' academic literacy (refer to section 2.5 which details the benefits of 'collaborative pedagogy' between subject and writing specialists). The main argument of these theorists (e.g. Blake & Pates, 2010; Jacobs, 2005, 2010; Murray & Nallaya, 2016; Wingate, 2011, 2018) is that developing all students' academic writing can be achieved if provision of

writing support is embedded in the disciplines and subject lecturers are actively involved in providing writing support.

Lack of emphasis on developing students' academic writing through assessment could also signal lecturers' lack of conversancy with the role of assessment in, and ways in which assessment could be used to promote, student writing development. Missed opportunities to support students' disciplinary academic writing development through assessment are evident in lack of emphasis on writing requirements and standards, lack of shared understanding of these requirements and standards between students and lecturers, and students' lack of clarity about their application to assessment tasks. These findings suggest that assessment criteria were not being used effectively to promote students' familiarity with requirements and standards of writing in their disciplines.

# 4.6.4.3 Consequences of lack of systematic forms of academic literacy support for mature students

Results indicate that one of the consequences of lack of systematic academic literacy support programmes for mature students at the point of entry to this university or during their studies is that provision of writing support was left to the discretion of individual lecturers. The consequence of lack of systematic academic literacy support structures is inconsistency in the forms of support offered to mature students. This inconsistency is evidenced by the varied strategies which lecturers reported they used to mediate development of mature students' writing.

For example, two journalism lecturers talked about using formative assessment to support students' learning of academic writing. For one lecturer, writing opportunities for formative assessment were offered exclusively to a group of students experiencing writing difficulties. Outcomes of such assessment were used to provide students with feedback on the quality of their writing:

"we encourage a lot of practice. Those who you feel they are not good we give them work...not necessarily for grading but just for practice... those who you feel they are behind, you give them a lot of practical work to do, to write. You mark, then you sit down to say OK this is where it went wrong." (JLI4)

For another lecturer, the goal of formative assessment, undertaken in the early stages of students' studies, was to determine the level of their writing competence and familiarise students with requirements of academic writing:

"in my case within the first two weeks [of entry into university] I give them an assignment. When they come we try to explain the assessment criteria, and the assessment criteria usually they capture those issues of standards, logical argumentation for example, breadth of knowledge, building the arguments. So before we could give them that assignment we brief them on what we expect.... So after I've done that briefing just ten minutes or thereabouts, which obviously is not enough, I normally give them assignments within the first two weeks to gauge their level of writing." (JLI1)

For three lecturers, remedial lessons and bridging courses were used as a way of familiarising students with academic discourse practices. For example, one journalism lecturer talked about collaborating with librarians specifically to provide students with academic literacy instruction:

"we are trying to work with some remedial measures. At some point we involved our colleagues in the library to train them on some standards of referencing and other areas." (JLI1)

One education lecturer reported that mature students were urged to attend an EAP course which is offered to traditional first year entrants, but as an optional, non-credit bearing course:

"there are several others that we have asked them to attend year one classes, communication classes, just like auditing especially to learn issues of paraphrasing, summarising, and how to write an essay, and how to refer. Some of them they do swallow their pride and attend year one classes." (ELI2)

Besides formative assessment and literacy instruction, three lecturers reported employing self-directed learning strategies to enable students to internalise the requirements of academic writing in their context. For example, one lecturer in journalism explained that he used high-

scoring student exemplar assignments in order to enable students contextualise good academic writing practices and to self-assess the quality of their own writing.

"what I have done before is isolate students who are able to write well, then give the other students the write-up. You give a student for example two out of ten. They come here. I can't understand why I've gotten two out of ten. Then the best I do is to say person Y... has gotten maybe nine out of ten.... Can you compare what you did and what this person did? Then they will mind the gap.... So it's about like maybe giving the students windows from where they can actually experience writing especially maybe like having them to compare." (JLI2)

Reading to learn about writing was also reported as a means of scaffolding students' writing. One lecturer who reported adopting this pedagogical approach indicated that he recommended reading of scholarly work such as journal articles to facilitate students' internalisation of academic discourse practices. Students were also encouraged to read other writers' texts in order to understand how such texts were constructed, and model their writing after such texts:

"I advise them to read academic works because through reading they are able to appreciate how the writing is done...you say... can you go and read this article or this journal or... this book, see how the writing is done. Can you in your own way somehow adapt to that one, adopt that kind of writing... because sometimes...we tend to improve our writing through reading. So you guide them to read" (JLI4)

Another lecturer used collaborative assignments on the basis that such activities provide students with opportunity to scaffold each other's writing, especially in cases where it is impossible to offer students individualised support.

"in my class I have over ninety students. So, individualised kind of support may not work. Sometimes what I do is I put them in groups to do group assignments, group research projects, and I organise presentations so that they talk about their research and their findings, present to the whole class and am sure through that they are thinking about reading and writing sometimes." (ELI1) Notwithstanding the role of subject lecturers in developing student academic writing as identified in this study (see section 4.7.1) and recommended in the literature (refer to section 2.5), leaving provision of writing support to the discretion of individual subject lecturers is likely to disadvantage mature-entry students. Firstly, not all lecturers can perceive the need to provide writing support even if it is required by students due to, as is evident in findings of this study (see sections 4.6.1 and 4.6.4.1), their assumptions about mature students' knowledge of academic writing which they enter university with. Secondly, although they may be aware of students' disciplinary writing needs and challenges and the need to address these by providing students with writing support, lecturers may not be well positioned to decide on the best possible ways of supporting development of students' writing. In this study, this inability to determine the most appropriate forms of writing support is evident in the kinds of writing support which some of the lecturers reported they offered students, as well as those which they recommended for developing students' writing (see section 4.7.1), namely, remedial courses taught by librarians which could run parallel to and supplement the teaching and learning of subject content, use of source texts as exemplars without any form of lecturer mediation, and urging second and third year mature students to enrol in an EAP course as an elective and non-credit bearing. This EAP course is intended for normal-entry year one students (see section 1.1.2 for details of this subject). In addition, not all lecturers assume a responsibility of helping students improve their writing, for example through assessment. As results of this study have shown (see section 4.6.4.2), subject lecturers can neglect assessing the quality of students' writing and instead prioritise their learning of subject content.

# 4.6.5 A summary of factors accounting for mature students' academic writing challenges

- Lecturers' assumptions about mature students' literacy competencies acquired from work and prior study were implicated in the provision of academic literacy support aimed at socialising mature students towards academic literacy practices which they are expected to master and engage with.
- Mature students' difficulties in transitioning from professional to academic writing practices were identified by both students and lecturers:

- In the journalism discipline, internalised professional discursive practices were implicated in the challenges mature students experienced whilst transitioning to academic literacy practices.
- The inadequacies of certain forms of discursive knowledge from workplace contexts which mature students bring to bear on their academic writing were particularly acknowledged by journalism lecturers.
- The findings have revealed a strong connection between students' inclination to draw on inappropriate discursive knowledge from professional writing contexts as resources for academic writing and lack of familiarity with academic literacy practices, as well as unawareness of disparities in discursive practices of academic and professional domains.
- Diverse academic writing demands and expectations of lecturers, as well as lack of shared understanding of writing requirements between lecturers and students were identified as factors which exacerbate the challenges students experience with academic writing.
- Three major factors were implicated in the lack of, or inadequate, support for development of mature students' academic writing in this context, namely: lecturer assumptions about students' prior writing experiences, failure to use assessment to induct students into academic literacy practices, and lack of systematic forms of academic literacy support for mature students.

# 4.7 Research question 5: What strategies for developing the academic writing of mature students do lecturers and students suggest?

As one way of establishing what could facilitate development of mature students' academic writing, in the questionnaire, students were asked about what contributed to improvement of their academic writing. They were asked to select three aspects and rank order the chosen three in terms of what contributed the most to improvement of their writing. The results of quantitative analysis of the data are presented in Table 22.

Table 22: Students' perceptions of what contributes to the development of their academic writing: Questionnaire responses in rank order according to total number of responses

	What contributes to the	Frequency co	Frequency count/percentage			
	development of students'	Contributes	Considerably	Slightly	Out of 98	
	academic writing	the most	contributes	contributes	returned	
					questionnaires	
1	Lecturer feedback (on	60 (67%)	15 (17%)	14 (16%)	89 (87%)	
	marked assignments)					
2	Writing guidelines from	10 (23%)	21 (49%)	12 (28%)	43 (42%)	
	books/ internet					
3	Writing instruction	11 (26%)	12 (29%)	19 (45%)	42 (41%)	
4	Feedback from students	3 (8%)	15 (41%)	19 (51%)	37 (38%)	
	(same year group)					
5	Writing guidelines provided	3 (10%)	15 (48%)	13 (42%)	31 (32%)	
	in module outline/manual					
6	Student exemplar/model	1 (3%)	15 (52%)	13 (45%)	29 (28%)	
	assignments					
7	Feedback from students	5 (50 %)	2 (20%)	3 (30%)	10 (10%)	
	(other year groups)					

It is evident from Table 22 that most of the students (87%) attributed improvements in their writing to lecturer feedback and that many of them (67%) considered the feedback as what influenced development of their writing the most. It can also be seen that less than half of the students thought that literacy instruction led to improvements in their writing. The results in the table also show that a small number of students found student exemplar assignments effective in developing their writing.

In interviews, both students and lecturers were asked about their views on what could help mature students address writing challenges which the participants had identified. For the students, this question was specifically directed to the challenges identified in their responses to the questionnaire and elaborated on in the interviews. In the questionnaire, students were asked for their views on what would help them to improve their academic writing. It should be noted that some of the suggestions offered by students and lecturers were not in direct response to this question. Analysis of student and lecturer responses yielded the following broad categories of proposed strategies for developing mature students' academic writing: inclusiveness in provision of academic literacy support, learning to write through writing, use of dialogue as a "pedagogic space" (Lea, 2004, p. 745) for developing students' writing, using knowledge about students' prior literacy practices to inform pedagogical practices for

scaffolding students' academic literacy, and developing students' writing by enhancing their understanding of requirements and standards of academic writing.

# 4.7.1 Inclusiveness in provision of academic literacy support in early stages of study programme

Results show that both students and lecturers across different disciplines recommended provision of academic literacy support to all students in early stages of their studies regardless of the entry route to university and level of commencement of their studies. In their interview and questionnaire responses, students thought that offering literacy instruction to mature students, especially early in their studies, would have a positive impact on their knowledge of requirements of academic writing. The following comment is typical of the views of 11 interviewees and 25 questionnaire respondents:

"I would love that the University include a module during the first year of entry of mature entry students so that they can also appreciate what is required of them in the University in regards to writing. This would help mature entry students to have the same understanding of writing as those of the normal entry [traditional] students and in turn improving the writing skills of all mature entry students" (PLMSS14)

In interviews, four students specifically saw the need for the EAP course, which is offered to first year traditional entrants, to be extended to all mature students on commencement of their studies (see section 1.1.2 for details of the EAP course). The extract below illustrates this recommendation:

"These people [traditional students] who come here in first year they learn communication and the academic writing. I think there's need for this subject to continue up to maybe third year because in university most of the students enter at first year, some enter at second year and others at third year. So, there's need to accommodate everyone." (ESI1)

Lecturers shared students' sentiments on the need to offer writing instruction to diverse groups of students who enter study programmes through different routes. Like students, some of these lecturers recommended an EAP course which currently is offered only to students who commence their studies at year one (see section 1.1.2 for details of this course). In the

following excerpt, a lecturer in education proposes giving students an option to attend the course as an elective and non-credit bearing.

"mature entry students come in at year two or year three... perhaps they can take communication modules in year one as well, as audit modules, just to improve their writing." (ELI2)

Whilst participants agreed on the need to offer writing instruction to mature students, the findings reveal contrasting views on who should mediate students' academic writing development. Accounts of several lecturers indicate an acknowledgement of the need for subject lecturers to actively participate in socialising students towards academic discourse practices. However, this role is largely confined to assessment. Specifically, these lecturers thought that they could contribute to development of students' writing by affording them regular writing opportunities (see section 4.7.2), offering feedback on students' work, as well as providing them with assignment exemplars so that they have an idea of what good quality work looks like. As explained in the following comment, it was felt that lecturers could facilitate students' internalisation of requirements of academic writing by ensuring that such requirements are expected of students in assessment tasks.

"onus is on us lecturers to guide them especially the mature students.... the language lecturers when they give a task they would expect students to write academically. But it's us...especially the accounting lecturers who fail to ensure that the students are writing [academically]. So, onus is on us trainers to ensure that students are writing academically." (ALI3)

Another lecturer felt that lecturers' feedback could be used to enable students to unlearn previous ways of writing in order to pave way for learning discursive practices valued in the academy:

"to be able to kindly make suggestions to the mature learner about how else certain things can be written.... to guide the student towards what he should be. In other words, to help him de-learn what he has accumulated in the past and learn new ways of doing things." (ELI3)

Solely relying on these processes to socialise students into discursive practices of their disciplines implies that they are capable of learning unfamiliar literacy conventions and genres without being taught explicitly. However, without lecturer intervention such as 186

lecturer-facilitated discussions, students can find it difficult to identify the nature of quality required of their writing from written feedback or assignment exemplars. In this study, a number of students indicated that lecturer written feedback did not help them make sense of requirements of academic writing. The difficulty in understanding what was required in academic writing was attributed to certain qualities of the feedback, namely, (1) non-specific, (2) less detailed, and (3) more retrospective rather than forward-looking (see section 4.4.2).

Other lecturers' accounts suggest lack of acknowledgement of their responsibility to teach academic writing. Instead, two of these lecturers thought that academic literacy instruction is the domain of academic writing instructors who could provide students with writing support in the context of an EAP course. Teaching of academic writing was also seen by three lecturers as the responsibility of library staff who could offer students 'bridging', 'short', or 'remedial' courses in academic writing.

"we could do sort of bridging programmes or in other universities this is done through the library where they provide support to improve students' academic writing. So am sure the library can mount those programmes across the semester so that students can come in and participate, learn one or two things in terms of academic writing" (ELI1)

However, responses from two students present a contrary view to the lecturers' view on who should assume the role of acculturating students in academic writing practices. Their comments suggest a desire to be afforded writing instruction by language lecturers who, due to their expertise, were perceived by one student as better positioned than subject lecturers to facilitate development of students' writing. The lecturers' idea that library staff should be responsible for teaching academic writing instruction by language lecturers, or to be provided with an EAP course which, in the context of this study, is delivered by academic literacy lecturers. As evident in this comment, the language lecturers, due to their expertise, were perceived better positioned than subject lecturers to facilitate development of students who specifically is delivered better positioned than subject lecturers to facilitate development of students who specifically is delivered by academic literacy lecturers. As evident in this comment, the language lecturers, due to their expertise, were perceived better positioned than subject lecturers to facilitate development of students' writing.

"I don't think they [subject lecturers] are the specialists on academic writings. Maybe, of course they can help...but I think those that are

specialists on communication, in academic writings, maybe they are the ones that can really help us." (BASI1)

The lecturers' delegation of the responsibility of academic literacy instruction to librarians would imply that the librarians have knowledge of discipline-specific conventions and the expertise to teach disciplinary writing. When these lecturers' views are examined closely, it becomes clear that their conceptualisation of academic writing as constituting decontextualized and generic technical skills could have led them into thinking that library staff should be entrusted with the responsibility of teaching writing. Their proposition that bridging courses should aim at teaching students such skills as summarising and referencing conventions or remediating their language deficiencies suggests support for a generalised approach to teaching academic writing. These findings accord with observations made by several scholars (e.g. Murray & Nallaya, 2016; Wingate, 2015; Zhu, 2004) that lecturers' conception of what constitutes academic literacy and the underlying causes of students' academic writing difficulties is likely to influence their opinions about who should assume responsibility for facilitating development of students' academic literacy, as well as the nature of academic literacy instruction to be offered to students. That is, as evident in this study and as observed by these authors, subject lecturers are likely not to consider teaching academic writing as their domain if they (a) interpret academic literacy as generalizable basic writing skills, (b) equate academic literacy with language proficiency, and (c) believe that the challenges students experience with academic writing emanate from their linguistic incompetence.

Besides academic literacy instruction, three students and three lecturers considered the general orientation which acquaints newly recruited students with the university's academic or learning culture at the commencement of their studies as an appropriate context in which students could be introduced to academic literacy requirements and conventions. As suggested by one of the lecturers, to be effective, such induction needs to be a systematic process rather than an ad-hoc event in response to students' poor performance.

"it should be one of those carefully thought-through issues, not just an after-thought. You wake up today and you say we should orient these people in academic writing, no.... the first week they should be trained in standards of academic writing. Otherwise if you leave it late to a point

where now they would have failed so many modules by that time maybe you try to intervene." (JLI1)

Importance is also attached to the timing of this induction. The three students emphasised the need for students to be oriented in academic writing on entry to university. As explained in the following extract, one student noted that induction in academic writing could be effective if offered before students are engaged in any writing assignments in their subject area.

"I would assume that if at the level of entry students are oriented on what academic writing is all about then the first assignment we will have received, we would have done better, because the orientation was done inbetween the semester while the assignments had already been started in other subjects. So if the orientation of how to come about with a convincing writing is all about at the entry point, maybe the first two weeks before engaging in the new studies, that can be helpful." (ASI4)

In agreement with the students on the importance of providing mature students with access to norms and practices of academic writing early on in their studies, one journalism lecturer thought that this could potentially enable them to begin to identify with their disciplinary communities besides their professional ones.

"When they come here right from the first semester, first week, they should be oriented in the principles and art of academic writing; that immediately they join the university, they should start thinking academically. They should start thinking as scholars now, not just as practitioners in the media industry. So it should be one of the key steps that we should take once they join [study programmes]" (JLI1)

These views suggest an understanding of student socialisation towards literacy practices of their communities as a one-off event held and completed at the point of entry into study programmes. The one-off event concept represents the process of socialising students into discourses of their disciplines as unproblematic. To conceive students' socialisation into discursive practices and genres of their disciplines in this manner is to assume uniformity in students' response to socialisation and not to acknowledge that academic discourse can be a "site of struggle" (Duff, 2010, p. 170) for novice members in terms of appropriating disciplinary discursive practices and identities. Also, it is to take it for granted that a one-off 189

induction session offered within a very limited time frame is sufficient enough to enable students to fully appropriate disciplinary practices and epistemological assumptions underlying these practices, as well as to gain access to the target genres and consequently develop capacity to produce them.

Moreover, this form of induction cannot provide direct entrants with a level of preparation for academic literacy demands similar to what their counterparts joining at year one are afforded. These year-one entrants have at least a year of exposure to literacy practices pertinent to their disciplines through writing assignments and feedback offered on their work. Also, they receive academic literacy instruction in a form of an EAP course upon entry to their programmes (see section 1.1.2 for details of the EAP course offered to year one entry students). In other words, it cannot be expected that students will develop competence in disciplinary discourses once they go through a one-off induction event. If student transition in HE is conceived as an "on-going process that is repeated over time" rather than "a one-off event" that becomes complete at the point of entry into university (Tett et al., 2017, p. 389), then it is fitting to position students' socialisation towards literacy practices of their disciplines as a process which, as Tait and Godfrey (2001) have suggested, should continue throughout the course of a study programme.

### 4.7.2 Learning to write through writing

Findings derived from both interview and questionnaire data revealed that providing students with regular writing opportunities was considered by several students (12 questionnaire respondents and 6 interviewees) and a minority of lecturers (2) as one way through which students' understanding of academic literacy practices and expected standards of quality could be enhanced. It was felt that feedback could facilitate improvement of the quality of students' writing, and thus performance. As indicated in the following quote, two lecturers saw a possibility of students becoming acquainted with academic discourse practices through affording them regular writing opportunities.

"They just have to write more... especially an issue of citation and referencing, if you can write regularly and pay attention to the details then it becomes seamless. It will just flow. So maybe rather than maybe have the students to write once in a while, they have to do it regularly." (JLI2)

The students believed that familiarity with discourse practices, through regular writing, would bolster students' confidence in their academic writing abilities. As explained in the following extract, this applies particularly to mature students, some of whom take a prolonged break from studying prior to commencing their university studies.

"being a mature student... being people who have stayed out of school for some time, to get to grips with the demands at school it takes maybe occasional (sic) writings to develop confidence and quality. So I would prefer if we were to get much exams or assignments so that if we are able to get poor grades, we would have a chance to work on them on the following exams... and by doing so...I believe we would work on our confidence....By writing more we would improve our quality and then we will really be addressing or writing to what the lecturers need" (IASI1)

These results imply recognition that students can become acquainted with discourse practices of their academic communities through doing writing. As Northedge (2003a) observes, socialising students towards, and enabling them to participate competently in, the discourses and practices of their disciplines, necessitates offering them opportunities to "speak and write the discourse in the 'presence' of a competent speaker" (p. 178). More importantly, Northedge (2003a) notes that by responding to students' writing, subject lecturers can help to shape students' use of the disciplinary discourse and thus enable them to make their own "legitimate meanings" (p. 178) within disciplinary discourses. Notwithstanding their benefits, writing regularly is not sufficient enough to enhance students' proficiency in disciplinary discourses. Developing competence in academic literacy practices largely depends on the design of writing tasks assigned to students. For example, if students are to develop fluency in writing with source texts, then they will need to undertake assignment tasks which support development of this academic literacy practice.

Students suggested the type of writing tasks which they wished to be afforded regular writing opportunities on the basis that such tasks could support development of their writing. For instance, tasks which require students to write with sources were recommended by two students. Reading scholarly texts was considered as a means through which their writing could be scaffolded as students would be exposed to academic writing practices.

"More literature review assignments so that as students read they may learn one or two things on how others write, especially on refereed journals" (IASS11)

Other students (5) recognised the role which peers can play in supporting development of fellow students' writing. Hence, value was attached to writing tasks which offered students opportunities to work collectively in small groups. It was felt that collaborative writing is an appropriate context in which students' writing could be mediated by peers. That is, collaboration with peers, whether in a form of group assignments or discussion of individual assignments during the writing process, could enable students to scaffold each other's writing and allow those experiencing writing challenges to benefit from the guidance of more capable peers. Moreover, it was felt that through feedback or guidance, peers could help shape the quality of fellow students' writing. The views of the students who expressed preference for collaborative writing are reflected in the following extract:

"Another thing that would certainly help it's doing this [a writing task] in groups since I might think other people are facing the same hurdles of which other people may be performing well. So what our department has done is that we are doing research [final year research paper] in groups, a group of three, a group of four, such that if I find it hard maybe my colleague can find it easy and might give us a guidance of which I've already seen it's happening." (ASI4)

If collaborative writing is understood as "all activity and communication surrounding the construction of texts by multiple contributors whether written or spoken, and whether planned or incidental" (Bremner, Peirson-Smith, Jones, & Bhatia, 2014, p. 151), then collaborative activities should not be restricted to assignments performed in groups. Whilst acknowledging that group assignment tasks provide students with opportunity to collaborate, students do not necessarily have to wait to be assigned group work in order to benefit from the collaborative processes. As evident from results presented in section 4.4.3, in practice, the boundary between individual and collaborative writing which students engage in can be blurry. That is, even when they are required to work independently on assignment tasks, to a certain degree, some students engage in collaborative processes at various stages of composing, for example in terms of brainstorming and exchanging of ideas on how to tackle

an assessment task, as well as enhance the quality of work. This means that even when the final product is supposed to reflect an individual's effort, students could still be encouraged to seek out opportunities for and participate in collaborative activities which involve high levels of interaction with peers and more capable others, such as those suggested by Bremner et al. (2014), namely, brainstorming, discussion or negotiation of meaning, and exchanging of ideas at the planning, composing, and revising stages. Students can engage in these activities for purposes of improving the quality of their work and more importantly to develop competencies in academic writing.

## 4.7.3 Use of dialogue as a "pedagogic space" for developing students' writing

Results indicate that dialogue with lecturers was seen by a few students as an appropriate context in which development of students' writing could be supported. Students' access to dialogue with lecturers was considered necessary specifically in the context of providing feedback on students' writing (also see section 4.4.2). For example, in interviews, two students recognised the importance of dialogue or interaction between lecturers and students especially in the absence of written feedback or when lecturers are incapable of providing personalised feedback on students' writing due to heavy marking workload and time constraints. As is suggested in the following student's response, dialogue or interaction between students and lecturers has potential to facilitate provision of tailored feedback, which could help address idiosyncrasies of students' writing development.

"They [lecturers] would just generalise maybe because there are a lot of students here or maybe they wouldn't address one-on-one or maybe they have busy schedules. They would just generalise saying that question you were supposed to answer it this way. But there are many ways in which you can tackle a question.... If there were sessions that could be where a student and a lecturer could sit down ten to fifteen minutes, discussing on how that assignment went, then I think people would improve." (JSI4)

The need for sustained dialogue or interaction with lecturers was alluded to in interview accounts of two students. Their responses suggest that provision of opportunities for consultations with lecturers should be the norm. As implied in the excerpt below, lecturers' receptivity to and availability for dialogue and interaction with students are factors which

could influence students' ability to actively seek writing support from lecturers (also see section 4.4.2).

"For those [lecturers] that are not open enough if they can be open enough to say you can come and consult me for each and every step where you are not understanding. I think by doing those kind of things I can make better progress." (IASII)

These students' view that interactions with lecturers have a pedagogical value of facilitating development of their writing seems to accord with Lillis' (2001, 2006) observation that dialogue can be regarded as a form of socialisation, and thus it can be centrally positioned in 'academic literacies pedagogy'. The pedagogical benefits of dialogue can go beyond what the students suggested, namely, facilitating processes of providing or clarifying feedback on students' writing. Other ways in which interactions between students and lecturers can support development of students' writing have been documented in the literature. For instance, it is within the context of these interactions that gaps between students' and lecturers' ways of understanding disciplinary literacy practices could emerge (Lea, 2004; Richards & Pilcher, 2013). Lecturers could also attempt to bridge the identified gaps through scaffolding students' learning of disciplinary practices by making literacy practices and conventions, within which they are expected to write, visible (Lillis, 2001, 2006). However, certain factors can prevent students from utilising and benefiting from "pedagogic spaces" (Lea, 2004, p. 745) offered by dialogue. Results of this study presented in section 4.4.2 suggest that students' decision to consult lecturers for writing support was influenced by their perceptions of accessibility of, and lecturers' receptiveness to dialogue, as well as their perceptions of socio-academic relations between students and lecturers. These factors could have an impact on students' ability to play an active role in developing their own academic writing, as well as lecturers' capacity to mediate such learning.

The findings of this study have shown that students can become agents of their own learning through, for example, engaging in collaborative activities with other students with the intent to deepen their understanding of writing expectations and improve quality of their writing (see section 4.4.3). Students could also be empowered to become agents of their learning of academic writing in terms of soliciting lecturer feedback by fostering an environment conducive for interactions between students and lecturers. Establishing conditions which

encourage dialogue between students and lecturers is especially crucial if students are to be positioned as capable of self-regulating their own learning of academic writing. As Boud and Molloy (2013) have observed, self-regulation in learners can be fostered by positioning them as generators or "elicitors of knowledge" (p. 705) for improving their own writing. Therefore, a conducive learning environment in which learners are able to seek feedback both within and outside of the classroom instead of waiting for lecturers to provide them with feedback can help develop students' capacity to take control of the development of their writing. However, it needs to be acknowledged that how students seek feedback from academic staff depends on the context of learning. For example, for large classes, as is mostly the case in the context of this study, it may not be sustainable for students to seek feedback from lecturers individually. In these contexts, students can be encouraged to raise issues in class, so that writing support is given to the whole class. If feasible, students can seek feedback in groups outside of the classroom.

# 4.7.4 Developing students' writing by enhancing their understanding of requirements and standards of academic writing

Results indicate that both students and lecturers suggested that raising students' awareness of the required standards of academic writing in the context of assessment could support development of students' writing. This suggestion was based on the belief that codifications of generic standards would ensure shared understanding of these amongst lecturers and students, consistency in the standards expected of students' writing at the departmental or institutional level, as well as enable students to apply, or comply with, the standards of quality in their own writing.

Several students (6 questionnaire respondents and 2 interviewees) suggested the need for shared understanding of requirements and standards of academic writing between students and lecturers. For instance, the need for students to become clearer about standards of academic writing and their application to assessment tasks was emphasised by these students. As indicated in responses of two students, the need for explicit articulation and shared understanding of academic standards was based on the observation that standards required of students' writing varied amongst lecturers even within the same discipline, and thus regarded as not transferable across assessment tasks written for different lecturers (see section 4.6.3).

Therefore, the need for specification of standards and practices of academic writing at the institutional or departmental level was recommended:

"I would say it would have been better if at the university level or at least at a departmental level if we are to agree on the style (of writing) ... lecturers from different backgrounds...have different demands. What would be a seventy percent plus assignment someone else would give you a sixty.... I think we needed to have some clear guidelines. For example, referencing.... we needed to sit down as a department or as a university that this is what we are going to be using." (JSI3)

In addition, several students (8 questionnaire respondents, 1 interviewee) suggested the need for lecturers to make requirements and standards of academic writing more explicit in task briefs for each assignment.

"it would be more important to say that that lecturer before giving you that assignment...he should tell you like what he is expecting you to come up with.... I think that can help because the feedback on a particular module in my case I could say it doesn't apply to the other [modules]." (PLMSI1)

Six lecturers across the disciplines also supported the idea of sharing academic standards at the institutional level. As the journalism lecturer explains in the following comment, lecturers have a collective responsibility in raising student awareness of standards and requirements of academic writing and ensuring application of these standards to assessment tasks

"the issue of standards should be shared thinking among lecturers in the departments. It should not be lecturer-specific to say when [lecturer A] asks us to write an assignment this is what she demands. Those demands should be shared by the institution. Poly [the institution] as a whole should share those demands.... It shouldn't be...a function of a particular individual...I think standards on academic writing...should be shared" (JLI1)

Whilst it is necessary for students to become aware of standards which are used to judge the quality of their written work, simply drawing students' attention to these standards and ensuring that these are demonstrated in their writing is insufficient to support improvement of 196

students' writing. The extent to which students' knowledge of standards can foster development of their writing is likely to depend on the goal of clarifying these standards for students, as well as how students understand the function of the specified standards and utilise these when engaging in assessment tasks. For instance, knowledge of standards is not likely to support development of students' writing if it fosters 'instrumentalism' (Torrance, 2007). That is, improvement of students' writing is likely not to materialise if students merely aim at complying with the specified standards of writing for students, the goal should be to develop students' capacity for self-regulation. That is, as argued by Gibbs (2006), students should be enabled to develop ability to assess their own work and monitor progress in their academic writing against the set standards (refer to section 5.4 for suggestions on pedagogical activities which can be used to enhance students' capacity to self-assess the quality of their own work against specified standards).

In order to facilitate the process of sharing these standards not only with students but also amongst lecturers, some lecturers (3) suggested documenting general standards of good academic writing practice. It was believed that standards codifications would lead to consistency amongst lecturers in the standards required of students' writing at the departmental and faculty level.

"maybe if we could establish standards for our students on our expectations, make it clear, put it in writing so that they should be aware of the standards expected of them... if we could standardise it as a department, as a faculty, to say this is what we want our students to be doing, I feel they are going to comply to that [standards].... the issue is we need to have proper guidelines to give to them of what is expected of good academic writing work." (BALI1)

These lecturers also suggested a clear institutional policy or measures which would ensure that all lecturers require students to write according to the norms and conventions of academic writing, prioritise assessment of students' writing, as well as expect similar standards of academic writing.

"Perhaps we need a clear policy. If it is there, then we don't know that it is there. For instance, plagiarism, students do plagiarise and in fact sometimes even the lecturer doesn't know that they have plagiarised, or he knows but he doesn't care. Referencing when they are writing, sometimes they would just write without referencing because it's not required.... as an institution we need a mechanism...that ensures that lecturers are requiring students to write academically." (ALI3)

Although specifications of standards can facilitate sharing of standards amongst lecturers, it does not guarantee uniformity in the standards which lecturers would expect for each assessment task. Studies such as O'Donovan et al.'s (2001) have shown that verbal descriptors of standards are open to interpretation. This leads to, as Harrington et al. (2006b) point out, variation in what lecturers consider as the most important qualities in students' written work. In this study, variation in lecturers' interpretation of standards was reported by several students who noticed that such variation made it futile to transfer standards across assessment tasks written for different lecturers (see section 4.6.3.1). These results suggest that what is needed is for students to share lecturers' interpretation of the generic codified standards pertinent to each assessment task.

# 4.7.5 Knowledge of students' prior literacy practices can inform pedagogical practices for scaffolding students' academic literacy

To ensure inclusiveness in provision of writing support and to determine the possible appropriate means of facilitating students' academic writing development, in interviews, two students suggested that lecturers should be well informed about mature students' academic writing competencies acquired from their training at the FE level. This view was shared by one lecturer. The results indicate that two techniques which lecturers could use to gain insights into literacy practices students enter university with were proposed. The first technique is conducting needs analysis to gauge students' level of familiarity with academic writing practices. As explained in the following excerpt, the needs analysis of students' writing needs should be conducted upon entry into their study programmes. This could involve asking learners about what they already know and what they need to learn.

"by the time we are being enrolled here maybe we should be given a chance, or a form to fill, asking us questions whether we know about the academic writing or not... friends of ours that started from the second year, they were given a chance to explain how they think they can be assisted. That's why they got to be helped on the academic writing, how to use the citations, the references." (BASI4)

The second technique is reviewing the curriculum of study programmes which are offered by further education institutions, and whose qualifications students use to enrol in degree programmes (see section 3.2.2 for details of these qualifications and awarding institutions). As explained in the excerpt below, reviewing the nature of writing support offered to students in their previous study at the FE level could help lecturers to establish students' level of knowledge of academic writing which they enter university with.

"they [the institution] have to look at.... the diplomas that they use when selecting mature entry students. They have to check what do these boards, let's say ICAM [Institute of Chartered Accountants in Malawi], ACCA [Association of Chartered Certified Accountants], what do they offer? Do they offer something like English language?" (ASI2)

The students' and lecturer's suggestions render support to Lea (2004) and Paxton and Frith's (2014, 2015) argument that information derived from probing discursive resources which students bring from other contexts, such as prior study and work, can inform lecturers' decisions pertaining to how students' academic literacy should be scaffolded. Paxton and Frith (2014, 2015) have argued that what makes probing discursive resources which students bring from prior study or other contexts necessary is that it allows lecturers to gain insights into the disjunctures between students' prior literacy practices and disciplinary practices. When these disjunctions are not identified and addressed early, as is evident in this study, they can continue to negatively impact students' ways of meaning making in their writing throughout the course of their studies (see section 4.6.2). Knowledge of discontinuities between students' prior practices and those of their disciplines can, as observed by Artemeva and Fox (2010) and Richards and Pilcher (2013), allow lecturers to interrogate their own assumptions about discursive resources students bring to disciplinary writing from other contexts. In this study, these assumptions were perceived by students as detrimental to provision of appropriate writing support to mature students (refer to sections 4.6.1 and 4.6.4.1).

The proposed needs analysis technique can help lecturers learn about students' experiences of academic writing in prior learning. However, unless students are aware of literacy practices of their disciplines which they are expected to engage with, the needs analysis exercise may not be effective in helping lecturers establish what students need to learn in order to develop competence in academic literacy. Therefore, the main limitation of asking students about their academic literacy needs is that as novice writers in their communities they are unlikely to have not only knowledge of disciplinary practices but also, as Etherington (2008) points out, the specific nature of genres which they are expected to produce. This is more likely to apply in cases where the needs analysis exercise is conducted at the point of entry into study programmes, as per the suggestion of one student in this study.

The limitations of asking students about their academic literacy needs suggest the need to supplement needs analysis with other means of establishing students' knowledge of literacy practices which they enter university with. For example, formative assessment could help lecturers explore the following: (1) the nature of literacy practices from prior study and even professional contexts students draw on in their writing, (2) how the discursive resources which are drawn on enable or constrain meaning-making expected in their disciplines, and (3) disjunctures between practices students bring from other contexts and disciplinary practices they are expected to engage in. In the context of dialogue with students, lecturers can use this knowledge derived from analysis of students' texts as a basis for probing into meaning-making practices brought from other contexts which may not be evident in students' texts. In addition, these discussions can dwell on establishing what influences students' decision to draw on certain practices.

## 4.7.6 A summary of findings on recommended support for development of mature students' academic writing

- Inclusiveness in provision of academic literacy support to diverse groups of students, including mature students, was recommended by both students and lecturers.
- Lecturers felt that subject lecturers should participate in socialising students towards academic discourse practices through assessment, for example, by providing feedback on students' work and ensuring that standards of academic writing are required of students' assignments. Lecturers also recommended writing support in a form of 'bridging', 'short', or 'remedial' courses which could be delivered by librarians. On

the other hand, a few students wished to be taught academic writing by language lecturers.

- Students and lecturers felt that orientation in academic writing would be more effective if offered at the start of their studies and if it is a systematic process rather than an intervention following students' underachievement.
- Participants indicated that through regular writing, students would be able to gain access to and become familiar with discourse practices, as well as bolster confidence in their writing abilities.
- Certain types of writing tasks, such as those requiring collaboration and writing from sources, were perceived as likely to support development of students' writing competence.
- Participants regarded dialogue and interaction between lecturers and students as an appropriate context for provision of tailored feedback which could help address idiosyncrasies of students' writing development.
- Lecturers' receptiveness to and accessibility for dialogue were perceived as factors which could encourage students to seek dialogic feedback and facilitate sustained provision of opportunities for dialogue and interaction between students and lecturers.
- Participants indicated that specification of standards would facilitate the process of sharing standards at the institutional level, ensure consistency amongst lecturers in the standards required of students' writing, and enable students to apply these to their own writing.
- Establishing students' academic writing competencies on entry into study programmes was deemed a necessity for provision of appropriate support for mature students' writing development.
- Source texts were viewed as scaffolds of students' academic writing development, as they could help enhance students' academic discursive knowledge.

#### **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter begins with a summary of findings according to each research question raised in chapter two and discussed in chapter five. It will then go on to present pedagogical implications of this study for the Polytechnic College and UNIMA as an immediate context of this study, as well as other HE institutions in Malawi and in the broader context which enrol mature students. Focus is on how these institutions can support mature students' development of academic writing so that they are able to transition successfully to the academic writing demands of their disciplines. This is followed by limitations pertaining to the research design and findings of the present study. Other suggestions for further research which are derived from the present study's findings and limitations are highlighted in the next section. The final section is a summary of implications of this study's findings for research on academic writing experiences of undergraduate mature students.

### 5.2 Summary of research

The aim of this study was to explore student and lecturer perceptions of academic writing experiences of final year mature undergraduates at the Polytechnic College, University of Malawi. In order to respond to these questions, a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was adopted in this study, whereby a questionnaire was employed first and was followed by retrospective semi-structured interviews with some of the questionnaire respondents for further discussion of their questionnaire responses. The study was conducted at the Polytechnic, the second largest constituent college of the University of Malawi and involved final year mature undergraduates in varied social science fields, as well as lecturers from the same disciplinary areas as the students. What follows is a summary of key findings which address each research question.

# **RQ1:** How do mature undergraduate students and their lecturers interpret requirements of student writing in a Malawian context?

The results indicate that students' interpretation of certain writing requirements suggest their misconceptions about and limited understanding of what these attributes entail. Evident in interview responses of several students is a misconception about the nature of argumentation
required at university, namely, that an argument is developed based on comparison of two opposing positions. Similarly, a good number of students seem not to be aware of core pedagogical functions of citation. They largely understand citation as a means through which academic integrity is achieved and punitive consequences of inappropriate source attribution are avoided. These students also think that citation is required because lecturers mainly want to establish the scope and quality of their research or reading on an assignment topic. Also, some students think that demonstrating critical thinking/evaluation in their writing entails going beyond the scope of given task demands and drawing on content knowledge exceeding what is acquired in the classroom, but without engaging with such knowledge.

Lecturers' interpretation of writing requirements reveals understandings which most students do not share. A few lecturers' understanding of argumentation in academic writing indicate the foregrounding of the epistemic function of writing; that is, rather than merely recounting existing knowledge or evidence, they emphasise engaging with this knowledge in order to develop one's own perspectives on a given subject. As regards critical evaluation of content knowledge, several lecturers consider critical evaluation of content knowledge as an essential element of argument development and contribution to academic debates. They also associate critical evaluation with the epistemic function of academic writing. They consider critical evaluation as a resource which enables writers to develop their own position as regards to subject content. Critical evaluation, involving active engagement with existing knowledge, is also seen as key to constructing knowledge and meaning making. Concerning use of source texts, several lecturers' views on use of source texts foreground the epistemic function of source texts in academic writing. They hold the view that writers should use information from literature as a basis for developing own voice and generating new perspectives on a subject. Some of these lecturers' views indicate that they value students' ability to clearly distinguish between their own and other authors' voices by attributing the latter appropriately.

## **RQ2:** How do these mature students learn about what is required of their writing at UNIMA?

The study has shown that students attempt to enhance their understanding of requirements of academic writing through different ways, namely: using peer assignment exemplars, through lecturer feedback on their written work, interaction/dialogue with other students, and through

assessment task briefs. Students consult high-scoring peers' assignments and self-appraise their writing in relation to other students' assignments for different purposes, namely: to understand criteria used to assess their writing, to learn how their own work falls short of satisfying task demands which are successfully met in peers' assignments, to identify areas of improvement, to learn how task requirements can be applied successfully in future assignments, and to understand lecturer feedback on their own work.

Lecturer feedback on students' work helps expose gaps in students' interpretation of expected standards of academic writing and enables them to identify and bridge these gaps. In addition, guidance from fellow students, obtained through one-on-one consultations and group discussions, proves useful in the context of writing assignments. Through these discussions, students obtain clarification on how to approach, or respond to, the demands of unfamiliar writing tasks. Furthermore, oral or written assessment task briefs provide students with guidelines on the requirements for assignments. Students also derive expectations for assignments from task questions, particularly if they are well phrased.

The findings also indicate that several factors are implicated in students' inability to develop understanding of requirements expected of their writing. Firstly, certain attributes of lecturer feedback and assessment task briefs do not facilitate the bridging of the gap between students' and lecturers' knowledge of writing requirements, namely: obscure or vaguely worded task questions, less detailed task briefs, and feedback which is more retrospective than forward looking, non-specific, and less detailed. Secondly, power differential between students and lecturers inhibit some students from seeking lecturer feedback in order to clarify task requirements and lecturer expectations on their written work. Thirdly, lack of opportunities for interaction with lecturers outside of the classroom, due to the lecturers' unavailability, prevents students from clarifying academic expectations on assignments while writing or after their work is assessed.

### **RQ3:** What are the perceived affordances of discursive resources from professional contexts which these mature students bring to bear on their writing?

The study has shown that, if exploited appropriately, discursive resources from the workplace can enrich mature students' meaning making. Both students and lecturers acknowledge that mature students who enter university with knowledge of workplace genres do not face much difficulty writing assignments which simulate real-world workplace writing specific to their 204

professions. Also, students who have knowledge of professional practice are not restricted to drawing on the sanctioned traditional academic resources, such as disciplinary knowledge, for evidence to support their arguments. Their meaning-making is enriched by insights from professional practice.

## **RQ4:** What reasons do these students and lecturers give for academic writing challenges of mature students?

The study has revealed that the academic writing challenges experienced by mature students are compounded by lecturer assumptions about their previous writing experiences in prior study and the workplace these students bring with them to university. These assumptions, which do not often match students' realities, have a detrimental impact on the quality of academic literacy support offered to these students and thus, the development of their academic writing.

Also, due to variation in lecturer perceptions of what constitutes academic writing, students discover that it is futile to apply writing advice or feedback obtained from one lecturer to subsequent assignments written for other lecturers. Students experience difficulties in discerning what they perceive as idiosyncratic academic writing demands of lecturers and switching from one lecturer's writing requirements to those of another within the same discipline.

The findings also indicate that a tendency to draw on professional practices which are at odds with those of their discipline is the main factor implicated in the writing challenges faced by journalism students. Lecturers attribute this students' behaviour mainly to their inability to distinguish between discursive practices of different domains. The results further reveal that the consequence of lack of systematic academic literacy support programmes for mature students is that provision of writing support is left to the discretion of individual lecturers. This, as found in this study, disadvantages mature students in two ways, namely: (1) even if lecturers are aware of the students' disciplinary writing needs and challenges, they may not perceive the need to develop these students writing, partly due to their assumptions about previous writing experiences students bring with them to university; (2) even if lecturers acknowledge the need to provide students with support to address their writing needs and challenges, they may not be well positioned to decide on the best possible ways of supporting development of students' writing.

## **RQ5:** What strategies for developing the academic writing of mature students do these students and lecturers suggest?

The following strategies for developing mature students' academic writing were suggested by students and lecturers: providing academic literacy instruction to all mature students regardless of level of commencement of degree programme, using dialogue as "pedagogic space" (Lea, 2004, p. 745) for developing students' writing, using knowledge about students' prior literacy practices to inform pedagogical practices for scaffolding students' academic literacy, and enhancing students' understanding of requirements and standards of academic writing. Moreover, some lecturers acknowledged that they need to play an active role in socialising students towards academic discourse practices. However, this role is mainly confined to assessment. That is, these lecturers appear not to recognise writing instruction as their responsibility. Hence, they delegated academic literacy instruction to other staff members, such as librarians and writing instructors.

#### **5.3 Theoretical implications**

The results of this study raise several implications for HE institutions which admit mature students who enter degree programmes as direct entrants and with alternative qualifications such as an FE qualification and work experience, as well as students who straddle academic and professional discursive contexts.

The findings of this study reinforce that the writing which students engage in at university is not merely an individual/cognitive process or product (Lillis & Curry, 2010) but, to a large extent, a social activity which is mediated by the capable others. These capable others are not just lecturers but also students. The latter's role, as revealed in this study, is to act an "immediate audience" (Devet et al., 2006) to fellow students' written work, and mediate other students' understanding of expectations or requirements of academic writing. It is, therefore, argued that students' socialisation into discursive practices of their disciplines is not only facilitated by more proficient members (i.e. lecturers) of their academic communities (Duff, 2010). Rather, the role of inducting students into their discourse communities extends to the capable others such as students.

In this study, lecturers' views about addressing students' writing challenges, such as remediating students' writing deficiencies through writing instruction offered outside of

disciplines, reflect the autonomous model and deficit view of literacy suggested by Lea and Street (1998). This confirms that lecturers' views of how students learn to write and how students' writing is developed are likely to be influenced by dominant discourses which underpin their understanding of academic writing.

The study reinforces the view that lecturer assumptions and expectations about students' prior academic writing experiences do not often match students' realities. Contrary to lecturers' expectations, direct entrants do not commence their degree programmes equipped with literacy competences which would enable them to meet disciplinary writing demands. If lecturers have high and unrealistic expectations about the affordances of prior discursive resources which direct entrants bring along to university, a result can be the treatment of these students as non-novices in academic discourses. It appears that different entry levels and route paths to university have an impact on how students are perceived as members of their discourse communities; that is, the entry levels of students into study programmes can influence the extent to which they are treated as new-comers to disciplinary discourses and thus in need of being socialised towards discursive practices of their disciplines. Besides conducting a needs analysis with students, there appears to be a need for lecturers, programme directors, or curriculum designers to interrogate the appropriateness of their own expectations about what resources which students bring along to university should afford them when writing in the academic context, if these students are to be offered academic literacy support befitting their needs.

The study also highlights the need for lecturers to acknowledge that regardless of prior writing experiences they enter university with, mature students are equally in need of academic literacy support which would enable them to access discursive practices they are expected to engage with in their disciplines. Moreover, it is argued that how lecturers perceive mature students' knowledge and experiences brought from outside of the university context is likely to influence the quality of academic literacy support they offer to this group of students.

This study emphasises that cultures of learning which mature students bring with them to university differ from those which are expected at university. That is, there is a mismatch between the kinds of writing demands such as assessment forms and practices which students encounter in prior learning and university courses. At the FE level, there is also insufficient level of engagement in specialised discourses through writing assignments. Also, as was reported by both students and lecturers in this study, the training students receive at the FE level is mainly to socialise them into the discursive practices and written genres of their profession rather than academic genres. If, as was the case in this study, they have inadequate FE preparation for the kind of writing demands they encounter at university, students who enter university with alternative entry qualifications may have subject knowledge but not academic literacies. Therefore, many of these students do not just need study skills or remediation of their skills deficiencies. More importantly, there is need to socialise the students into the discourse practices and written genres of their disciplines. Also there is need to raise students' awareness of the implicit assumptions about disciplinary ways of constructing and using knowledge (disciplines' epistemology) (Dressen-Hammouda, 2008; Morton, 2009) and the "contested nature of academic writing conventions" (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 12).

This study also emphasises the notion that direct entrants are disadvantaged as they are not afforded opportunities to develop their academic writing, for instance through academic literacy instruction which is offered to their peers whose entry to university is through the traditional route. By virtue of their entry into the university at an advanced level, mature students are either not treated as novices in disciplinary discourses or they are probably seen as established novices in comparison with their peers who transition from school and enter in year one.

This study highlights areas of disagreements in student understanding and lecturer explanations of desirable attributes of student writing which feature prominently in assessment criteria and lecturer written feedback. Given this, there appears to be a need for lecturers to be aware of gaps between student and lecturer understanding of what these requirements involve in undergraduate writing. Knowledge of these gaps is necessary if lecturers are to be able to address any misconceptions students may have about these attributes and narrow such gaps. It is argued that the nature and quality of academic literacy support offered to mature students are likely to depend on the extent to which lecturers understand mature students' experiences of HE academic literacy practices. Also it is argued that insufficient understanding of academic writing experiences of these students at university can lead to misconceptions about their academic literacy needs, as well as institutional

policies about provision of academic literacy support not befitting the needs and interests of these students.

For lecturers who teach undergraduate mature students, the study highlights the limitations of student texts. As a final product, texts do not reveal all the academic writing processes of students. From the texts alone, it may not be possible to infer the literacy practices which students draw upon and consequently shape their texts. Also, texts may not reveal what influences students' decision to draw on meaning making practices brought from other writing contexts. From the students written texts, lecturers may not identify certain difficulties and factors underlying such difficulties which students face during the assignment writing process. What this means is that information obtained from students' written work is not enough to enable HE institutions or lecturers to devise appropriate ways of responding to students' writing challenges and supporting development of their academic writing. There appears to be a case for advocating use of dialogue as a "pedagogic space" (Lea, 2004, p. 745) for developing students' writing. Dialogue between students and lecturers could provide a forum in which students' writing experiences at university could be made more visible to lecturers. Within the context of these interactions, students can talk about their academic writing experiences, particularly their prior writing experiences and academic writing difficulties encountered at university. Also, during these interactions, gaps between students' and lecturers' ways of interpreting disciplinary literacy practices could emerge (Lea, 2004; Richards & Pilcher, 2013), and lecturers could bridge the identified gaps by making literacy practices and conventions, within which students are expected to write, visible (Lillis, 2001, 2006).

#### **5.4 Pedagogical implications**

Several pedagogical implications arise from this study's findings in relation to provision of academic literacy support aimed at facilitating mature-entry students' successful transition to academic writing demands of their disciplines. The findings of this study have shown that, in the absence of writing support to familiarise them with genres and discursive practices of their subject areas, students revert to and draw on their knowledge of antecedent genres and discursive practices which have served them well elsewhere, for example, in the workplace. However, the study has highlighted the inappropriateness and inadequacy of some of these genres and practices for meaning making in academic disciplines. These results call for the

need to increase students' awareness of genres and literacy practices of their disciplines. Rather than simply entrusting individual lecturers with this responsibility, academic literacy support should be systematically incorporated in the curriculum for each study programme. The 'curriculum-linked' approach to discipline-specific academic writing instruction espoused by Wingate (2015) can be adapted. The main features of this approach are that literacy instruction is embedded in the curriculum and that subject and literacy lecturers are equally involved in course design and delivery. Section 2.5 details the main attributes of this approach. To ensure that misconceptions about disciplinary literacy practices and genres which students might have are addressed as early as possible, writing instruction would have to be offered upon entry into degree programmes. Also, the writing programme would have to be timetabled to encourage student participation and ensure lecturers' commitment to delivering the course.

The success of implementing this literacy instruction approach mainly depends on the cooperation between subject and literacy lecturers. For example, its success will depend on subject lecturers' ability to provide input for course design and development of teaching resources, as well as their willingness to contribute to teaching in the writing course. Its success is also likely to be determined by the following factors which Dudley-Evans (2001, p. 228) has identified: (1) clearly defined roles of subject and literacy lecturers, (2) subject and literacy lecturers acknowledge each other's professionalism, and (3) relatively limited demands on subject lecturers in terms of time allotted to teaching. More importantly, extending explicit literacy instruction to mature-entry students, whose studies commence at year two or three, calls for reviewing and restructuring of subject curriculum at the departmental or faculty level.

This study's findings suggest that when students' misconceptions about, and limitations in their understanding of, requirements of academic writing are not addressed, they can become consolidated and persist into later stages of their studies and become a barrier to students' successful writing. To address this issue, lecturers can use assessment as an opportunity to identify and address these misconceptions and limitations by focusing attention on students' understanding of these practices. Feedback offered on their writing can be used both to draw students' attention to misunderstandings and familiarise them with disciplinary literacy practices. Assessment tasks should be designed in a way that students are enabled to engage

in practices such as argument development, criticality, and source text use, which findings of this study have shown are likely to be inadequately understood by students. That is, assessment tasks can be used to develop students' knowledge of these literacy practices by foregrounding them in the criteria used to assess their work.

Results of this study have shown that outside of the classroom, some students often engage in activities which enable them to make evaluative judgements about their own and other students' work. To deepen their understanding of requirements and standards of writing expected in their assignments, these students seek feedback from peers and use other students' work as exemplars. Given students' ability to engage in these activities, lecturers should incorporate into the curriculum coaching exercises which would support further development of students' capacity to make judgements about the quality of their own and others' work. Activities which enable students to generate their own feedback and make evaluative judgements of their own and others' work against specified standards are important. These activities, which have the potential to foster self-regulation in learners, are particularly important in the current HE environment of large student enrolments, where students do not have easy access to lecturer feedback in the course of writing assignments and the feedback offered on their written work is not always of high quality. Ideally, this coaching should be done before students are assigned assignments or whilst they are in the process of writing assignments so that they have opportunity to evaluate the quality of their work and how it can be improved. One of the possible outcomes of developing students' capacity for evaluative judgements, as McConlogue (2015) notes, is that students can become less dependent on lecturers' judgments of their work in order to improve its quality.

Lecturers can choose assignments submitted by previous cohorts of students and which represent different dimensions of quality. Initially, unannotated versions of these assignments should be used so that students' judgements are not influenced by those of their lecturers. Students can comment on these assignments both individually and in groups in relation to criteria provided on feedback sheets. These criteria can be like those used to evaluate assignments which students are working on or would be required to work on. As per Tai et al.'s (2018) recommendation, students should be required not just to rate performance according to criteria, but more importantly to provide comments or justification on why they rate the quality of work the way they do. That is, focus should be on how the assignments

meet or fail to meet standards presented in the criteria. Students should also be given annotated versions of the assignments they have commented on so that they are able to compare their judgements with the lecturers'. As in Hendry et al.'s (2012) study, a discussion between students and lecturers can centre on how assignment exemplars were judged at different quality levels and why lecturers assessed the exemplars the way they did. Here, collaboration between subject and academic literacy lecturers could prove useful. Subject lecturers could benefit from the expertise of literacy lecturers on how to explicate literacy requirements by analysing the qualities of good academic writing embedded in the exemplars, as well as the characteristics of genres in which the assignment exemplars are written. A strategy of analysing exemplars which Tribble and Wingate (2013) have adopted in their study can be useful in the context of this study. Subject and literacy lecturers can jointly develop a commentary on assignment exemplars, by identifying 'textual features and patterns' that differentiate the quality of high and low achieving assignments. The commentary can highlight 'desirable features' in high achieving assignments and 'problematic aspects' of low achieving assignments.

The findings of this study have shown that the quality of rubrics can contribute to the widening of the gap between students' and lecturers' knowledge of standards expected of students' assignments. If, as Tai et al. (2018) has argued, rubrics can be regarded as a 'scaffold or pedagogy' (p. 476) to support the development of students' evaluative judgement, then lack of understanding of standards limits the students' capacity to self-assess the quality of their work in relation to the set standards. The consequence of lack of familiarity with academic standards, as was reported by students in this study, is failure to meet the quality expected of their assignments. To ensure that students can envision what quality looks like at different performance levels, evaluative criteria and descriptors of quality should be provided and discussed. Assignment exemplars can also be used to illustrate the standards which students are expected to apply to their own work.

Outcomes of this study have shown that students want opportunities for dialogue or interaction with lecturers to discuss their work and seek feedback on their writing. However, it has also been established that students can be reluctant to solicit lecturer feedback outside of the classroom due to inaccessibility of lecturers and the power differential between students and lecturers. Whilst acknowledging that opportunities for student-lecturer dialogue,

especially outside the classroom, can be rare, dialogue around students' texts and lecturer feedback is still necessary. This dialogue is particularly important when lecturer written feedback is inadequate. Since it may not be feasible for lecturers to meet students one by one, especially in the context of large class sizes, these dialogues can be held in the classroom. For instance, students can be asked to go through the feedback on their work and take note of comments which they would like to discuss with the lecturer. Students can also be encouraged to raise issues surrounding lecturer feedback, particularly regarding its quality. Students can forward a summary of feedback comments and other issues to lecturers in advance. This information could also serve as formative feedback to the lecturers which they can use to reflect on, and find ways to improve, their feedback practices. Alternatively, if possible, lecturers could meet students in small groups to discuss their work and feedback. Inclass discussion of written feedback students receive on their work can also benefit those who feel inhibited about interacting with lecturers outside of the classroom, particularly in one-to-one meetings.

The study has found that lecturer assumptions and expectations regarding students' previous academic writing experiences do not often match students' realities. This finding calls for the need for lecturers to learn more about literacy practices required of mature-entry students in their previous learning in order to identify mismatches between previous literacy practices and those expected in their subject areas at university. These gaps should be considered when designing literacy instruction and assessment aimed at developing these students' academic writing. The study's findings also indicate that lack of accurate knowledge of mature-entry students' previous writing experiences can prevent lecturers from providing appropriate writing support which these students require in order to develop competence in literacy practices of their subject areas. That is, if not interrogated and addressed, assumptions made about mature students' knowledge of academic literacy practices can have a detrimental impact on the quality of writing support offered to this group of students. As discussed in section 4.7.5, in order to gain insights into students' prior literacy practices and antecedent genre knowledge, two techniques can be used. Firstly, curriculum designers and programme directors can review the course syllabi for study programmes offered at the FE level in order to establish the writing demands of these courses. Specifically, such a review can focus on the writing tasks and characteristics of the written genres required of students. Secondly,

lecturers can use formative assessment early in the students' studies to determine the discursive resources (e.g. genre knowledge) they enter their study programme with.

In order to find out about workplace practices students bring with them to university, subject lecturers can administer a standard survey to all mature students at the beginning of their studies. The survey can explore specific writing demands these students experience in their professions. These demands can include those which Knoch et al. (2016) have explored in their study of the writing demands experienced by recent graduates in engineering and accounting professions in Australia, namely: the kinds of writing done at work, the audiences they write for, how much writing they do or have done for work, the features of the texts they produce, the qualities of writing that employers identify as important, and challenging aspects of professional writing.

#### 5.5 Study limitations

Several caveats, some of which are raised in chapter three regarding the methodology used, need to be noted in relation to the findings and conclusions of this study. Firstly, the findings represent perceptions of one cohort of final year mature undergraduates and their lecturers drawn from social science disciplines at one constituent college of UNIMA. The participants' perceptions of mature students' academic writing experiences depend on students' academic and professional backgrounds coupled with the disciplinary and institutional contexts within which their writing occurred. Therefore, it is acknowledged that the findings of this study are more pertinent to students and lecturers in similar circumstances to those involved in this study.

Secondly, notwithstanding the significance of the lecturers' contributions to this study, the views of a few lecturers may reflect idiosyncratic rather than collective understanding or interpretation of what constitutes academic writing, its norms and demands in their disciplinary area and specifically in their respective subject areas. As Lea & Stierer (2000, p. 4) have observed, what is considered as academic writing or good quality academic writing is to a certain extent based on "individual preferences" of lecturers or their "individual interpretation" of norms and conventions of academic writing. Thus, lecturers are likely to have distinct understandings of what constitutes academic writing within and across disciplines (Etherington, 2008; Lea & Street, 1998).

Thirdly, the findings of this study are based on self-reported data elicited through semistructured interviews and questionnaires. Although several interview questions for students were centred on samples of their written work they had brought to the interview, I neither analysed their writing, nor lecturer feedback comments. Analysis of the students' texts and lecturer feedback could have offered useful insights into students' performance in assessment tasks and markers' perceptions of students' capacity to meet requirements and standards of academic writing for a particular task. The one-off text-based interviews used offer limited, but insightful, glimpses into students' writing experiences.

Another limitation of the study design is asking students to talk about assignments which not all students had brought along to the interview. For example, when asked to talk about one assignment which was most successful and another one which was least successful, 14 out of the 35 interviewed students chose to talk about assignments which they had with them. The rest decided to talk about assignments they had not brought to the interview. It was observed that the students who did not have the assignments with them were sometimes hesitant or uncertain about some of the aspects of the assignments they were talking about. Their vague recollection of the details of the assignments can be attributed to limited memory as some of the assignments which students chose to talk about were written some time before. Reference to such assignments could have jogged their memory and thus minimised the tendency to generalise rather than provide the specifics.

Although in interviews students were able to reflect on their writing experiences over the course of their degree programmes, the research design mainly provides a snapshot of students' perceptions of their writing experiences taken at a particular point in time of their studies. It is acknowledged that as students progress through their studies, their writing experiences are likely to evolve. Thus, certain experiences are likely to be related to specific phases of study. For example, due to changing writing demands, the writing challenges experienced in the initial period of their studies are likely to vary from those encountered in the latter stage. Therefore, perceptions of writing experiences captured in this study are mainly of students in the advanced stage of their studies. Nevertheless, by focusing on students at the end of their studies, it was possible to gain useful insights into their writing experiences since the commencement of their studies.

#### **5.6 Suggestions for future research**

The findings of this study raise several questions which should be addressed in future research. Although the final year mature students involved in this study were able to reflect on their academic writing experiences since they joined their study programmes, a longitudinal study could help establish these students' writing experiences at different stages of their studies. A study designed to follow a group of mature students from the beginning to the end of their degree programmes would illuminate whether these students' writing experiences change over the course of their studies, how their experiences change, and what contributes to such changes. In order to investigate these changes, students could be interviewed soon after their arrival at university to establish their pre-university writing experiences and their expectations about academic writing at university, and at the end of each semester of the two or three years of their university education. Outcomes of this research could help establish the academic literacy needs of mature students at different phases of their university career and inform strategies for supporting development of students' writing to enable them to meet writing demands at different stages in the degree programme.

Since mature students at UNIMA articulate into year two or three of degree programmes, it would be interesting to find out how academic writing experiences of students who commence their studies at these different levels compare. Specifically, research is needed to probe the implications of the entry level on students' transition to academic literacy practices. Findings of this study have revealed more commonalities than differences in students' perceptions of their writing experiences across disciplines. However, these results do not imply that students' writing experiences do not vary according to disciplinary area. Therefore, future research should probe these differences. Particularly, further research should look closely into the variation of students' and lecturers' interpretation of requirements of academic writing according to subject area.

Although there are hints from this study's findings that students' ways of understanding requirements of academic writing could be influenced by their lecturers' guidance, it is not very clear where students' misconceptions or limited understandings of these requirements stem from. Therefore, additional research is needed to gain a deeper understanding into what influences students' ways of interpreting requirements of academic writing if the

misunderstandings identified in this study are to be addressed. This will require eliciting data from additional sources besides in-depth interviews, for example, writing guidance offered in course handbooks, study manuals or handouts, samples of written feedback on students' work, and other reading materials which students consult for general advice on academic writing such as textbooks recommended in course outlines.

The present study has found that some of the discursive resources from the workplace which mature students draw on in their academic writing fall short of enabling them to meet disciplinary writing demands and constrain their learning of disciplinary practices. In this study, this particularly applies to students in the field of journalism. Given the influence of professional discursive knowledge on students' academic writing practices, further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding about the following: the nature of writing experiences from professional contexts and prior study which students from different disciplines bring to their academic writing, as well as how and why students draw on prior discursive resources. Text-based interviews on writing samples from both work and prior study could be used to enable students to reflect on the kinds of writing done in these contexts which help them tackle particular assessment tasks and how and why they draw on the identified previous writing experiences when writing the assignments. Outcomes of this research could provide useful insights into how mature students use familiar writing experiences to negotiate their transition to unknown academic writing demands.

Given that some mature students straddle the academic and professional discursive worlds and switch between literacy practices of these domains, some of which conflict, future research should address the following questions: How do these students feel about engaging in academic literacy practices which are at odds with those of their professional communities? Considering that they may enter university already invested in the membership of their professional communities and which they possibly primarily identify with, do these students experience any difficulties identifying with academic disciplinary practices?

A similar study is recommended at the UNIMA and other HE contexts involving students from other disciplines such as the sciences. This could enhance the extrapolation of this study's findings to groups of students in other disciplines. Future research should also compare academic writing experiences of mature students based on such characteristics as gender, age, entry qualification, whether they continue to work whilst studying, and prior writing experiences at the FE level.

#### 5.7 Concluding remarks

Globally, as universities continue to expand enrolment of mature students in accordance with the widening access and life-long learning discourses, it is imperative that academic literacy experiences and needs of this group of students are sufficiently understood if they are to be supported appropriately in meeting the writing demands of their degree programmes. This study has explored perceptions of academic writing experiences of final year mature undergraduates in a Malawian HE context.

The study has contributed to the growing body of scholarship about mature students' experiences of academic literacy in HE. It has revealed that the challenges which mature students experience with academic writing are exacerbated by lecturer and institutional assumptions and expectations about writing experiences and knowledge these students bring with them to university. The study has shown that these assumptions and expectations do not often match students' realities. The assumptions and expectations, which emanate from insufficient understanding of these students' previous writing experiences, make the specific literacy needs of mature students less visible and impede provision of appropriate support aimed at facilitating their successful transition to and participation in disciplinary writing.

This study's findings reveal that understanding mature students' experiences of writing in other contexts, namely, the workplace and previous education, is necessary if they are to be provided with appropriate scaffolding for developing their academic literacy at university. This study has also shown that there is a need for inclusiveness in providing support to mature students irrespective of their entry route and level of commencement of degree programme. What this means is that granting mature students access to university education also entails affording them institutional support which would ensure their successful participation in, and completion of, their studies.

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## Appendix 1: A summary of minimum entry requirements for all mature students in UNIMA

- 1. A Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) or any equivalent O-Level qualification with at least 4 subjects passed with credit (6 subjects for some degree programmes), including English language.
- 2. A University of Malawi diploma or an equivalent diploma from a recognized University or institution of higher learning.
- 3. A minimum of 2 years work experience in a field related to the programme applied for after obtaining the relevant diploma qualification.
- 4. Applicants must also meet additional programme-specific entry requirements.

The table below outlines entry requirements for degree programmes on which mature students who participated in this study were enrolled:

Degree	Year of	Programme	Times for	Programme-specific entry
programme	entry	duration	class	requirements
			attendance	
Business administration	2/3	4	College holidays	<ul> <li>Advanced diploma/diploma in business administration or management or related programmes from a recognized institution of higher learning or examining body or accredited programmes of the UNIMA</li> <li>MSCE or its equivalent with 4 credits including English and mathematics</li> </ul>
Accountancy	2/3	4	College holidays/ Semester time	<ul> <li>Diploma in accounting or other related qualification from a recognized institution of higher learning or examining body or accredited programmes of the UNIMA</li> <li>MSCE or its equivalent with 4 credits including English and mathematics.</li> </ul>

Entry requirements for degree programmes on which participants of this study were enrolled

Continued from previous page

Degree programme	Year of entry	Programme duration	Times for class attendance	Programme-specific entry requirements
Procurement and Logistics Management	3	4	Semester time	<ul> <li>Advanced diploma/diploma in procurement, supply chain or other related qualifications from a recognized institution of higher learning or examining body or accredited programmes of the UNIMA</li> <li>MSCE or its equivalent with 4 credits including English and mathematics.</li> </ul>
Internal auditing	3	4	Semester time	<ul> <li>Diploma in accounting or related programme from a recognized institution of higher learning or examining body or accredited programmes of the UNIMA</li> <li>MSCE or its equivalent with 4 credits including English and mathematics.</li> </ul>
Technical Education (science)	2/3	4	Semester time	<ul> <li>Recognized diploma in education and diploma in any technical field or equivalent</li> <li>An additional MSCE credit in mathematics and physical science.</li> </ul>
Education (business studies)	2/3	4	Semester time	<ul> <li>Recognized diploma in education or diploma in a business/ management field or equivalent</li> <li>An additional MSCE credit in mathematics.</li> </ul>
Journalism	2	4	Semester time (weekends)	<ul> <li>Diploma in journalism or mass communication from a recognized institution</li> <li>MSCE/O-level with at least 4 credits including English and any other social science subjects.</li> </ul>

Source: <u>www.poly.ac.mw</u>

# Appendix 2: Letter of request for permission to conduct research at the polytechnic college

University of Reading	School of Literature and Languages Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics
	Humanities and Social Sciences Buildin Whiteknights, PO Box 218 Reading RG6 6AA
Associate Professor Nancy Chitera The Vice-Principal The Malawi Polytechnic P/bag 303 Chichiri Blantyre 3	phone +44 (0)118 378 email
24 March 2017	
Dear Professor Chitera	
CHIMWEMWE MAGELA: REQUEST FOR PERI RESEARCH AT THE MALAWI POLYTECHNIC	
I am the supervisor of Chimwemwe Magela, a Com lecturer from your Malawi Polytechnic. I am contac permission from your office for her to conduct doct	ting you on her behalf to ask for
This research, which will form the core of her doctor perceptions and experiences of academic writing at study will involve fourth year mature-entry students Commerce and Education/Media Studies. For this r lecturers will, with your permission, be asked to ress in an interview. The researcher will also collect sam	Malawian undergraduate level. The s and their lecturers in the Faculties of esearch project, relevant students and pond to a questionnaire and to take part aples of students' written assignments h this letter, we are sending the
and documentation related to their coursework. Wit University of Reading Ethics Committee letter of a	pprovarior uns study.

On behalf of the University of Reading and our doctoral student, Mrs Magela, I would be most grateful if you could grant her permission to conduct this research at your Polytechnic. Please contact me if you require any further information at the email address below.

Yours sincerely

Clare L. Frinemux

Clare Furneaux Professor of Applied Linguistics c.l.furneaux@reading.ac.uk
#### Appendix 3: Letter of approval to conduct research at the polytechnic college

All correspondence to be addressed to the Principal University of Malawi - The Polytechnic Private Bag 303 Chichiri Blantrye 3, Malawi Tel: (+265) 1 870 411 Fax: (+265) 1 870 578 CHARSITY OF MAL E-Mail: PRINCIPAL Prof Grant Kululanga, PhD. Eng., MSc. Eng., BSc. Eng., MASCE Our Ref.: Your Ref: Date: 24 March 2017 University of Reading School of Literate and Languages Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics Humanities and Social Science Building Whiteknights P.O. Box 218 READING RG6 6AA United Kingdom Attention: Professor Clare Forneaux RE: CHIMWEMWE MAGELA: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT PhD RESEARCH AT MALAWI POLYTECHNIC With reference to the heading above, permission is granted for her to conduct the research at the University of Malawi, the Polytechnic. Yours sincerely Rheed Nancy Chitera PhD Vice Principal Cc: Principal Registrar Dean - Faculty of Education and Media Studies Head of Language and Communication Department 1 Centre of excellence in scientific and technological education and training www.poly.ac.mw

#### Appendix 4: Sample email message inviting students to participate in the study

My name is Chimwemwe Magela, a member of staff in the department of Language and Communication at the Polytechnic (University of Malawi), but currently a PhD student at the University of Reading (UK). I would like to invite you to participate in a research project that I am doing which is part of my PhD studies. For details about this study, please refer to the 'participant information sheet' which I have attached to this email.

Please complete the questionnaire that I have attached to this email. The questionnaire is in Word format. You will need to download it and save it as **Magela PhD Research Student Questionnaire.** After completing the questionnaire and saving it, please email the questionnaire back to me, preferably as an attachment. If you face any difficulties with downloading the questionnaire or completing it, please let me know. My mobile number is ...... (I am on WhatsApp). Please take note that on the last page of the questionnaire, I am requesting you for an interview.

If you have any questions regarding my study and the questionnaire in particular, please do not hesitate to ask and I would be more than happy to answer them.

Your completion of the questionnaire will be much appreciated, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

#### **Appendix 5: Student questionnaire**

## Mature-entry students' perceptions and experiences of academic writing at Malawian undergraduate level

My name is Chimwemwe Magela and I am a PhD student at the University of Reading, UK. For my research project, I am investigating undergraduate mature-entry students' perceptions and experiences of academic writing at the Polytechnic (University of Malawi). I would like to invite you to take part in this study as your academic writing experiences will be of great value to this study. The study's outcomes have potential to help lecturers who teach mature-entry students at the Polytechnic make informed decisions on how best they can support students' academic writing development in order to help their learning and achievement through writing. Participation is entirely voluntary, and involves answering a questionnaire which will require approximately 30 minutes to complete. All your answers will remain confidential and you will not be identified in the reporting of the findings. **Please note** that by completing and returning this questionnaire it means you are giving consent for your responses to be used for the purposes of this research project. If you would like to receive a summary of the results of this survey by email at the end of my research, please add your email address below:

I would like to receive a summary of results (please mark the appropriate box with 'X')



My e-mail address is \_\_\_\_\_

Section 1: Personal details

Please mark the appropriate box with 'X' and write other answers in the spaces provided.

1. Gender:
Female
Male

2. Age (years):
Below 25

25 - 30
31 - 35

31 - 35
36 - 45

Above 45
Image: Constraint of the second se

3. Faculty:

Commerce	
Education and media studies	

- 4. What degree programme are you enrolled for? (please specify below):
- 5. Year of entry to university

2 <sup>nd</sup> year	
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	

6. Mode of class attendance:

Weekdays	
Weekends	
Holidays	

7. University entry qualification:

Diploma	
Advanced diploma	
Bachelor's degree	
Graduate diploma	
Other (please specify belo	w)

- 8. If you are currently working, what job do you do? Please specify below.
- 9. If you are not currently working, what jobs have you had in the past? Please specify the last two jobs below.

Section 2: Questions about your academic writing experiences

10. Which of the written tasks listed below have you done so far for your degree programme at the University of Malawi? Please mark the appropriate box with '**X**' in each row.

Written tasks	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
1) Essays				
2) Reports				
3) Examination				
4) Book/article review				
5) Research proposal/plan				
6) Case study				
7) Literature review				
8) Dissertation/research project				
9) Other (please specify below)				

11. If your programme includes written examinations, what kind/s of examination have you written so far? Please mark the appropriate box with '**X**' in each row.

Type of examination you have written so far	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1) Multiple choice questions				
2) Short answer				
3) Short essay				
4) Other (please specify below)				

12. What kinds of writing do you do or have you done at work?

13. a) What do you find easy about the writing you do/you have done at work?

Please explain your answer.

b) What is the most challenging aspect of the writing you do/you have done at work?

Please explain your answer.

14. How do you deal (have you dealt) with the writing challenges at work?

15a) How helpful is your knowledge/experience of workplace writing in your academic writing? Please mark the appropriate box with '**X**'.

Very helpful	Quite helpful	Neither helpful nor unhelpful	Not helpful at all

- b) Please explain your answer.
- 16. Which five task requirements do you think most of your university lecturers want/expect to see in your assignments? (Please select five task requirements and rank them 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in order of preference with 1 representing "the most important")

Addressing the question	
Wide reading/research on assignment question	
Evaluation of quality of source texts (e.g. book, internet sources)	
Not plagiarised	
Proper use and citation/referencing of other authors' ideas	
Expressing ideas clearly/logically	
Combining information from several sources into a coherent whole	
Writing coherent paragraphs	

Developing argument	
Knowledge of subject content	
Critical thinking/evaluation of subject content	
Structuring/organisation of ideas	
Use of language/writing style	
Presentation/ formatting	

17. How do you find out about the task requirements your lecturers want/expect to see in your written work? Please mark the appropriate box with 'X' in each row.

Often		Rarely	Never
	Sometimes	rearcity	110101
-			

18. What contributes to improvement of your academic writing at university? (Please select the top three and rank them 1, 2, and 3 in order of preference, with 1 representing "has contributed most to improvement in my academic writing at university").



- 20. What do you find difficult about academic writing at university?
- 21. What would help you to improve your writing at university?
- 22. Do you think that as a mature-entry student you have any advantages in comparison to normal-entry students in terms of the writing you do at university? Please describe the advantages and provide reasons for your answer.
- 23. Do you think that as a mature-entry student you have any disadvantages in comparison to normal-entry students in terms of the writing you do at university? Please describe the disadvantages and provide reasons for your answer.

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire!

#### **Request for interview**

I am interested to talk to you in more detail about your academic writing experiences. If you are also available to share your experiences in an interview with me that will last about 60

minutes, please provide your name, phone number, and email address below. I will contact you to arrange an interview at the time and place that is convenient to you. I will send you further information about the interview and a consent form. As a token of appreciation for taking part in the interview, I offer to provide you with a 30-minute tutorial on academic writing. You will also be offered K5, 000 to help cover your travel expenses.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number\_\_\_\_\_

Email address (please add if not given on page 1)

#### **Appendix 6: Participant information sheet for students**

School of Literature and Languages Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics

Researcher: Chimwemwe Magela

Email: c.p.magela@pgr.reading.ac.uk

Supervisor: Clare Furneaux Phone: +44 1183788986 Email: c.l.furneaux@reading.ac.uk



#### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

#### (Student)

### Project title: Mature-entry students' perceptions and experiences of academic writing at Malawian undergraduate level

The purpose of this research, which is for my PhD studies at the University of Reading, UK, is to explore mature-entry undergraduate students' academic writing experiences and perceptions of these experiences at Polytechnic College (University of Malawi). In particular, I am interested in finding out how you understand academic writing demands within the context of your disciplinary area, your experiences in meeting writing demands, and the variation of your reported academic writing experiences according to disciplinary areas.

You have been selected to participate in this study because your views have potential to help lecturers who teach mature-entry students at the Polytechnic make informed decisions on how best they can support students' academic writing development in order to help their learning and achievement through writing.

Participation is entirely voluntary, and involves answering a questionnaire which will require approximately 30 minutes to complete and taking part in an interview with me which will last about 60 minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded with your permission and primarily conducted in English, but you will be able to speak in Chichewa if you prefer. In order to have specific examples of your writing to talk about in the interview, I would like you to bring along the following documents on the day of the interview:

- A copy of **two different types** (e.g. essay, report, case study, exam, etc.) of marked assignments with feedback comments (if available) which you recently submitted for different modules [e.g. during 3<sup>rd</sup> year or last semester of the 4<sup>th</sup> year].
- Other documents related to the assignments (e.g. assignment guidelines, assessment criteria, assignment question/topic, and any handouts of academic writing offered to you by lecturers) if you have them still.

You have a right to withdraw from the study at any time if you wish to do so. If you choose to do so, you can contact me through <u>c.p.magela@pgr.reading.ac.uk</u> or <u>cmagela@poly.ac.mw</u>. If this is the case, your questionnaire, interview responses and any documentation which you may provide will not be used. As a token of appreciation for participating in this study, I offer to provide you with a 30 minute-tutorial on academic writing. If you would like to take this offer, email me within one week of completing the questionnaire. If you will take part in the interview, you will also be offered K5, 000 to help cover your travel expenses.

If you choose to participate in this study, your answers will be treated confidentially. This means that your work and discussion in our interview will only be seen by me and my supervisors. The data will be kept on a password-protected computer and in a locked drawer. I will not share your individual responses with your lecturers. On completion of this research project (after 3 years), the questionnaire, audio-recorded data and assignments will be destroyed. The consent form will be stored in the School of Literature and Languages (University of Reading) for a reasonable period of time after the research project. In addition, when reporting your responses in the thesis I will not mention your name. A pseudonym (fictitious name) will be used instead. Moreover, for data analysis focus will be on identifying recurring themes across data rather than individual perspectives. Although excerpts from the interview and textual data derived from your assignment scripts may be used to illustrate identified themes in the thesis, any direct quotation of your responses and textual data will not compromise your anonymity. Moreover, your data will be used for academic purposes only, namely to write the PhD thesis and disseminate the findings in journals and at conferences.

I will send to you a copy of the interview transcript (by email) so that you can check if what has been recorded in the transcript reflects your ideas. I will also send a copy of the summary of my study's results to you if you are interested to have one. If you wish to receive a copy of the study's results, please contact me through <u>c.p.magela@pgr.reading.ac.uk</u> or <u>cmagela@poly.ac.mw</u>.

This project has been subject to ethical review by the School Ethics Committee following the University's *Notes for Guidance* on research ethics, and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.

If you have any queries or wish to clarify anything about the study, please feel free to contact me by email at <u>c.p.magela@pgr.reading.ac.uk</u> or my supervisor at <u>c.l.furneaux@reading.ac.uk</u>

# Appendix 7: Sample email message reminding students and lecturers to complete questionnaire

I would like to remind you to complete the attached questionnaire which is part of my PhD research project.

I would be very grateful if you could return the questionnaire to me by....

If you have any questions regarding my study in general and the questionnaire in particular, please do not hesitate to ask.

Your completion of the questionnaire will be much appreciated, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

#### Appendix 8: Profile of student and lecturer interviewees and duration of interviews

Student interviewees

Degree programme	-	Faculty	Interviewee ID	Times for class attendance	into	of entry amme	Entry qualification	Gender	Age		loyed e time 1dy	Work experience	Date & duration of
				2	3	7			Yes	No		interview	
Accountancy	Commerce	AS1	Semester holidays	V		Diploma	F	-		√	Accounting	14/07/17 (39 min)	
		AS2			V	Advanced diploma	М	31-35	√		Police service	07/07/17 (46 min)	
		AS3			V	Diploma	М	25-30		√	Auditing	24/07/17 (37 min)	
		AS4		V		Diploma	М	25-30	V		Accounting	24/07/17 (26 min)	
		AS5	Semester time	V		Diploma	М	25-30		√	Accounting	18/07/17 (43 min)	
		AS6		V		Diploma	М	36-45	V		Accounting	11/07/17 (37 min)	
Total		6		4	2				3	3		228 min	
Business administration	Commerce	BAS1	Semester holidays	V		Diploma	F	Below 25		√	Banking	06/07/17 (60 min)	
		BAS2		√		Diploma	F	31-35	V		Management	10/07/17 (43 min)	
		BAS3			V	Advanced diploma	F	31-35		√	Marketing (business)	20/07/17 (37 min)	
		BAS4			V	Advanced diploma	F	25-30		√	Banking	17/07/17 (28 min)	
		BAS5			V	Advanced diploma	М	31-35	V		Accounting	07/07/17 (51 min)	
Total		5		2	3				2	3		219 min	

Degree Facult programme		Faculty	Interviewee ID	Times for class attendance	Year of into progra	of entry amme	Entry qualification	Gender	Age	Empl at the of stu	e time	Work experience	Date & duration of			
				2	3				Yes	No		interview				
Internal auditing	Commerce	IAS1	Semester time		V	Diploma	М	25-30		√	Accounting	03/07/17 (75 min)				
		IAS2			V	Bachelor's degree	М	31-35	V		Accounting/ teaching	10/07/17 (39 min)				
		IAS3			$\checkmark$	Diploma	М	25-30		√	Accounting	20/07/17 (48 min)				
		IAS4			V	Diploma	М	25-30		√	Accounting	25/07/17 (57 min)				
		IAS5			V	Diploma	М	25-30		√	Accounting	27/07/17 (39 min)				
		IAS6	IAS6	IAS6	IAS6	IAS6			V	Diploma	F	31-35		√	Auditing	08/08/17 (39 min)
Total		6			6				1	5		297 min				
Procurement & logistics	Commerce	PLMS1	Semester time		V	Advanced diploma	М	36-45		√	Banking	29/06/17 (100min)				
management		PLMS2			V	Graduate diploma	F	36-45		√	Administration	(7/7/17 - 41 mins)				
		PLMS3			V	Advanced diploma	F	36-45		√	Banking	17/07/17 (28 min)				
		PLMS4			V	Advanced diploma	М	25-30		√	Administration	28/07/17 (31 min)				
		PLMS5	-	$\checkmark$	V	Graduate diploma	М	25-30		√	Procurement	22/07/17 (33 min)				
		PLMS6	PLMS6		1	1				V	Graduate diploma	F	36-45		√	Procurement/ teaching
		PLMS7	]		V	Advanced diploma	М	31-35		√	Procurement	01/08/17 (29 min)				
		PLMS8	]		V	Graduate diploma	М	25-30		√	Marketing (business)	03/08/17 (25 min)				
Total		8			8				-	8		342 min				

Degree programme	Faculty	Faculty	Interviewee ID	Times for class attendance	into	of entry amme	Entry qualification	Gender	Age	Emp at the of stu	e time	Work experience	Date & duration of
				2	3				Yes	No		interview	
Journalism	Education & Media Studies	JS1	Semester time (weekends)	V		Diploma	М	36-45	V		News editing /programme production	18/07/17 (32 min)	
		JS2		V		Diploma	М	25-30	V		News reporting	22/07/17 (37 min)	
		JS3		V		Diploma	М	25-30	V		News reporting	16/07/17 (57 min)	
		JS4		V		Diploma	F	25-30	V		Programme production	08/07/17 (70 min)	
		JS5		V		Diploma	М	25-30	V		News reporting	22/07/17 (74 min)	
		JS6		$\checkmark$		Diploma	F	25-30	V		Marketing (business)	14/07/07 (48 min)	
		JS7	_	V		Diploma	F	25-30		√	Banking	13/07/17 (35 min)	
		JS8	_	V		Diploma	F	Abov e 45		√	News editing	21/07/17 (30 min)	
Total		8		8					6	2		383 min	
Technical education (science)	Education & Media Studies	ES1	Semester time		√	Diploma	М	36-45	V		Teaching (technical college)	31/07/17 (30 min)	
Education (business studies)		ES2			V	Advanced diploma	М	36-45	V		Teaching (secondary school)	10/07/17 (49 min)	
Total		2			2				2	-		79 min	
Overall total		35		14	21				14	21		1,548 min Average/ student= 44 min	

#### Lecturer interviewees

Faculty	Programme	Interview ID	Gender	Modules taught	Year groups of mature students taught	No. of years of teaching (mature students)	Date & duration of interview	Highest academic qualification	Academic position
Commerce	Business administration	BAL1	F	Management principles and practices, human resources management, strategic management	3, 4	5-10	25/07/17 (20 min)	Masters degree	Assistant lecturer
	Accounting	AL1	М	Financial reporting, supply chain management	3, 4	5-10	01/08/17 (14 min)	Masters degree	Lecturer
		AL2	М	Costing, management accounting, corporate governance	2, 3, 4	Less than 5	17/07/17 (34 min)	Masters degree	Lecturer
		AL3	М	Financial reporting, financial management	3	5-10	15/08/17 (46 min)	Masters degree	Senior lecturer
Total mins							114		
Education & Media	Technical education/	EL1	М	Research methods, testing, measurement and evaluation	3, 4	Over 20	09/08/17 (25 min)	PhD	Associate professor
Studies	business education	EL2	F	Engineering science	3, 4	5-10	07/08/17 (46 min)	Masters degree	Lecturer
		EL3	М	Engineering science, production technology	2, 3, 4	Over 20	10/08/17 (41 min)	PhD	Lecturer
	Total min						112		

Continued on next page...

lty	Programme	Interview ID	Gender	Modules taught	Year groups of mature students taught	No. of years of teaching (mature students)	Date & duration of interview	Highest academic qualification	Academic position
	Journalism	JL1	М	Media and society, specialised writing, business journalism, media research methods	2, 3, 4	Less than 5	20/07/17 (35 min)	Masters degree	Lecturer
		JL2	М	Political science, development communication, international relations	2, 3, 4	11-15	31/07/17 (33 min)	Masters degree	Lecturer
		JL3	M	Communication media, online journalism, media and global culture, research methods	2, 3, 4	16-20	15/08/17 (28 min)	PhD	Lecturer
		JL4	M	News reporting for radio, media management, business journalism	2, 3, 4	5-10	03/08/17 (32 min)	Masters degree	Lecturer
	Total min	L			I		128		
	Overall total m	in					354 Average = 32 min		

#### Appendix 9: Sample email message invitation for lecturers to participate in study

My name is Chimwemwe Magela, a member of staff in the department of Language and Communication at the Polytechnic, but currently a PhD student at the University of Reading (UK). I would like to invite you to participate in a research project that I am doing which is part of my PhD studies. For details about this study, please refer to the attached 'participant information sheet'.

I would be very grateful if you would take a few moments to complete the questionnaire and return it to me by....

If you have any questions regarding my study in general and the questionnaire in particular, please do not hesitate to ask and I would be more than happy to answer them.

Your completion of the questionnaire will be much appreciated, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards.

#### **Appendix 10: Participant information sheet for lecturers**

School of Literature and Languages

Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics

Researcher: Chimwemwe Magela *Email*: c.p.magela@pgr.reading.ac.uk

Supervisor: Clare Furneaux *Phone*: +44 1183788986 *Email*: <u>c.l.furneaux@reading.ac.uk</u>

#### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

#### (Lecturer)

## Project title: Mature-entry students' perceptions and experiences of academic writing at Malawian undergraduate level

The purpose of this research, which is for my PhD studies at the University of Reading, UK, is to explore mature-entry undergraduate students' academic writing experiences and perceptions of these experiences at Polytechnic College (University of Malawi). In particular, I am investigating how the students understand academic writing demands within the context of their disciplinary area, their experiences in meeting writing demands, and the variation of their reported academic writing experiences according to disciplinary areas. I am interested in these issues because I would like to find out how best mature-entry students' transition to academic writing at university can be facilitated, how they can be supported to deal with academic writing demands of the university, and how their learning and achievement through writing can be enhanced.

You have been selected to participate in this study because as an established member of your discipline and one of the lecturers who teach mature-entry students and assess their written work, you are in a good position to provide insights into the writing demands of your disciplinary/subject area, the more challenging aspects of academic writing for mature-entry students, and what would help students improve their writing.

Participation in this study will involve filling in a questionnaire which will require 10 minutes to complete and taking part in an interview with me which will last about 60 minutes. The interview will be audio-recorded with your permission. However, participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You also have a right to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to do so, you can contact me through <u>c.p.magela@pgr.reading.ac.uk</u> or <u>cmagela@poly.ac.mw</u>. If this is the case, your



questionnaire and interview responses and any documentation which you may provide will not be used.

If you choose to participate in this study, your answers will be treated confidentially. This means that your discussion in our interview will only be seen by me and my supervisors. The data will be kept on a password-protected computer and in a locked drawer. On completion of this research project (after 3 years), the questionnaire and audio-recorded data will be destroyed. The consent form will be stored in the School of Literature and Languages (University of Reading) for a reasonable period of time after the research project.

This study will also involve analysis of feedback on students' assignments. In the event that the assignments which will be analysed will be those which you set and assessed, such analysis will not be done with a purpose of identifying flaws in your teaching and assessment practices. When reporting your responses in the thesis I will not mention your name; rather, a pseudonym will be used. Moreover, for data analysis focus will be on identifying recurring themes across data rather than individual perspectives. Although excerpts from the interview may be used to illustrate identified themes in the thesis, be assured that any direct quotation of your responses will not compromise your anonymity. In addition, your data will be used for academic purposes only, namely to write the PhD thesis and disseminate the findings in journals and at conferences.

I will send to you a copy of the interview transcript (by email) so that you can check if what has been recorded in the transcript reflects your ideas. I will also send a copy of the summary of my study's results to you if you are interested to have one. If you wish to receive a copy of the study's results, please contact me through <u>c.p.magela@pgr.reading.ac.uk</u> or

This project has been subject to ethical review by the School Ethics Committee following the University's *Notes for Guidance* on research ethics, and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.

If you have any queries or wish to clarify anything about the study, please feel free to contact me by email at <u>c.p.magela@pgr.reading.ac.uk</u> or my supervisor at <u>c.l.furneaux@reading.ac.uk</u>

#### **Appendix 11: Lecturer questionnaire**



### Mature-entry students' perceptions and experiences of academic writing at Malawian undergraduate level

My name is Chimwemwe Magela and I am a PhD student at the University of Reading, UK. For my research project, I am investigating undergraduate mature-entry students' perceptions and experiences of academic writing at the Polytechnic (University of Malawi). I would like to invite you to take part in this study. As an established member of your discipline and one of the lecturers who teach mature students and assess their writing, your knowledge of academic writing within your field and experiences of students' writing will be valuable to this study. Participation is entirely voluntary, and involves filling in a questionnaire which will require approximately 10 minutes. All your answers will remain confidential. **Please note** that by completing and returning this questionnaire it means that you are giving consent for your responses to be used for the purposes of this research project.

#### Section1: Personal details

Please mark the appropriate box with 'X' and write other answers in the spaces provided.

1. What is your academic position?

Professor	
Associate professor	
Senior lecturer	
Lecturer	

Other (please specify)

2. What is your highest qualification?

PhD	
Masters degree	
Bachelor's degree	

Other (please specify)

3. How long have you been teaching in the University of Malawi?

Less than 5 years	
5 - 10 years	
11-15 years	
16 years and above	

4. How long have you been teaching mature-entry students?



- 6. What is your disciplinary area?
- 7. Which year group/s of mature-entry students do you teach? Please select all options that apply.

2 <sup>nd</sup> year	
3 <sup>rd</sup> year	
4 <sup>th</sup> year	

8. What modules do you teach?

Section 2: Questions about mature-entry students' academic writing

Which of the following writing tasks do you set for students on the modules that you teach? Please mark the appropriate box with 'X' in each row.

Types of writing	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
1) Essays				
2) Reports				
3) Examination				
4) Book/article review				
5) Research proposal/plan				

6) Case study		
7) Literature review		
8) Dissertation/research project		
9) Other (please specify below)		

10. If students write examinations, what kind/s of examination do you set? Please mark the appropriate box with '**X**' in each row.

Types of examination you set for students	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1) Multiple choice questions				
2) Short answer				
3) Short essay				
4) Other (please specify below)				

11. Which five task requirements do you want/expect to see in students' written work on modules that you teach? (Please select five task requirements and rank them 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 in order of preference with 1 representing "the most important")





12. How do students know about what you want/expect to see in their written work? Please mark the appropriate box with '**X**' in each row.

How students know about what	Often	Sometimes	Domolar	Never
	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
you want/expect to see in their				
written work				
1) Assessment /marking criteria				
given with assignment task				
2) Assessment/marking criteria				
given on marked assignment				
3) Instructions given in classroom				
4) Key words or cues in				
assignment question				
5) Model/example assignments				
6) Feedback on assignment draft				
7) Feedback on submitted final				
assignment draft				
8) Reference to guidelines on				
writing from books/internet				
sources				
9) Advice given in face to face				
individual meeting				
10) Other (please specify below)				
(preuse speerry sere ")				

Appendix 12: Ethics approval from the University of Reading

Memo School of Literature and Languages Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics



To Prof Clare Furneaux

From Dr Michael Daller

Date14/2/17

Your application for Ethical Approval

Your project entitled **"Mature students' perception and experiences of academic writing at Malawian undergraduate level"** has been considered by the School Ethics Committee, and I am pleased to report that the Committee raised no ethical objections and subject to your undertaking to store the consent forms in the Department Office the normal way, it is accordingly given permission for the project to proceed under the exceptions procedure as outlined in paragraph 6 of the *University's Ethics Guidance to Schools*.

Signed

Dr Michael Daller

On behalf of the School Ethics Committee Prof. Catherine Leglu, School Director of Research Prof. Alison Donnell, Head of School

#### Appendix 13: Sample of participant consent form

School of Literature and Languages Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics



#### ETHICS COMMITTEE

Consent Form

### Project title: Mature-entry students' perceptions and experiences of academic writing at Malawian undergraduate level

I have read and understood the Information Sheet relating to this study, which has been provided by Chimwemwe Magela. I understand the purpose of this study and understand what is required of me.

I have been given opportunity to ask questions and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my participation.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time.

I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the accompanying Information Sheet.

Name:

Signed:

Date:

# Appendix 14: Sample email message accompanying interview transcript sent to participants for reviewing

I hope this email finds you well.

Once again I would like to thank you for taking part in my study.

As promised I am sending you the interview transcript which I have attached to this email. Attached is also another document with details of procedures I followed when transcribing your interview. I believe these details will enable you to understand how I have represented your words on paper.

I would like to ask you to go through the transcript to check whether the contents of the transcript represent your views. If you would like to comment on the contents of the transcript, please add your comments on the margins, at the beginning or the end of the transcript. You can also use colour to highlight and comment on specific areas within the transcript.

Whilst reading the transcript, please bear the following in mind:

- 1.Be assured that your transcript and the audio-recording from which the transcript has been derived will be treated with utmost confidentiality.
- 2. Speech/spoken word is different from written word. The former is naturally characterised by errors, false starts, hesitations, repetitions, and incomplete statements. Therefore, do not be dismayed when you see these features in your transcript.
- 3. My main interest is in the themes that will emerge from interview data rather than individual responses.
- 4. All effort has been made to anonymise your identity. This means that if excerpts/parts of your transcript will be used in my thesis, it won't be possible for anyone to trace them back to you.

I would be very grateful if you could return the transcript with your feedback to me by.... Please note that if I don't hear from you by this date I will assume that you are happy with the contents of the transcript.

Your feedback on the transcript will be very much appreciated and I look forward to hearing from you.

#### **Appendix 15: Transcription guidelines for interviews**

- Verbatim depiction of what was said is presented. That is, the actual words of the interviewees are included but some features of speech have been omitted. These include fillers for example errs, uhs, and ums, and other paralinguistic features such as pauses or those showing emotion such as laughs, sighs.
- Response tokens such as yeah, mm, OK which indicate agreement or understanding between researcher and interviewee are included.
- (...) indicate incomplete statements which trail off. When presenting findings, the ellipsis dots are sometimes used to indicate deliberate omission of superfluous words from quote.
- False sentence starts as well as repeated expressions, some of which indicate participants' emphasis of a point are included.
- Punctuation for written prose is used. For example, full stops at the end of what is perceived as a complete statement, commas within sentences to give them structure and meaning, and question marks at the end of questions.
- Errors related to grammar and sentence structure in both the interviewer's and interviewees' speech have not been corrected.
- Translated non-English (Chichewa) expressions are italicised.
- Background noises such as banging of doors, noise from moving cars, and people's voices have been excluded.
- [brief disruption] means that the audio-recording of the interview was stopped momentarily due to interferences.
- Back channel utterances (e.g. yeah, ok, alright, and mm) of both interviewer and interviewees have been omitted. Since these were numerous, they have been excluded in order not to disrupt the flow of speech.
- Inaudible expressions are indicated by (unintelligible). This means that what interviewees' said could not be understood due to various reasons such as background noise interference.
- Uncertainty about a section of speech = the expression is enclosed in brackets ( )
- Words enclosed in square brackets [ ] are the researchers' additions. The brackets are used to enclose, among other things, words which are used to anonymise identities of

individuals, organisations, or modules. They are also used to provide further explanations that provide background information or contextualise interviewees' words/views for the purpose of aiding understanding of what is being said.

#### Appendix 16: Sample of student interview schedule

A: Generic questions on academic writing experiences

- 1. In the questionnaire you've selected the following [mention the chosen requirements] as task requirements which most of your university lecturers want/expect to see in your assignments; in general, can you tell me what each of these aspects/ requirements means?
- 2. (a) Can you talk a bit about one piece of writing (written assignment) that was particularly most successful for you? Why do you think you did better in this assignment?
  - b) Think of an assignment you did much worse on.Why do you think you did not perform well in this assignment?
- 3. a) In the questionnaire you've mentioned that you find [mention aspects of academic writing] difficult. Can you say a bit more about this?
  - b) How do you deal with these writing difficulties?
  - c) What else would help you to address these writing challenges?

Section B: Generic questions on experiences of writing at work

4. At work you write/have written [mention the kinds of writing specified in the questionnaire]; are there any differences and similarities between the writing that you do/have done at work and that which is required of you at university? If so, what?

Section C: Specific questions about assignments

- 5. Can you identify parts of this assignment where you were successful/did better? Why do you think you were successful in these parts?
- 6. Which areas of this assignment did you particularly find difficult to write? Why?
- 7. a) Did you get written feedback from your lecturer on this assignment? If so, on what?
  - b) How did you feel about this feedback?
  - c) Were the comments helpful to you? If so, in what way? If not, why?

Closing remarks

8. Do you want to add anything or comment on your experience of writing while at university?

#### **Appendix 17: Sample of lecturer interview schedule**

- 1. Can you explain how important you think writing is in the modules that you teach?
- 2. Are there any connections between the written tasks that you set for your students and the writing they are expected to do at the workplace when they graduate? If so, in what ways?
- 3. In the questionnaire you have specified the following [mention the chosen requirements] as the most important task requirements which you want/expect to see in students' writing/ assignments. In general can you tell me what each of these aspects/requirements means?
- 4. Are there any differences between the writing of mature-entry students and normalentry students? If so, can you describe these differences?
- 5. (a) What strengths do you see in mature-entry students' writing?
  - (b) Why do you think mature-entry students demonstrate strength in aspects /areas of academic writing you have mentioned?
- 6. (a) What do mature-entry students find difficult about academic writing?
  - (b) What do you think contributes to the students' writing difficulties?
  - (c) What would help students improve on their writing?
- 7. What other issues concerning mature-entry students' academic writing would you like to add/raise?

	Feedback categories	Description				
1.	Developmental	These comments are made by the tutor with the intention of aiding the student with subsequent				
		work in relation to the current assignment.				
	a. Alternatives	The marker offers alternatives, suggestions and recommendations in place of what the student has				
		written or points out omissions in the student's work.				
	b. Future	These are comments on how the student needs to address a point directly in subsequent work.				
	c. Reflective questions	The marker poses a question, as opposed to making a direct point, for the student to consider reflectively.				
2.	Structural (Discourse level)	These comments consider the organisation of the assignment as a whole in terms of the constituent				
		sections: introduction, literature review, conclusion and so on. These comments may consider he				
		each of these constituent sections may be put together, in terms of rhetorical moves, or how they				
		themselves may fit together to give a structure to the overall assignment (coherence).				
3.	Stylistic	These comments consider the use and presentation of academic language within the assignment.				
		Covers the following areas: Punctuation /lexis/syntax/word order/grammar/ proofreading/ spelling;				
		citation; presentation (e.g. cover page numbering, subtitling, figures, tables, captions, footnotes,				
		endnotes, contents pages, word length, acronyms).				
4.	Content-related	Comments on the content of the assignment in terms of their appropriateness/accuracy or their				
		inappropriateness/inaccuracy.				
	a. Positive evaluation	Comments on the strengths of the assignment are noted and tend to include features such as:				
		synthesis of literature, theory and practice; appropriate synthesis of personal experience; clear				
		argumentation; and reflection.				
	b. Negative evaluation	Comments are on weaknesses in the assignment, which may include a deficit in the above features				
		as well as problems relating to the provision of evidence, lack of clarity or the need for				
		clarification, or a lack of criticality in the work.				

### Appendix 18: Hyatt's (2005, pp. 344-348) classification scheme of lecturer written feedback

#### Appendix 19: Piloted versions of lecturer interview schedule/student questionnaire



#### Student questionnaire - Piloted version

### Mature-entry students' perceptions and experiences of academic writing at Malawian undergraduate level

My name is Chimwemwe Magela and I am a PhD student at the University of Reading, UK. For my research project, I am investigating undergraduate mature-entry students' perceptions and experiences of academic writing at the Polytechnic (University of Malawi). I would like to invite you to take part in this study as your academic writing experiences will be of great value to this study. The study's outcomes have potential to help lecturers who teach mature-entry students at the Polytechnic make informed decisions on how best they can support students' academic writing development in order to help their learning and achievement through writing. Participation is entirely voluntary, and involves answering a questionnaire which will require approximately 25 minutes to complex. All your answers will remain confidential. Please note that by completing and returning this questionnaire it means you are giving consent for your responses to be used for the purposes of this research project.

#### Section 1: Personal details

3rd year

Please mark the appropriate box with 'X' and write other answers in the spaces provided.

1.	Gender: Female Male
2.	Age (years):
	Below 25
	25 - 30
	31 - 35
	36-45+
	Above 45
3.	Faculty:
	Commerce
	Education and media studies
4.	What degree programme are you enrolled for? (please specify below):
5.	Year of entry to university
	2 <sup>nd</sup> year



	Mode of class attendar Weekdays	]
	Weekends	
	Holidays	]
	Other (please spec	ify)
7.	University entry qualif	ication. Please tick all that apply.
	Diploma	
	Advanced diploma	
	Bachelor's degree	
	Graduate diploma	
	Other (please specify b	pelow)

8. If you are currently working, what job do you do? Please specify below.

9. If you are not currently working, what jobs have you had in the past? Please specify the last two jobs below.
#### Section 2: Questions about your academic writing experiences

10. Which of the written tasks listed below have you done so far for your degree programme at the University of Malawi? Please tick the appropriate box with 'X' in each row.

Written tasks	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
1) Essay				-
2) Report				
3) Exam		-		-
4) Summary				
5) Book/article review			-	
<ol><li>Research proposal/plan</li></ol>				
7) Case study		-		
8) Literature review				
9) Dissertation/research project				
10) Other (please specify below):				

11. If your programme includes written examinations, what kind/s of examination have you written so far? Please tick the appropriate box with 'X' in each row.

Type of exam you have written so far	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1) Multiple choice questions				
2) Short answer				
3) Short essay				
<ol> <li>Other – please specify below:</li> </ol>				

12. What kinds of writing do you do or have you done at work?

Commented [C6]: Changed to open-ended-students ticked options which weren't applicable to them – which they don't do/haven't done – established when asked if they had really done the kinds of writing chosen

**Commented [C5]:** Question revised; Added 'each row' – since students were not marking other boxes considered not applicable

13. a) What do you find easy about the writing you do/you have done at work?

Please explain your answer.

b) What is the most challenging aspect of the writing you do/you have done at work?

Please explain your answer.

- 14. How do you deal (have you dealt) with the writing challenges at work?
  - 15. a) How helpful is your knowledge/experience of work writing in your academic writing? Please tick the appropriate box with 'X'.

Very helpful	Quite helpful	Neither helpful nor unhelpful	Not helpful at all

b) Please explain your answer.

Commented [C7]: Changed from yes/no answer formatseparated into 2 parts (a & b) - to minimise risk of students responding to one area and ignoring the other 16. To what extent do you think the following are task requirements which most of your university [Commented [C8]: Question -rephrased lecturers want/expect to see in your assignments? Please tick the appropriate box with 'X' in each

Task requirements	Yes, definitely	Not sure	No, definitely not	Does not apply
1) Addressing assignment question				
2) Knowledge of audience for text				
<ol> <li>Wide reading/research on assignment question</li> </ol>			-	
4) Relevance (whether writing is off topic or not)				
5) Evaluation of quality of source texts (e.g. book, journal, internet sources)				
6) Not plagiarised				
7) Citing and referencing material appropriately				
8) Expressing ideas clearly/logically				
<ol> <li>Combining information/ideas from several sources into a coherent whole</li> </ol>				
10) Writing coherent paragraphs				
11) Developing argument			_	Sec. 1
12) Knowledge of subject content			-	
13) Critical evaluation of subject/content matter			-	La Sales
14) Correctness of English language				
15) Structuring an answer/organisation				
<ol> <li>Style of English language (e.g. formal/informal)</li> </ol>				
17) Presentation (e.g. font, formatting, spacing)				
18) Other (please specify below):				

17. How do you find out about the task requirements your lecturers want/expect to see in your written work? Please tick the appropriate box with 'X' in each row.

	w you find out about things your lecturers nt/expect to see in your written work	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1)	Assessment /marking criteria given with assignment task				
2)	Assessment/marking criteria given on marked assignment				
3)	Instructions given in classroom				
4)	Key words or cues in assignment question				
5)	Model/example assignments				
6)	Feedback on assignment draft				
7)	Feedback on submitted final assignment draft				
8)	Guidelines on writing from books/internet				
9)	Advice from lecturers given in face to face individual meeting				
10)	Discussion with/advice from fellow students (same year group)				
11)	Discussion with/advice from students in other year groups				
12)	Discussion with/advice from colleagues at work				
13)	Other - please specify below:				

18. What contributes to improvement of your academic writing at university? Please choose the top three and rank your choices by writing the appropriate number in the relevant box. 1 represents 'first'= has contributed most to improvements in my academic writing at university, 2 represents 'second', 3 represents 'third'.

Lecturer feedback on marked assignment
Writing guidelines in module handout/manual
Writing guidelines in books/internet
Instruction/lessons in writing
Example /model assignments written by other students
Feedback from fellow students in same year group

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Feedback from fellow students in other year groups Other (please specify)

19. What do you find easy about the writing you do at university?

20. What do you find difficult about academic writing at university?

21. What would help you to improve your writing at university?

22. Do you think that as a mature-entry student you have any advantages in comparison to normalentry students in terms of the writing you do at university? Please explain what and why?

23. Do you think that as a mature-entry student you have any disadvantages in comparison to normalentry students in terms of the writing you do at university? Please explain what and why?

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Commented [C9]: Added new question

# Appendix 20: Samples of coded student and lecturer interview transcripts

	Sample coded lecturer interview transcript
1	Interview ID: Business Administration Lecturer 1 (BAL1)
2	Date of interview: 25/07/17
3	Place: The Polytechnic College
4	Duration: 20 minutes
5	(Gender: F; Academic position: Assistant lecturer; Faculty: Commerce;
	Discipline: Business administration; Duration of teaching - UNIMA: 5-
	10yrs, Mature students: 5-10yrs; Year groups taught: 3, 4)
6 7	R = Researcher/interviewer BAL1= Business Administration Lecturer 1
8	R: I will go straight to the first question and for this question I would like
	you to explain how important you think writing is in the modules that
	you teach.
9	BAL1: I think the first thing is a fact that it shows the ideas or the way a
	person thinks by putting it on paper. I expect my students to express
	themselves better in writing. Of course presentations, oral presentation
	is OK, but writing is the best way because it's taking the students'
	thoughts on paper. It helps to realise exactly what is going in the
	person's mind, the extent to which they have understood the content
	that has been taught to them. When it's committed to paper I find it
	better.
10	R: Are there any connections between the written tasks that you set for
	your students and the writing they are expected to do at the workplace
	when they graduate?
11	BAL1: Yeah to an extent there is a connection. In fact most of the work
	that I give them must be practical, is organisation related, should be
	something they are expected to be doing in their organisation. At the
	level that I teach I expect they are supposed to be managers when
	they leave here. So they should be able to communicate with other
	people. There's a lot of maybe report writing when they go to work. So
	they need to learn that at this point so that when they go to their
	workplaces they are able to commit themselves, be able to express
	1/8

1/8

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themselves in writing.

- R: If I may ask a further question, as far as the written tasks are concerned maybe can you cite or provide maybe examples of such tasks that you think probably are more likely to be asked of the students when they graduate or when they join the industry?
- BAL1: Specifically I believe in every workplace there's need to produce reports. So they need to be able to write reports. They need to be able to come up with presentations that are flowing, that are logical, that are making sense to those that are reading them. I think basically let me just state those two.
- R: Then for the next question I will refer to your responses to one of the questions in the questionnaire and this has to do with the question that was asking you to select five most important task requirements that you want or expect to see in students' work on the modules that you teach. And according to your response you've ranked addressing the question as number one and then the others are proper use and citation of other authors' ideas, expressing ideas clearly/logically, structuring/organisation of ideas and presentation/formatting. So I would like to find out from you what do you believe students should do in order to demonstrate each of those five task requirements in their written work?

BAL1: Ok the first one I said addressing the question is the first point. Yes am asking them a question they have to address it. They have to give me the information that is pertaining to that particular question. That was the whole point of asking them that question. So I expect a student to provide facts of the question that they have been given. Probably I would prefer it to be in a logical order. I don't know if it is... I think that's a third point. You said expressing ideas clearly and logically. As they are giving me the answer to the question the points should come logically. Their ideas, the facts to the question they should come out logically, making sense, flowing from one point to the other. I think the other issue was structuring and organisation of ideas. I think to an extent we are flowing in the same way, answer the question, put your facts in a

Addressing the (task) question

Structuring/organising text

Structuring/organising text

Resources Comparison with traditional students

#### Presentation

Comparison with traditional students

logical, clear, concise manner, structure your ideas. They should flow one to the next. The reader should be able to follow where the discussion is coming from and where it is going. I think the fourth one is proper use of citation, referencing and other authors. I think now we are focusing much on student dissertations and what have you and we really need to have these students learn on issues of citation. And that's one of the problems that I have observed in most of the students, be it normal students or mature students. Especially the mature students, issues of referencing and citation, they take it lightly. They just copy and paste from somewhere and put it. Sometimes you find that two or three have written the same statement. So I feel there is no seriousness. Their work they are just copying and pasting. I want to see people put effort to their writing. So probably that's why I chose proper use and citation as one of the issues. Presentation and formatting, background, I think I did some secretarial work. So I want to see things neat. But anyway these are people we are sending over to the industry. They have to be able to present their work properly. At least people should see that this person went through university. So I expect to see proper presentation. Even in my marking I will mark their formatting. I will mark their correction. Not that I will grade it, but I will just want to show them that this is not how we do it. In fact when am giving them an assignment I would give them my specifications, font size, font type, line spacing because I want to have neat work.

R: Thanks for your responses. For the next question I just want to find out from you. Are there any differences between the written work of mature entry students and generic students or the normal entry students? If so can you describe those differences?

BAL1: On that one it would be difficult for me to specifically state. What I've noticed it depends from course to course and also group to group or cohort to cohort. But for the mature students mostly I wouldn't say they are better off. The generic students are better off in their presentation. For the mature students most of them they are like in a hurry, the way they are presenting. And for them I expect much. I

## Comparison with traditional students

Learning behaviours

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expect them to provide more relevant examples since they are already experienced. They have worked before. They have knowledge of the industry. I expect to see more of examples, more of practicality of the concepts that have been taught to them. But usually it doesn't work like that unless you ask them a question that is specifically saying tell us about your organisation, then they may fit in one or two things about their organisation. But otherwise most mature entry students they have problems to express themselves based on the experience that they have had. For the generic students I think you understand because you know they have never been to industry, just focusing on theory. But at least they are able to put their ideas logically, the things that I think I've already mentioned. You can see an element of a flow of points properly.

R: Probably the other question that I will ask later on might address the question that I wanted to ask now, as a follow-up to what you're saying. But because there's another question that could... probably you would be able to tackle the issue that I wanted you to look at. Yeah. So I will move on to the next question. What strengths do you see in mature students' writing? Maybe you've touched on it a little bit but probably you could add some. What qualities do the mature entry students bring to their writing?

BAL1: The challenge now is the last class of mature students I had. I never liked their writing. It was so pathetic. There's lack of cohesiveness. I think it's something that I've already mentioned. It's as if they are not sure of what is it they have to write. It's like they just want to finish whatever they are writing. They just want to fulfil an obligation to answer. I feel like there's sometimes lack of commitment to their writing. They are like they are just here to fulfil some sort of obligation, to get their paper and go. That's what I have noticed. There isn't much heart to their writing.

R: Probably you said that that's one of the things that you've noticed in terms of what mature entry students find difficult about academic

writing. But have you noticed anything maybe... maybe some strengths for example based on your experience of teaching maybe several cohorts of mature students, strengths that you see in their writing?

- <sup>21</sup> BAL1: Yeah as I've already said it depends from group to group. But sometimes you find those that are able now to start relating the concepts that they are learning with their workplace activities or workplace experience. So that is one of the strengths that I've seen. Even you as a lecturer you are able to understand oh! so this concept this is how it can be applied in the workplace. So that's one of the strengths, those that are able to express themselves, relate the issues. Then you are able to know that I think this one is able to apply whatever we are teaching to their work environment.
- R: So probably my next question maybe you've already addressed it, maybe it could be partly. But I will ask it anyway. If there are other things that you would like to add then you can always raise them. What do mature students find difficult about academic writing?
- <sup>23</sup> BAL1: I think the first thing is for them to put their ideas, to organise their ideas in a logical format, to express themselves to say this is point A, this is how I expand it, this is how I support it, to find supporting information to support the point, I think most of them they have problems to do that. Sometimes maybe you teach them some models, some frameworks, for them to relate that particular framework and be able to explain it and make it clear, to connect it to something, usually I find *that most of them* they have a problem with that. I don't know if I have answered the question.
- 24 R: Sure
- 25 BAL1: That's how you put it.
- 26 R: Yeah. So what do you think contributes to the students' writing difficulties?

BAL1: Background. Most of them have done professional courses that

27 Previous academic writing experiences

### Previous academic writing experiences

Professional writing experiences

Professional writing experiences

were taught elsewhere. Especially for the groups that I teach, they are taught ABE and what have you. So usually those professional courses they don't give assignments. They are not given... there's no teaching of academic writing in any way. So most of them they don't have any experience in academic writing. And I think most of those professional courses they do not offer any communication courses. So it's about writing the English that you know, everyday's language that you speak. You commit it to paper. But in terms of academic writing I don't think they have that background. Most of them they don't have that.

28 R: Anyway I just want your thoughts on this issue. To what extent do you think the academic writing difficulties that you've mentioned can be attributed to the students' transitioning from workplace writing to academic writing?

BAL1: To be honest from my experience I don't think most of those
that I have encountered that... if they were at all involved in writing at
the workplace I feel from what... from my own experience I feel they
would have no problems at all here. Because I believe writing comes
from afar. From a young age as you are going up, there's various stages
of education. One must be able to advance or to go higher in the level
of writing. But if they are here and then they are still having problems,
then I don't think there's anything happening worthwhile at the office.
There's a direct link. I feel they are unable to even commit themselves
properly at the workplace. That's my feeling.

30 R: So what do you think would help the students improve on their writing?

BAL1: Mature students they really need some sort of orientation when they come. First of all academic writing should be part of their orientation. I don't know, from what I've noticed I think when they come here there's a belief that they were already in the industry. They already undertook some professional course. So they... but what I've noticed is they need an orientation to live up to the standards of the university. Yeah. So that could be one of the interventions that can be

made. Either, OK number one, orient them on the need for academic writing when they join the university. Number two, there's need to reintroduce communication courses whether at third year or whatever level they are entering. There's need for that.

- R: So does it mean that at the moment that is not what is happening?
- <sup>33</sup> BAL1: Yeah. For the mature students like in my faculty they come at either second year or third year but there's no communication course.
- R: So for the final question, what other issues concerning mature entry students' academic writing would you like to add or raise, what hasn't been maybe covered in the questions that I've asked?
- 35 BAL1: What can I say? I hope I will not waste your minutes thinking about that.
- 36 R: Not at all.
- BAL1: I don't know, maybe if we could establish standards for our students on our expectations, make it clear, put it in writing so that they should be aware of the standards expected of them. The other challenge is most of the lecturers, each lecturer will deal with them according to his or her needs so much so that sometimes you meet the mature entry students you ask them about do you know anything about referencing? They are not aware. So it's you who as an individual you are interested in issues of referencing you start teaching them referencing and citation and what have you. But I've noticed that they don't take it seriously because there's is no law, there's no basis. They are saying this is her own making. What she wants. But if we could standardise it as a department, as a faculty to say this is what we want our students to be doing, I feel they are going to comply to that. In fact that's how most of us learned because there was a guideline as to what is expected of you in academic writing. But for mature entry students they are just left scotfree. If the lecturer does not tell them what they are supposed to do, then nothing is going to happen and they will leave this place without focusing. So, too much of what I've said, but the issue is we need to

Writing standards/writing requirements

Writing standards/writing requirements

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Previous academic writing experiences issue is we need to have proper guidelines to give to them of what is expected of good academic writing work.

R: Something that you've said is quite interesting. You've said that it appears as if they are left scot-free as far as maybe the standards are concerned. Does it mean that the mature entry students are treated differently compared to their counterparts, the mainstream ones when it comes to the expectations or standards of academic writing?

<sup>39</sup> BAL1: I wouldn't say they are left out but for the generic students they are starting at first year, and at first year there are diverse range of courses that they are learning including communication. So from the very onset of their learning they are groomed of what is expected of them. But for the mature students they are coming in in the middle of the programme and as I already said it's as if we believe that whatever qualifications that they have they must have been taught that when actually that has not been done. So it's an assumption that the department or the faculty makes to say these ones they already know, if they already have experience, if they already have professional qualification, but for the generic students they have been groomed from the beginning and they know that this is what is expected of us as we come out. So that's why I said I feel they are left scot-free.

#### Sample coded student interview transcript

1	Interview ID: Journalism Student 1 (JS1)			
2	Date of interview: 18/07/17			
3	Place: Interviewee's workplace			
4	Duration: 32 minutes			
5	(Age: 36-45; Gender: M; Faculty: Education and Media Studies;			
	Discipline: Journalism; Year of entry: 2; Mode of attendance: non-			
	holiday)			
6 7	R = Researcher/interviewer JS1 = Journalism student 1			
8	R: So I will go straight to the first question and for this question I will			
	refer you to your response to one of the questions in the questionnaire,			
	and this has to do with the question which I asked you to select five			
	task requirements which you think most of your university lecturers want			
	or expect to see in your assignments, and I also asked you to rank the			
	five chosen task requirements in order of preference with the one that			
	you as ranked one representing the most important. So according to			
	your response you've ranked addressing the question as one and the			
	others are wide reading on assignment question, not plagiarised, proper			
	use of other authors' ideas, and then there's also developing argument.			
	So the question is can you explain			
9	[Brief interruption]			
10	R: So the question is can you explain what each of these five			
	requirements means according to you?			
11	JS1: On addressing the question we were told that we should first			
	understand the demand words and when we understand the demand			
	words we need to address those words. If it is to evaluate it's different			
	from to explain for example. So we really need to compare and draw			
	our conclusions and if there are maybe more than maybe a multiple of			
	options we need to say this is what I prefer and for these reasons and			
	then you conclude. That's what we were told and they always, they			
	always emphasise that you really need to address the questions. Should			

Addressing the (task) question

I go to two and three and four?

R: Yes, you can proceed with the others.

JS1: On plagiarism we are told that it's a serious offence in academic circles. People work hard for their assignments, for their contributions to journals, so according to the discipline we are supposed to really acknowledge their input. We shouldn't use the way we do in journalism, in newspapers that we can quote these entries liberally, and when work is discovered to be based on plagiarism, then it's disqualified altogether. On proper use of citation/reference of other authors' ideas, similar to what I explained on plagiarism but maybe to add to say it also helps to bring credibility to whatever you are writing because it shows that there's authority or precedence which has already been accepted in the past. Wide reading/research on assignment question, on wide reading we are told to show that we are maturing with time. For example we are in year four now, final year, we are supposed to show that we have really gone through a lot of entries or writings so that we can ably defend our positions. So we are supposed to read. Sometimes we are told at least ten articles and cite maybe, others very rarely say a minimum of five but most of them say ten. On developing argument we are told like there's one lecturer who says don't regurgitate, another one says don't vomit back at me, whatever I've given you don't vomit back at me. So we are supposed to bring an issue then develop it, concretise our position, instead of saying there's this problem that we say, sometimes we say you see Malawians are weak in this area because ... before you expound on why Malawians are weak then you go and wander about the issue. So that's what we are told on developing content. Actually that's where I got confused because it looked like almost the same.

14 R: Thanks for those responses. Then I will move on to the next question. For this question I would like you to talk a little bit about one written assignment that was particularly most successful for you and why do you think you did better in that assignment.

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Resources

#### Developing argument

#### [Brief interruption]

- 16 R: I guess I will repeat the question. Can you talk a little bit about one written assignment that was particularly most successful for you and why do you think you did better in that assignment.
- JS1: I think there was one that we were asked to ... what was it? It was a kind of article review. It's just that my memory is failing me. Let me take another one. The other one was specialised writing, we were doing feature writing. So I wrote a feature on I think the pollution in Blantyre, in the rivers of Blantyre city. I think that was the one. So it was successful because one it came out of passion. I was passionate about it. I thought I knew how to address the issue. I contacted a lot of stakeholders, almost exhausting all of them. We also came up with a few suggestions that the authorities could take to address the issue. You know if you drive around Blantyre it's stinking nowadays. So that was the issue. I think off on top of my head that's what I can recall.
- 18 R: What about an assignment that you did much worse on and why do you think you did not perform well in that assignment?
- IS1: There are one or two but I think mostly... I don't know whether this answer is helpful, but mostly it's to do with economics. I think I don't enjoy doing mathematics and stuff like that. Am into languages. So we are supposed to practise and do a lot of stuff and when they come back they really haunt you. I think that's the area that I've been struggling with.
- 20 R: So mostly mathematics, calculations?
- JS1: Mathematics. Actually we are waiting for exams. That's a headache right now.
- R: Then I will move on. For this question I will also refer you to your response in the questionnaire and this has to be the question which I asked you to maybe talk about or mention what you find difficult about academic writing and that should be I think question twenty. Of course I

I can't remember what you wrote, but I don't know, what did you say?

- JS1: I said I think most lecturers go for length of the essays and not the facts that have been presented.
- 24 R: So can you provide some more details about that? Can you say a little bit more about that?
- JS1: For example in [name of module], we are asked about maybe to provide historical context of corruption fights in Malawi since the time of Dr Banda and then give examples. You mention people, people that (I've never heard of). You mention incidents. I mean that you've done your research. Utmost maybe I could do three pages of such a question, then you get a fifty after doing whatever you think and then somebody who even consulted you for examples and stuff like that and they write almost word for word of what you told them, they get eighty or something like that. You check, examples are the same, because it's not even plagiarising because if it happened those are the examples that everyone will cite. And that's just one example that I would give. Most of the times I've seen that I think the lecturers are impressed. Actually sometimes they even say that all this information you couldn't even write five pages only. You could have done seven or more. So am convinced in my little world without their explanation that they are impressed with volumes than quality of the content. But now since am still an undergraduate I can't argue with them because I will not get the grade. I will wait until I graduate. I will give them feedback.
- R: So how do you deal with such kind of maybe challenge or how have you dealt with such kind of a challenge?
- IS1: It's still a challenge. What I've noticed, I could be wrong, what I've noticed is that in academic writing academics follow certain particular pattern. For example even the research that we are doing, each topic you have to introduce it, argue and whatever, whatever, then conclude. Each topic, each chapter has got its own conclusion and the conclusion ties back to your introduction. In some cases almost

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repeating whatever you have said. Now as a journalist am trained to be very economical with words and I wouldn't be repeating things that I've already said and that's where I get it tough. But am working on it.

- 28 R: What else do you think would help you to address such kind of a challenge?
- JS1: I think I need to go through a few more articles that have been done by people who have succeeded in academic circles and see how they argue, how they structure their write-ups because as of now am working from a point of ignorance apart from what I got in the lecture rooms and maybe a few write-ups that have been given by the lecturers or what I got from the library. But I really need to... because really for me it's a big thing. I find it to be a waste of space, a waste of... to me it sounds like redundant and tautology. But that's what academics believe in.
- R: Then I will move on to the next question and for this question I will also refer you to your response to one of the questions that should be question twelve, and for that question I think I asked you to maybe mention or provide some kinds of writing that you do at the workplace, and am sure you've mentioned maybe several. But are there any differences and similarities between the writing that you do at work and that which is required of you at the university?
  - JS1: Yeah the similarities would be that ... the language. We need to follow the rules of the language, grammar and stuff like that, maybe the language that most people can understand which also means a difference because in academic writing sometimes you need to sound a bit educated and use words that are sometimes above normal, while in journalism writing we really have to use the normal everyday language for most part of the write-up. I think the other difference or similarity is the one that I mentioned for the other question that maybe in journalism we believe in being brief while in academic writing we need to be extensive. Like for columns, for opinion pieces we use free style. We are not really bound by the dictates of maybe structuring and stuff like

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experiences

that. People will think no maybe this is his way of writing it. But in academic writing you are kind of limited, that you have to follow certain particular framework. I think that's what I can say off my head.

- 32 R: Just a follow up question on what you said. To what extent does your workplace writing or the kinds of writing that you do at the workplace influence your writing or academic writing?
  - JS1: Because I deal with current affairs so most of the times the stuff that we are learning in journalism course at the university we deal with the same things which are everyday examples. So that helps me to find it a bit easier, and of course not to beat my own drum most of the classmates run to me for examples. Unfortunately they get even better marks than me. But I also find, whether it's to answer the same question, but I also find and I've been told in some cases that I think there's higher expectations from the lecturers on what I can deliver because they know that I've been around in the field for some time and because this is specialised writing, this is academic writing, sometimes they get disappointed to see that it's not what they expected of me. But discipline writing is different from journalism.
- R: So to a certain extent maybe can I say that the lecturers have got certain assumptions about what they expect from maybe students like you who have some experience maybe in the field like journalism and can I say that their assumptions are wrong?
- JS1: Yeah, no they really have expectations and one of them, no, two of them told me that, one actually said when we get the thing, they were telling me as a friend, when we get the write- ups then we start with yours because we know that you are already a writer. Sometimes you are not putting in your all your effort in these things. He was advising me maybe to work harder. So they have a lot of expectations. Even in class sometimes you feel a bit pressured because they say yes what do you think [interviewee's first name]? You, you are an editor, what do you think? But I wouldn't say... OK maybe their expectations are wrong in a way that we go there to be trained. We have the basics yes, but we

have to be coached in that discipline so that we can produce scholarly writings other that these things that we lash at politicians because in that game the limitations are so few unlike in the academic writing.

- 36 R: Then I will move on to the next set of questions and for these questions I will refer you to the assignments and I think... all they are marked, isn't it?
- <sup>37</sup> JS1: No, the one on top, this one only.
- 38 R: It's only one?
- JS1: Yeah
- 40 R: Ok I think we can just refer to that one, the one that is marked. So the first question is can you identify sections or areas of that assignment where you were successful or where you did better and why do you think you were successful in those areas?
- 41 JS1: The issue was to compare, I mean to justify or to argue on whether globalisation theories reflect cultural imperialism thesis. So the content I did better and I think the reason is because as I said am in the current affairs sector and I understand what goes on, the changes, the structural adjustment programmes, the changes that the donor community impose on the developing countries and I could juxtapose such issues. Organisation and structure, I also did well because I think am a writer so that's not an issue. To structure something basically I can do well and I did well. On citation I didn't do... OK that's not the question, the question was where I did well.
- 42 R: Yes, anyway since you are already going into that direction, maybe you just read my mind because the next question is which areas of that assignment did you particularly find difficult to write and why?
- 43 JS1: Actually the question was, in the first place the question itself was a problem and we struggled, not only me but the whole class struggled with it and we always talk about it. Everybody memorised that question because it was to what extent are media globalisation theories a mere

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mirror of the cultural imperialism thesis. We are talking of theories and the thesis, then mirror, not only mirror but a mere mirror and the extent. I earlier on talked about demand words and the extent, there were too many factors that we had to consider in this question. So the question itself was a challenge. According to the lecturer notes am told the logic and argument I didn't do well maybe because in trying to balance these issues, the demands that were in the question, I think I got lost in the woods. And just for your future reference if you return to the classroom then please come down from your level of PhD holders and remember that these are just students. So don't be too technical and confusing in your questions because you people who have gone too far with education you don't understand us the mere mortals.

- 44 R: Alright will remember that.
- 45 JS1: Please, please.
- 46 R: I've seen that the lecturer or the marker of that assignment provided you with some written comments. On what areas did the lecturer offer you the comments?
- 47 JS1: For example, I think I made assumption that we knew, the lecturer and myself knew what we were talking about, but he wanted to remove maybe ourselves from the issue that if somebody gets hold of the paper they can understand. You shouldn't be there to defend it always. So for example I said cultural imperialism is one of the approaches that proponents of globalisation use blah, blah, blah. So he said what? He underlined and said what? Meaning I had to unpack that one. So I think on that one yes I agreed and .... On the other one he says quotes. I think that's where the issue of being a journalist and ... in journalism we know that some issues are universally accepted and they are facts. We don't have to waste time saying Malawi was discovered or may be Dr David Livingstone came to Malawi in ... according to (Boyd) and ... no, everybody... that's a fact of history. But in academic writing we don't take assumptions. So he said quotes. He wanted me to be using citations at least on everything that I wrote. Then yes he also says

what's your stand in the debates? Whether it's a mere mirror, I have to take a stand that this one is saying this, this one is saying this, this one... but I think this is what I believe in based on.... So he also told me to do that. Where we always have a fight with the lecturers is on the conclusion. I said... it was just two sentences. He felt insulted. He wanted a paragraph or more. So I said based on the foregoing arguments it can be said that the media globalisation theories are a mere mirror of the cultural imperialism thesis full stop. Then he was very angry with me because of that challenge that I talked about because I feel am repeating whatever I already said, but he wanted me to isolate and pack it nicely, even mention what I've mentioned before. So am working on conclusions.

R: That's good. So how did you feel about that feedback?

- JS1: I didn't like it. OK the feedback was OK because it helped me to improve. But I didn't agree with the grade because I didn't even get fifty percent of the marks. So after working so hard, I felt bad. But anyway it's a process of learning. That's why I went there to be trained in the discipline.
- 50 R: Did you find the comments helpful?

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..Lecturer

Feedback

..Lecturer

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- JS1: Yes very helpful, very helpful especially like conclusion and I've compared, I've seen a few write-ups, academic writings, you really have to summarise whatever you've said in the whole write-up and bring your stand. While in my case, you say, like in journalism writing you say having said what I've said or every Malawian knows that the [name of political party] has failed. That's not... that can hardly be defended, but in journalism you get away with such statements, sweeping statements as conclusion. So it really helped me a lot. It opened my eyes a lot.
- R: Then for the final question, for this question I would like to give you opportunity to give or to add anything or comment on your experience of writing whilst at the University of Malawi.

Professional writing experiences

### Writing experiences from previous learning

come with our baggage of experience and then we have to take that one out and bring something new. Now it's like teaching old dogs new tricks. It's not easy. But also I think and I've heard my colleagues saying that there's a lot of assumption among the lecturers. They think we know these things. So you would hear a lecturer saying this is standard two material. You already know these things. This you did at your diploma. Which diploma? Some have a diploma from the Trade Fair Grounds. Some from Sky Way, whatever, whatever. There's no proper regulation. There was no proper regulation at that time of the higher education in Malawi. So we shouldn't make assumptions that because everyone has a diploma then they covered this area. Some of these things are personal. They might be assumptions only. What else could I say?

JS1: I think for us, mature students, we are in a kind of a fix because we

R: As long as names are not mentioned. That will be fine.

Relations/interactions with lecturers/other students JS1: But anyway people say and sometimes I think it might apply not necessarily to me but maybe to other people that some of these lecturers we have been with in the industry and some are considered to not have succeeded. Now we go and sit under their Kachere tree, it's payback time for some of us although we are not the ones who made them to fail. So... and sometimes they want to prove a point that they know better than everyone who is in the industry. So I think it's a big challenge to study in Malawi. I've heard a lot of people saying for my masters I will not do it in a Malawian, at a Malawian university especially at UNIMA, and UNIMA you are talking of Chancellor College or Polytechnic because the lecturers we know each other, we have interacted before and some of them want us to feel that these things are not easy. When we don the wisdom hat, you call it the wisdom hat? The wisdom hat, we should really have sweated for it. So such issues also are maybe personality clashes. Personally I haven't experienced it really but I know that a lot of people complain about that and I see sometimes the way people are treated. For instance, if somebody is late for classes maybe five minutes late, why should they

#### Relations/interactions with lecturers/other students

Academic year/calendar

be turned away? And this is a mature student, maybe he's coming from Lilongwe travelling all the way to Blantyre and then the lecture, the lesson is maybe five minutes in progress and they are told no, go back you are not serious. I mean, a mature student is not serious? Is paying a million Kwacha from their pocket? So such issues I think also affect us a lot. So sometimes we exaggerate our being nice. Sometimes we exaggerate our being active in class because we are not sure what the lecturer expects of you. If you are too quiet he will think you are not interested, you are indifferent, you are looking down upon them. When you are too talkative they would think you consider yourself knowledgeable. It's tricky for some of us and you see some of us have never been through the formal university training because the diploma that we have maybe you did by correspondence, maybe you did at fly by night college at a corner of town. So this is the only formal training that we are having and as I said the discipline of academic writing, university life, we are just learning and in our case we started in year two for the four years. We started in year two, which means the orientation of year one we didn't benefit from. So these other assumptions are not correct. We have never been to anybody's university. So how do we get expected to understand and behave accordingly?

# Appendix 21: Final list of codes for interview and open-ended questionnaire responses

## List of codes with definitions

	Codes	Definition
1	Academic writing support	Support available/unavailable to students to aid transition to and development of academic writing; includes forms of support offered/not offered by lecturers/ institution. Also refers to writing support students sought/received from peers/others, how students identified and accessed writing support, how they dealt with unavailability of writing support, their expectations and assumptions about academic writing support. This code further applies to cases where suggestions are made on the kind of support students could be offered to help develop their academic writing competence; but excludes cases pertaining to feedback.
2	Academic year/calendar	Refers to duration of academic year/calendar, the modular system, modes of course delivery, scheduling of assignment tasks, and enrolment policy/ entry routes; perceived impact of these aspects on e.g. students' development of writing competence and institution's provision of academic writing support
3	Addressing the (task) question	Students' and lecturers' understanding of what addressing the (task) question entails; includes perceived difficulties students face with addressing (task) questions
4	Comparison with traditional students	Students' and lecturers' comparison between mature students' and traditional students' academic writing experiences in terms of: writing experiences from previous learning, professional writing experiences, access to resources, academic writing support, and writing standards/lecturer expectations, as well as duration of academic year/ calendar.
5	Content knowledge	This code covers all cases pertaining to content knowledge (includes content knowledge gained from professional writing and writing experiences from previous learning)
6	Critical thinking/ evaluating subject content	What critical thinking about/evaluating subject content means to students and lecturers
7	Developing argument	Students' and lecturers' understanding of argumentation and developing arguments in academic writing; includes perceived difficulties students face with argument development
8	Feedback	Students' views on lecturer feedback (solicited/ unsolicited) they received/did not receive on their written work, how feedback was conveyed and what it focused on, students' reaction to or attitude towards feedback (i.e. how they felt about feedback, what they learnt, their expectations/preferences, their interpretation of feedback, and action taken/not taken as a result of feedback/lack of feedback); includes feedback from peers and others
9	Learning behaviours	Students' learning behaviours (including reading habits, time management, attitude towards writing/ task demands, approach to tackling task demands) and perceived impact of these behaviours on students' writing (processes, outcome, performance)/development of writing competence

	Codes	Definition
10Life commitmentsFactors beyond		Factors beyond students' academic life (e.g. work and social commitments) and
		perceived impact of these on students' academic writing - processes, outcome, and
		performance. Also refers to cases where suggestions are made on institutional
		academic writing support pertaining to mature students' (personal) needs.
11	Presentation	Presentation of text (e.g. language use), also include conventions pertaining to
		layout/ formatting/ paragraphing
12	Writing experiences	Students' prior academic writing experiences, what these experiences afford/ do not
	from previous learning	afford students when engaging in academic writing, lecturers' and institution's
		awareness of (lack of)/assumptions about these writing experiences; also refers to
		cases where university academic writing and writing experiences gained from prior
		study are compared.
13	Professional writing	Refers to previous professional writing experiences and those concurrent with
	experiences	academic writing, what these experiences afford/ do not afford students when
		engaging in academic writing, lecturers' and institution's awareness of (lack
		of)/assumptions about these writing experiences; also refers to cases where
		professional writing is compared with academic writing
14	Relations/interactions	Students' opinions of and attitudes towards faculty/peers; perceived impact of the
	with lecturers/other	relations/interactions on students' writing, e.g. provision of/access to writing
	students	support.
15	Resources	Provision of/access to resources for writing assignments, writing from sources,
		including difficulty with these; interpretation of effective use of sources, perceived
		pedagogical reasons for writing with sources and citation. This code is also
		assigned to cases where suggestions pertaining to using resources to enhance
		students' academic writing competence are made.
16	Structuring/organising	Students' and lecturers' understanding of what structuring/organising text entails
	text	
17	Writing standards/	Provision of writing standards /writing requirements/lecturer expectations to
	writing requirements/	students, includes students' access to and understanding of these; also refers to
	lecturer expectations	comments pertaining to perceived variation/ inconsistency in these aspects.





### Appendix 23: A sample memo on interview data

Extract from a student's interview transcript:

"I think for us, mature students, we are in a kind of a fix because we come with our baggage of experience and then we have to take that one out and bring something new. Now it's like teaching old dogs new tricks. It's not easy." (JSI1)

### Memo: Unlearning prior internalised practices

Here prior experiences (which ones? life, work related?) considered as 'baggage' which has to be taken out in order to 'bring (in) something new', but also acknowledges the challenge of this - " it's like teaching old dogs new tricks, it's not easy" - so in this case, prior experiences considered as detrimental to learning - e.g. learning about academic writing - doing academic writing itself? To what extent is un-learning previous practices (especially from workplace settings) possible? Or rather should they learn to negotiate practices in the academic and workplace settings which maybe at odds/conflict? Refer to Lea (2004) - Paxton & Frith, 2013, 2014; Hyland 2009; Richards & Pilcher, 2013? Wingate (2012)

The former could be challenging because students have internalised such practices (for some having been exposed to them/engaged with them for a long time) - such practices could be ingrained. I think it's not about 'taking out the experiences /knowledge students bring with them to academic writing' because these experiences seem to be useful resources- (which lecturers seem to value and expect students should have, but loathe? them at the same time) - students draw on these resources - they fall back on these when faced with unfamiliar practices. Rather it's about learning to negotiate between the two - could the two co-exist?

Learning to negotiate between writing requirements/practices of the academic and workplace contexts - This requires awareness of the distinctiveness of genres and literacy practices (discursive knowledge) in these two contexts, as lack of such awareness can lead students to draw on aspects of professional genres and literacy practices which may conflict with those of their disciplines (Devitt, 2007). In addition, as Ivanič (1998) and Michaud (2011, p. 11) have observed, professional discursive knowledge and composing strategies that students internalise and develop on the job through the genres they produce or consume, as well as the "attitudes and dispositions toward written discourse which they internalise" can influence how they make a transition from writing in the workplace to writing in the academia (Meaning what?)

## Appendix 24: Illustration of coding of open-ended responses on soft copy student questionnaire

Apper	ndix 24: Illustration of coding of open-ended responses in soft copy questionnaires	
A sele	ction of open-ended responses from a journalism student's questionnaire	
1.	How helpful is your knowledge/experience of workplace writing in your academic writing? Please explain your answer. Clarity, simplicity and brevity I use at work are also widely accepted as qualities	
	of good writing even at school. Most of the lecturers prefer essays which are	
	clear, simple and not unnecessarily long. The issue at hand must be clearly	
	articulated in a news story at work if it is to secure any space in a paper.	
	Likewise, most of the lecturers prefer that the issue being addressed in an	
	academic question must be clearly spelt.	Commented [C1]: Professional writing experiences
2.	What do you find difficult about academic writing at university? The need for precise attribution for every borrowed thought makes academic	
	writing difficult for me. Every borrowed thought must be attributed from the	
	source, publisher and year of publication. In news writing there is you do not	Commented [C2]: Resources
	necessarily have to precisely attribute everything. You can just say critics,	
	analysts or commentators say this this this but that is not allowed in academic	
	writing.	Commented [C3]: Professional writing experiences
3.	What would help you to improve your writing at university? I need more sessions on academic writing and tutorials. Since my work involves	Commented [C4]: Academic writing support
	extensive writing the work and academic styles crash with each other often. I	
	find myself using academic writing in journalistic works and vice-versa.	Commented [C5]: Professional writing experiences
4.	Do you think that as a mature-entry student you have any advantages in comparison to normal-entry students in terms of the writing you do at university? Please describe the advantages and provide reasons for your answer.	
	The main advantage is practical, examples. When you talk of corruption for	
	example a mature journalism student for example should be aware of several	
	corruption cases than a normal entry student who may have not worked before.	
	The other advantage could be the level of language. As someone who is writing	
	on daily basis, a mature student should have a richer vocabulary which is a tool	
	box for building essays and case studies.	Commented [C6]: Comparison with traditional students; professional writing experiences
5.	Do you think that as a mature-entry student you have any disadvantages in comparison to normal-entry students in terms of the writing you do at university? Please describe the disadvantages and provide reasons for your answer.	

The main disadvantage should be when academic and work writing styles crash with each other. And again as someone who may be working, he/she may lack time for preparation.

Commented [C7]: Professional writing experiences