

THE READING AND WRITING CENTRE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO:
TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS OF THE
FIRST ENTERING HUMAN DIETETICS STUDENTS

By

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DECLARATION

I, Khalo Kaparela Evans, declare that the research report titled: ***The Reading and Writing Centre at the University of Limpopo: towards the development of the academic writing skills of the entering human Dietetics students*** is my own work and that it has not been submitted for any other course or degree and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. This research report is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree, Master of Arts in English Studies at the University of Limpopo.

Name..... Date.....

Signature.....

DEDICATION

This research report is dedicated to my mother and grandmother who have been my source of strength throughout the study with their endless prayers;

To my late sister who has always been there for me,

And to my uncle who has been my mentor throughout my academic years.

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- The participants who volunteered to participate in study in order to make it a success.

ABSTRACT

Although several interventions have been in place to address the writing difficulties of students, research reveals that student writing is still one of the major challenges experienced by English Second Language (ESL) students worldwide; specifically, in the context of higher education institutions. As such, writing centres have been deemed as facilitators that are paramount for the transition of first-year students' high school literacies to the academic writing conventions of higher learning. The primary purpose of this study was to examine the efficiency of the Reading and Writing Centre (RWC) as a supporting structure of the University of Limpopo (UL) through a case study of services rendered to first entering dietetics students. The study was guided by Vygotsky' zone of proximal development and scaffolding theories to determine how the knowledgeable other can support the less knowledgeable students in developing their academic writing skills. An analysis of students' assignments for the first semester and the second semester was conducted. The study also used semi-structured interviews to allow the current researcher to gain a detailed description on the challenges confronted by the dietetics students, and whether RWC is efficient in improving the academic writing skills of the dietetics students. The research established that academic writing appeared to be difficult for first-year entering dietetics students in the first semester prior to the assistance from RWC, and relied on the centre for the transition of the academic writing demands of higher learning. The study further discovered that although the students still committed slight grammatical mistakes, they showed improvement from the assistance they obtained from the feedback received from the RWC, ultimately signifying that the centre played a pivotal in scaffolding first-year students who came to higher learning underprepared for the academic writing conventions.

Keywords

Academic writing, high school literacies, writing centres, student tutors, feedback,

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Despite various interventions to address students' writing difficulties, research reveals that student writing remains one of the key challenges experienced by English Second Language (ESL) learners globally; notably, in the context of higher education institutions (Lillis & Scott, 2007; Ivanic & Lea, 2006; Lea, 2004; Munro, 2003; Lea & Street, 1998; Gambell, 1991). Academic writing skills have long been recognised as essential to students' overall performance by educational institutions. According to the academic writing literature, if students are to effectively continue in their studies, they must have a fair understanding of academic writing conventions. This includes, among other things, grammar and vocabulary competence. This is not the case, since some first-year English Second Language (ESL) students struggle with writing according to disciplinary academic writing standards and patterns. This may be attributed to the students' prior sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds. A lot of ESL students are from the Sepedi, Xitsonga, and Tshivenda first language backgrounds, and have largely been exposed to English as a medium of instruction at school. This, in turn, hinders their writing abilities in English and prevents students from making a smooth transition to academic writing patterns of higher learning.

In evaluating the link between writing and literacy on a global scale, Lea and Street (1998) stress that literacy standards in high schools and higher education institutions are quite poor, and academics frequently complain that students cannot competently write essays. Poor academic writing has been identified as a particular issue among first-year students at South African institutions since the majority of local and foreign students are ESL speakers (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013; Chokwe, 2011).

Several universities established support structures, such as a writing centre, to help first-year ESL students support and improve their academic writing skills. In light of this, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Reading and Writing Centre (RWC) at the University of Limpopo (UL) in developing the academic development of first-year dietetics students. This is a group of students whose lecturers have consistently

expressed concern that their writing was overwhelmingly poor, posing a threat to their academic success.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Academic writing has been and continues to be one of the most difficult challenges for first-year ESL students. To assist ESL students in making a smooth transition from high school illiteracies to academic writing conventions of higher learning, several writing centres, such as the RWC at UL, have been established to assist students in making a smooth transition from high school illiteracies to academic writing conventions of higher learning. The center's goal is to help first-year students, including Dietetics students, develop their academic writing skills. The centre is open during the week, with student tutors serving as language consultants. Their mandate is to help students who are struggling with academic issues such as how to structure an introduction, conclusion, and referencing, as well as language features such as cohesion and coherence, syntax, and punctuation marks. Despite efforts to overcome ESL students' writing challenges, students, including dietetics students, continue to visit the writing centre for assistance with their assignments and have enrolled in a year-long English course that covers modules such as Preparing for University, Library Sessions for Research Purposes, Features for Academic Writing, and Effective Use of a Dictionary, the Writing Process, and Element of Writing. Given this, the researcher realised that, while there is a centre that aims to improve the academic writing skills of first-year students, no study has been conducted to determine whether the centre is effective in fulfilling its mandate. As a result, the researcher identified a gap that needed to be filled.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the Reading and Writing Centre as a supporting structure at the University of Limpopo by conducting a case study of services provided to first-year dietetics students.

2.1. Research questions

Main research questions

- How does the University of Limpopo's Reading and Writing Centre help first-year dietetics students' transition from secondary school literacies to academic writing conventions of higher learning?

Sub-questions

- What are the main challenges that first-year dietetics students encounter when writing academic assignments?
- Has the academic writing of dietetics students improved (or not) as a result of the centre's assistance?

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because it aims to generate findings that will help RWC at UL improve their strategies for addressing the academic writing challenges of first-year students. The study will add to the existing literature on the writing challenges of first-year students and provide a foundation for future research.

4. ROLE OF THEORY IN THE STUDY

This section describes the role of theory in the research. The purpose of this section is to show how the theory used in this study relates to existing knowledge. The framework of this study will be based on the tenets of Lev Vygotsky's (1896 – 1934) Constructivist Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Scaffolding theory.

Researchers have previously used the aforementioned theory to explain the significant role played by educators, peers, or a more knowledgeable other in guiding children's learning and development (Stone, 1998; Krause, Bochner and Duchesne, 2003; Hammond, 2002; Daniels, 2001). The Zone Proximal Development is defined by Vygotsky as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky's theory, when a student is in the zone of proximal development for a particular task, providing appropriate assistance by a knowledgeable adult will aid the learning progress, eventually leading to effective results.

According to Roosevelt (2008), the main goal of Vygotsky's theory is to keep learners in their ZPD as much as possible by assigning them interesting learning and problem-solving tasks that are slightly more difficult to complete on their own. As Roosevelt adds, such a situation forces students to collaborate with their peers, tutors, or educators to complete the task at hand. Similarly, Shabani, Khatib and Ebadi (2010) emphasise that the goal of ZPD is to place students in collaborative activities with more skilled individuals. Through such collaborative endeavours, students are given the opportunity to internalise new concepts, psychological tools, and skills for future purposes. Vygotsky (1962) popularised the concept of ZPD in order to condemn psychometric-based testing in Russian schools. Regular testing only reflected students' current level of achievement, not their potential for future advancement. The zone of actual development (ZAD) does not adequately depict progress. Instead, it emphasises what is currently being created or accomplished. The degree of aided execution in ZPD includes the potential for rising behaviour and "tomorrow of development" (Vygotsky, 1978).

According to the above comments, the term proximal indicates that the assistance provided goes just slightly beyond the learner's current competence, complementing and building on their existing abilities.

Vygotsky identifies three critical components for effectively assisting the learning process among ESL students:

- A More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) - That is, an individual who has more experience and skills than the student. In the context of this study, an MKO is the lecturer of the students and student tutors at RWC.
- Social interactions- This involves a tutor interacting with a student to allow the student to observe and practice the skills of the tutor. This implies students imitating spoken language and written comments/feedback of their lecturers and student tutors on their assignments.
- Scaffolding- This involves supportive activities provided by an educator, or MKO, to offer support as the student is led through the ZPD. In the context of this study, this involves giving students feedback on their assignments and giving them tasks.

The theory behind scaffolding is that when students first approach a new skill or subject, they can accomplish much more with support. As they master each step, those supports can be gradually reduced until the learner is able to complete these tasks entirely on their own (Bruner, 1966).

Scaffolding, according to Fink (2003), is a technique for assignment and course design that provides students with the necessary support while also encouraging independent learning and a deeper understanding of the material. The instructor can make the process and expectations of disciplinary knowledge and communication transparent to students through effective scaffolding, which opens up new opportunities for the instructor to create a significant learning experience (Fink, 2003).

Scholarly writings, such as a literature review, lab report, or research essay, are cognitively demanding and necessitate complex skill sets. Students must not only understand the course material, but they must also be able to write in the required disciplinary genre, select high-quality and relevant sources, and synthesise and evaluate difficult concepts and evidence. Scaffolding is thus critical in providing the necessary skills that would allow students to complete an assignment in accordance with academic writing conventions of higher learning, ultimately leading to the generation of a higher quality product.

The researcher investigated how the RWC at UL played the role of scaffolding first-year dietetics students toward becoming independent academic writers in the context of this study. The section that follows will look at the development of writing skills in ESL students.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This section investigates the study's relevant reviewed literature. It is divided into ten sub-sections: the role of writing centres in higher education; academic writing; the relationship between vocabulary and academic writing; the development of writing conventions and discourse competence; plagiarism as a concern among students; pedagogical approaches to facilitate effective writing skills; cohesion and coherence; Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic, and the role of feedback in shaping.

2.2. The role of writing centres at higher institutions of learning

According to Lea and Street (1998), accessing higher education might be difficult for people attempting to master the rules of admittance. Some first-year students struggle to adjust to the university atmosphere because they lack the cultural capital required to succeed in their studies, not to mention the shortcomings of education provided in particularly poor schools (Cross & Carpentier, 2009). It should be highlighted that even students from well-resourced schools sometimes fail to achieve the academic literacy requirements at university. Chokwe (2010) supports this idea by stating that various research shows that ESL students are underprepared for the demands of higher learning institutions in the context of academic writing. Again, for many students, especially those who speak English as a second or third language, the transition from secondary to higher education is difficult (Papashane and Hlalele, 2014, Pineteh, 2014). According to the researchers, the transition from high school literacies to academic writing should include collaboration between language specialists and discipline specialists (Elton, 2010; Mitchell & Evison, 2006; Jackson et al., 2006; Hawkins, 2005; Jacobs, 2005).

Given the foregoing, writing centres are becoming a more common part of higher education (HE) assistance in the UK to help address the problem that "a large number of contemporary British undergraduates lack the basic ability to express themselves in writing" (Murray and Kirton, 2006). According to Delport, Lackay and Richards (2019), writing centres liberates students from academic writing obstacles and leads them to full

involvement in disciplinary communities. A writing centre, according to Gordon (2014), is a learning space where students can meet with peer tutors and receive immediate feedback on their work. Furthermore, such an environment may allow students to pose questions on confusing points that they might not have had the courage to ask in lecture halls, thereby improving students' overall performance.

Arbee and Samuel (2015) investigated the impact of writing centre assistance on undergraduate students' academic performance in management studies. The study sought to assess the effect of discipline-specific Writing Place (WP) assistance on students' assessment outcomes. The study found that writing centres did, in fact, influence students' assessment performance in an exit level module and played a critical role in shaping students' writing skills.

Similarly, Kruger and Bevan-Dye (2013) investigated the supervisor's and language editor's important supportive roles in this regard. According to the study, students lacked basic language skills such as correct grammar, the ability to organise paragraphs coherently, and referencing, and they resorted to plagiarism. As a result, the study discovered that supervisors, referred to as the MKO (More knowledgeable other) in this study, were the primary resources for language development in general and writing development in particular. "They must correct poor writing, serve as a writing mentor, demonstrate good academic writing, and connect students to other writing support networks." Several participants stated that many supervisors are currently struggling to fulfil this dual responsibility" (Kruger & Bevan-Dye, 2013:59). It could be because developing academic writing skills takes time and dedication; as Jim Cummins (2000) points out, developing cognitive academic skills can take up to 7-10 years. In the following section, the researcher examines academic writing as one of the study's key focus areas.

2.3. Academic Writing

According to Murray (2005), academic writing is the style of writing with specific conventions and methods used in publishing a paper, writing an assignment, and writing a thesis in a specific discipline. "Academic writing is a well-structured product with careful considerations of factors such as audience, purpose, organisation, style, flow, and presentation" (Swales & Feak, 2012:3), and these factors are specific to who, why, and how questions.

Past and current studies have documented the urgent need to develop the writing competency of first-year students, highlighting that many first-year students were unprepared for the writing style required at universities. Chokwe (2013) investigated first-year students' conceptions of writing and the extent to which these conceptions influence their academic writing in a study. According to the study, some students claimed to be well prepared for the writing style at university. An examination of their assignments, however, revealed that they were not adequately prepared for academic writing conventions of higher learning, such as an introduction and conclusion.

Introductions and conclusions are critical components of academic essays, necessitating the writer's undivided attention. A well-written introduction, according to research conducted by the University of Adelaide (2014), should provide insight into your topic, highlight major issues of the essay, and provide an indication of the main idea in the essay. It should pique the reader's interest and encourage them to read more. A good conclusion, on the other hand, should reflect and summarise major issues raised in the essay. Furthermore, the conclusion should provide a clear reflection of the main arguments and discoveries of the essay, as well as a suggestion for further research.

Despite the importance of introductory and concluding statements, research shows that students struggle to construct coherent introductory and concluding statements in their essay writing. The findings of a study on students' essays by Cekiso, Tshotsho and Somniso (2016) revealed that some students had coherence issues when writing their introductions. The study looked into first-year university students' difficulties with

coherence writing strategies in essay writing at a South African university. According to the findings, the students' introductions were insufficient to prepare and persuade the reader to continue reading the body of the essay. According to the study, the cause of the latter problem was a lack of a thesis statement in the students' essays. In addition, the study reveals that the students rushed to the body without briefing the readers on what to expect as they progressed through the essay. One of the most significant challenges students face in academic writing is a lack of academic vocabulary to express their ideas (Fallahzadeh, 2007). The researcher will discuss the relationship between vocabulary and academic writing as a tool that would allow first-year students to express their thoughts using the academic vocabulary required at a higher education institution in the following section.

2.4. The relationship between vocabulary and academic writing

The lack of academic vocabulary and jargon is a major factor that contributes significantly to students' difficulties in accurately demonstrating academic language proficiency. According to Meara (1996), students who demonstrate a large vocabulary are more likely to succeed not only in academic writing but also in understanding their subject material. This viewpoint is shared by Cooper and van Dyk (2003), who state that "it may be inferred that quality of writing, level of reading comprehension, and academic performance are related to vocabulary size" given the assumption that available vocabulary in students plays a decisive role in the quality of their writing and understanding of a text.

In South Africa, many students enrol in university without having a sufficient academic vocabulary to perform tasks such as reading and writing academic texts effectively (Cliff & Yeld, 2006). To support this perception, Cooper (2000) discovered a link between the breadth (size) of first-year students' academic vocabulary knowledge and their academic performance at a South African university. According to Cooper (2000), many of the students in her study lacked both high-frequency and academic word knowledge needed to read academic texts, which would have an impact on their writing abilities.

The evidence and perceptions on the relationship between vocabulary and academic writing presented above may be seen in the writing of first-year dietetics students, whose poor writing skills can also be attributed to a lack of academic vocabulary for reading, writing, and critique abilities. Students have previously used the RWC at the University of Limpopo to become acquainted with the academic writing style and some of the discipline's academic vocabulary. The question is whether the centre is capable of carrying out this mandate. The following section will go over the effective skills that students' need, as well as some strategies for promoting writing skills among ESL students.

2.5. Development of Writing Skills and Discourse Competence

2.5.1. Effective writing skills

Writing is a highly complex, cognitive, self-directed activity that incorporates several cognitive processes (Gillespie & Graham, 2011) and necessitates a thorough understanding of grammar and grammar organisation (Hedge, 1988). As a result, writing is regarded as one of the most difficult language skills to master, alongside listening, reading, and speaking, and as researchers explain, this is due to the various components that ESL learners must adhere to prove themselves as good writers (Berman & Cheng, 2010). Even though some students come from an English-medium education, a large number of them are unable to express themselves in writing (Nehal & Nursat, 2013). Because of these complexities, undergraduate students, particularly first-year students, take a general English course that covers the four basic language skills of writing, speaking, listening, and reading.

According to Brown (2001), the difficulty of writing is that it is a process that requires an entirely different set of competencies than simply representing spoken language. Written products are frequently the result of thinking, drafting, and revising procedures that necessitate specialisation skills, which not every speaker naturally develops. More than linguistic competence, which includes sentence structure, grammar, and spelling, among other things, the characteristics of writing include taking a position, developing an argument, addressing a specific audience, and selecting an appreciating writing style (Lillis, 2003). Language facilitators and tutors must be aware of this skill and assist

learners in developing the ability to present and debate their ideas. According to the aforementioned authors, lectures should provide students with transitional words or conjunctions that will allow students to take a position in their writing and move from one point to another in a logical manner.

The aforementioned author also emphasises the importance of lecturers in guiding students on the importance of using past and current articles in strengthening their arguments and persuading readers that the readers presented in assignment writing are factual and believable. This, however, may appear difficult for first-year students who have relied solely on textbooks for knowledge acquisition. Based on these comments, it is clear that effective writing includes a variety of language features other than grammar, spelling, and vocabulary. It is therefore critical that lecturers and language tutors assist students, particularly those entering university, in becoming acquainted with skills that will enable them to be effective writers. Writing skills have historically, and continue to be, a challenge for first-year students. Given this, the following section will discuss some of the difficulties that first-year students face when writing assignments.

2.5.2. Challenges ESL students confront in their writings

Despite the above findings on effective writing skills and their impact on conveying meaning, many ESL student writers face a variety of writing challenges as they strive to learn English as a second language. These issues can be classified as linguistic, psychological, cognitive, or pedagogical (Haider, 2012; Hyland, 2003).

- Linguistic challenges and writing skills

Haider (2012) and Hyland (2003) investigated ESL learners' writing skills: problems, factors, and suggestions in terms of linguistic challenges. The study discovered that ESL students had over 1217 issues with grammar, syntax, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, word form and word order, spoken expressions, contracted forms, cohesion, idea repetition, and L1 influence. Grammar had the highest number of errors. This included errors in different word classes, subject-verb agreement, and singular and plural forms, as shown in the examples below: 'these applications provides a proper protocol to

communicate others', 'these channels provide a large number of information', 'every day the situation worsens', and 'their personality impresses everyone'.

In addition to the aforementioned issues, students had to deal with spelling and punctuation issues. Invension (invention), for example, 'individually' (individually). One of the study's participants responded as follows:

"I had too many problems with awkward phrases or words because, as my native language is not English, I tend to write in English as I do in Spanish. On several occasions, I tend to translate the phrases directly from Spanish, a reason for which these do not make the same sense on having read them in English." This is a common problem for many ESL students in higher learning institutions.

- Cognitive challenges

Another issue that ESL students face is cognition. According to Zuiga and Macas (2006), developing grammatical and morphological precision while using the appropriate register is cognitively demanding. This cognitive demand is increased when appropriate rhetorical structure, audience (reader) knowledge, critical thinking, and several principles such as coherence, concision, cohesiveness, and simplicity are included. Thus, the cognitive demand is determined not only by the number of elements that learners of academic literacies must consider but also by the complexity embedded in each of these elements. For example, Zuiga and Macas (2006) discuss the complexity of summarising, among other activities. The latter researchers have also taken note of the difficulties our students face at an undergraduate foreign language teaching programme when writing academic papers, particularly when asked to summarise, paraphrase, cite and acknowledge sources, and use other specific academic writing devices. Plagiarism is another issue that first-year students face at higher education institutions. As a result, the sections that follow examine plagiarism as a particular concern among students.

2.6 Plagiarism as a concern among students

Plagiarism is defined as the intentional or unintentional use of another's work or ideas, published or unpublished, without acknowledging the source (Jameson, 1993; Logue, 2004). According to Hannabus (2001), plagiarism is defined as using another person's

words or phrases and restating another person's thoughts in slightly different expressions. On the one hand, academics define intentional plagiarism as a severe case in which students are aware that they are claiming someone else's words or ideas as their own (Strayer University iCampus, 2010b).

Unintentional plagiarism, on the other hand, is defined by Harris (2001) as an occurrence in which students use the words or ideas of others but fail to quote or give credit, typically due to a lack of knowledge. Unintentional plagiarism includes omitting or incorrectly citing a citation, paraphrasing the original text by only changing the sentence structure or changing the sentence structure but not the words, and putting quotation marks around only a portion of a quotation (Harris, 2001; Park, 2003; Pecorari, 2003; Strayer University iCampus, 2010a). Scholarly research indicates that plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, is currently on the rise in the context of South African university students (Coetzee & Breytenbach, 2006; Cronin, 2003; Ellery, 2008). According to Ellery (2008), first-year students are unsure of what constitutes plagiarism and are frequently the perpetrators of plagiarism. This can be traced back to high school education, where students earned good grades because their teachers approved their work, which they copied from encyclopaedias and other reference books, or accepted purchased assignments (Logue, 2004, Sisti, 2007; Walker, 1998; White, 1993).

Due to the aforementioned comments, students enrol in universities without understanding what referencing/plagiarism is, and as a result, they turn to writing centres like RWC as one of the interventions to help them transition from high literacies to academic conventions that include knowledge to reference.

2.7. Pedagogical Approaches to facilitate effective writing skills

According to Haider (2012) and Hyland (2003), teachers lack an appropriate pedagogic approach to teaching writing, such as providing prompt and effective feedback to students, and, most importantly, teachers lack the ability to motivate students. It suggests that when lecturers fail to assist students in improving their writing, students may continue to experience writing deficits such as grammar, spelling, punctuation, cohesion and

coherence, and how to take a stance in their writing, among other difficulties. As a result, this section investigates various approaches to shaping ESL students' writings.

Academic writing appears to be a difficult task for ESL students, particularly first-year students who are expected to transition from high school literacies to academic conventions of higher learning, as mentioned throughout the study. In light of this, this section includes interventions recommended by academics for shaping ESL students' writing.

According to Shokrpour and Fallahzadeh (2007), creating a high learning environment for students in classrooms is most likely to improve their academic writing abilities. It necessitates several interventions from the ESL teacher, one of which has been identified by researchers, scholars, and teachers as motivation.

2.7.1. The role motivation in learning the second language

Researchers believe that students' attitudes and motivation toward learning English, or any second foreign language, is related to whether or not they will be proficient in that language. Dornyei (2001) suggests that learners who are enthusiastic about learning a second language are eager to learn, work hard, focus on correcting their mistakes, and eventually acquire the rules that are concerned with their learners who are interested in acquiring the second language. Kondal (2015) investigated the importance of motivation in the classroom. The study investigated the importance of motivation in ESL learning as well as the factors that may influence learners' motivation in ESL learning. According to the findings of the study, learner attitudes and motivation are closely related to successful second language acquisition.

Motivation, according to Hall (2011), is a critical factor in completing a specific activity. Teachers, on the other hand, typically describe language learners' accomplishments as being primarily dependent on the presence or absence of motivation. Gardner (2010) also claims that motivation, as an abstract and complex concept, is used to describe human behaviour. There are two types of motivation: instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. Integrative motivation entails learning a second language to participate in the

culture of that language. Instrumental motivation includes learners learning the language for a variety of reasons, including obtaining employment, gaining admission to a higher learning institution, successfully expressing ideas in assignments and exams, and a variety of other reasons. According to Cook (2000), learners who lack integrative or instrumental motivation are more likely to struggle with second language acquisition. In the context of this study, it could be argued that RWC lecturers and MKOs should successfully motivate or raise awareness among students about the importance of mastering the demanding academic language of higher learning. For example, show students the importance of learning the academic language by demonstrating that they will be able to demonstrate their understanding during assignments and examinations with ease.

Amjah (2014) investigated various strategies teachers could use to develop students' interest in learning English as a second language to discover the lack of interest of ESL students in learning the second language and the strategies that they could adopt to stimulate interest in learning ESL. The study went on to look into learners' perceptions of learning English as a second language. According to the findings of the study, 66.6 percent of students admitted to enjoying learning English, while 33.3% had no interest in learning as a second language. The students stated that one of the reasons they were less interested in learning English as a second language was the difficulty they had understanding teachers' instructions on proper grammar usage. The study also revealed that when the teacher incorporated the use of ICT and music to support their language learning, 90% of the students' interests were piqued, while 10% did not. As a result, lecturers should devise initiatives to keep students interested in learning English as a second language. According to Noah (2017), his mother always emphasised the importance of mastering the English language. As stated by the aforementioned author, this is because the English language is known for advancing employment opportunities, socialising in multicultural societies, and understanding national and international communication, among other things.

2.7.2. Free-writing

Free-writing, as coined by Peter Elbow (1973, 1998b), is an equally important strategy to employ in assisting ESL first-year students. Elbow (1973, 1998b) defines free writing as "the pre-writing technique in which a student writes quickly for a set time of ten to fifteen minutes, without worrying about the grammar, spelling, and mind blocking conventions that govern the academic discipline or that are provided by the teachers." Although free-writing produces texts that cannot be formally used, Elbow believes it is critical for assisting students in discovering their challenges, gaining confidence in writing, and stimulating understanding of text production, and it can also be used to deepen understanding of the ideas or thoughts behind a specific topic.

The general characteristics of free writing are based on the amount of time allotted to the subject at hand (Fontaine, 1991). It is also important to note that unguided (self-sponsored) free-writing occurs when there is no specific topic for the writing, whereas guided writing occurs when teachers provide instruction and is referred to as teacher-sponsored or focused writing (Elbow, 1998b; Elbow and Belanoff, 2000; Fontaine, 1991; Lannin, 2007).

Free writing has been tried and adopted in a variety of educational settings. Previous research has found that free-writing can be used as a useful learning and instructional tool for a variety of purposes, both in writing classes and across disciplines. For example, Reynolds (1988) reported that free-writing was used as a writing technique for composition class writing practise, a vehicle for student self-expression and discovery (Collins, 1990), a method for developing metacognitive awareness (Soldner, 1997), a strategy for improving lecture comprehension (Hinkle & Hinkle, 1990), an assessment tool for reading comprehension (Bintz, 2000), and a disciplinary technique for developing student learning and writing. In the educational spectrum, free-writing is used to promote fluency and self-confidence in second language writers.

According to Casanave (2004), focusing on writing fluency allows students to explore more in their writing without worrying about grammatical accuracy or pressure from writing classes, such as grammar errors or grades. Another study (Casanave, 1995) contends that using journal writing activities in EFL college-level classes encourages students to try out more of their ideas in a "risk-free environment."

In terms of self-confidence, research shows that many L2 writers experience anxiety when attempting to write a piece of writing because of the rules and conventions that they must follow. Cheng (2004) defines anxiety as "a relatively stable anxiety disposition associated with L2 writing, characterised by a wide range of dysfunctional thoughts, increased physiological arousal, and maladaptive behaviour" (p. 319). The explanation precisely describes how L2 writers feel when they write, and it can also be inferred from this definition that writing anxiety influences L2 writers' confidence in writing. Based on the findings of the researchers, free-writing could boost the confidence of L2 writers and encourage them to write more, ultimately improving their writing abilities. In this regard, free-writing is critical for this study because it can be used by RWC or departments looking to improve their students' writing. Students could be allowed to practise free writing in which they write now and edit later. This could allow students to go on a self-discovery journey, boost their confidence, and encourage them to write more. This type of motivation is required even in the context of university students who are expected to learn academic writing features for academic success, such as cohesion and coherence, which will be addressed in the following section.

2.7.3. Mind mapping

Mind mapping is defined as an instructional strategy in which the student "places supra-ordinate concepts on paper and subsequently links sub-ordinate concepts as appropriate" (Buzan,1993: 59). Furthermore, according to Buzan (2000) and Howitt (2009), mind mapping is a visual tool that learners can use to generate ideas, take notes, organise thinking, and develop concepts. According to Suyanto (2015) mind mapping can help students improve their writing skills. They were well-versed in the generic structure, language features, and text organiser of a procedure text. It also helped to create a positive atmosphere in the classroom. The mind mapping strategy is related to allowing students to think while being shown pictures and images. It can be argued that as students' ideas emerge in organised forms, they become more motivated to complete a writing task. Mind mapping has the potential to help students learn English in general and writing skills in particular in a variety of settings around the world (Ahangari and Behzady, 2011, Lee and Cho, 2010). Some of the related research studies on the role of mind mapping in shaping students' writing are as follows:

Ristwanto (2016) investigated the use of mind mapping to improve students' ability to write report genres. The study included 43 students from junior high schools in south Sumatra, Indonesia, from grades nine through twelve. To collect data, the researcher used observation, questionnaires, and tests. The findings show that using the mind mapping strategy resulted in a significant improvement in student writing.

Budiono, Degeng, Ardhana and Suyitno (2016) investigated the impact of a mind mapping strategy on short story writing learning skills. The study included 64 Indonesian students from a private junior high school in Mojokerto. The study's findings indicate that the mind mapping strategy is effective in improving Indonesian students' short story writing. As a result, mind mapping is a powerful strategy for assisting students in organising their thoughts and encouraging logical and coherent writing. This is most relevant to the study because the researcher wants to see if the first-year dietitian students' writing is organised. The researcher will discuss cohesion and coherence in the following subsection.

2.8. Cohesion and Coherence

One of the most difficult aspects of language skills is writing. The ability to write requires specific skills such as punctuation, sentence structure, vocabulary, and paragraph organisation, but the most important thing students should pay attention to before these factors is their main idea to deserve a good paragraph. Mastery of these language structures is critical in determining whether ESL students will succeed in their academic careers. This implies that they should become acquainted with two writing concepts: cohesion and coherence.

According to Ahmed (2010), cohesion in essay writing is concerned with connecting sentences and phrases through cohesive devices on the macro level and linking ideas on the micro-level. This involves grammatical and lexical relationships between written production elements (Grabe & Kaplan, 2014). Reference through personal or possessive pronouns, substitution or ellipsis, connectors to link sentences in a paragraph, synonyms to avoid lexical repetition, and punctuation are all examples of cohesion (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014). Many researchers have emphasised the significance of text cohesion, claiming that cohesion is what distinguishes a text as a text. Aguiab and Bouaziz (2017)

used discourse analysis to investigate students' difficulties with the use of cohesive devices. The study looked at the grammatical and lexical cohesive devices in 23 argumentative essays. The study's findings revealed that the most common issues found in the 23 essays were misuse, overuse of some cohesive devices, and ambiguity. According to Aguiieb and Bouaziz (2017), most students struggle with writing that is cohesive and coherent. Students would rather focus on subject and verb agreement than writing cohesively and coherently to improve their communication skills through writing.

Another important aspect of writing that students must pay close attention to is coherence, which is defined as "the organisation of discourse with all elements present and fitting together logically." Coherence, according to Hyland (2006), is "the way a text makes sense to readers through the relevance and accessibility of its configuration of concepts, ideas, and theories" (p. 311). This, according to Brismaster and Etchegaray (2007), refers to the logical connections at the idea level (topic). As a result, to facilitate the reader's comprehension, all of the sentences that comprise each paragraph must be logically arranged in a continuous order based on the message they are attempting to convey (Hinkel, 2004).

A coherent essay includes an introduction, a thesis statement, rhetorical support, and a conclusion. Several research papers have focused on students' coherence issues in English writing. Ahmed (2010) carried out a study to investigate students' cohesion and coherence issues in Egyptian EFL essay writing. The study found that English student teachers in Egypt struggle with cohesion and coherence in their writing in the English language. The difficulty in writing an introduction, thesis statement, subject paragraph, essay concluding sentences, and writing the conclusion were some of the challenges discovered concerning coherence.

Chokwe (2013) investigated first-year students' writing conceptions and the extent to which these conceptions influence their academic writing. According to the study, some students claimed to be well prepared for the writing style at university. An examination of their assignments, however, revealed that they were not adequately prepared for

academic writing conventions and failed to write coherently in their introduction and conclusion.

According to Odell and Hobbs (2001), the main idea in writing is a chain that connects all of the sentences and makes each sentence logical. So, determining the main idea before writing is a must because it will make all of the ideas in our paragraphs clear and logical. According to Odell and Hobbs (2001), when a paragraph has coherence, the ideas are organised in a logical progression or order that makes sense so that the reader can easily transition from one idea to the next.

In the next section, the researcher will differentiate between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which are paramount to this study in assisting the research in distinguishing between spoken language (BICS) and academic language (CALP).

2.9. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic

Jim Cummins (1979, 1981a) coined the terms Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) to describe the various stages of second language acquisition. Although the two terms are used differently, they are both necessary for ESL learners' language development.

Extensive research indicates that Jim Cummins has spent an inconceivable amount of time on the two terms to improve the learners' language. Teachers can better understand multiple approaches to teaching ESL and bilingual students by separating the two language learning concepts and demonstrating how acquiring one language skill leads to the acquisition of another language skill.

Both BICS and CALP are acronyms that refer to the amount of time it takes for new English language learners to develop conversational and academic English skills. The two concepts are critical in the development of learners' language skills. The first concept, BICS, is concerned with social language acquisition, whereas the second, CALP, is concerned with academic language acquisition.

BICS, or the first stage of language skills, are language skills that people require in social situations. According to Cummins (2000), this is the type of language that people use to interact with others daily. According to Cummins (2000), BICS is necessary for students to interact with their peers while playing at recess, participating in team sports activities, eating lunch, or socialising outside of school. This type of language skill is not cognitively demanding and usually develops after a student has been in school for six months to two years. Many first-year students are fluent in spoken English and may have mastered Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS), which they primarily employ in social situations (Cummins, 1999). This means that even if some students are fluent in written English, they may still produce poorly written assignments. Numerous higher education institutions have implemented a variety of interventions to ensure that English second language learners acquire the academic language, or CALP, to succeed in their assessment writing.

CALP is a term that refers to a student's formal academic learning. The CALP concept addresses academic skills such as listening, speaking, and reading, as well as writing about the relevant subject matter (Cummins, 2001). The acquisition of this language skill is critical to a student's academic success. It takes time and patience for students to master the language skills required for academic success. It may take students five to seven years to fully grasp the appropriate level skills for their academic journey. The concept of CALP is unique to the social context of schooling, thus the term "academic." As a result, academic language proficiency can be defined as "the extent to which an individual has access to and commands the oral and written academic registers of schooling" (Cummins, 2000).

CALP is a concept that necessitates time and patience on the part of both the learner and the teacher. If a student has no prior schooling experience or lacks parental guidance, it may take up to ten years for the student to master CALP (Cummins, 2000). This concept is further complicated by the inclusion of cognitively demanding concepts such as inferring, classifying, evaluating, comparing, and synthesising language content (Cummins, 1999).

According to Cummins (2000), a significant takeaway is recognising the levels of attainment and recognising when to move a student into the academic portion of the English language. In the context of this study, learners are expected to have entered the doors of higher learning institutions with a level BICS. However, research has shown that despite many years of schooling, most students' language skills remain poor (Chokwe, 2011), necessitating the intervention of the RWC to accelerate the process of the two language acquisition stages.

The role of feedback in second language learning is another factor that could help students master the cognitively demanding academic language. The role of corrective feedback in L2 learning will significantly aid the researcher in understanding the type of feedback practises used by RWC in facilitating the transition of dietetics 'students' writing from high literacies to required academic language and jargon of higher learning. As a result, the researcher will investigate the role of feedback in second language learning in the following section.

2.10. The role of feedback in sharpening students' writings

It is undeniable that writing is, as Bereiter puts it, a difficult task. If a native speaker considers it a difficult process, nonnative speakers or ESL student writers are likely to find it even more difficult. With this in mind, ESL writing teachers should strive to provide high-quality writing instruction using a variety of effective writing techniques. One method is to provide teacher feedback on ESL students' writing drafts.

When the process-writing approach was introduced in the 1970s, the issue of teacher response to students' writing became important (Ferris, 2003). This is primarily since the writing process is treated as equally important as the final product in this approach.

Giving feedback is essential at all stages of writing to help students improve their writing pieces. According to Leki (1990), the reasons for evaluating writing are first and foremost to guide a reader and assist students in analysing their writing, secondly to guide students in improving the quality of the content of their writing, and thirdly to motivate students to become better writers.

"Second language writers often benefit the most and make the most progress when teachers contribute to this goal through a variety of intervention strategies available in classroom settings," writes Kroll and Sunderman (2003). One of these intervention strategies is to provide students with written feedback on their writing, which is a common practice.

"Feedback is information about current performance that can be used to improve future performance," writes Wang (2006: 42). Feedback is critical in any educational process because it has the potential to significantly improve both learner and teacher performance by highlighting key aspects of their performance that can be improved.

Corrective feedback (CF) has been and continues to be at the heart of second language learning (L2), as educators struggle to devise an appropriate strategy for providing CF in a way that fosters improvement in students' writings while not undermining students' motivation to learn. Chen (2005) emphasises this point, stating that correcting too many errors may have a negative impact on students' fluency as a result of their fear of making mistakes during the learning process. On the other hand, if educators ignore students' errors and do not provide CF, students' writings will not improve, leading students to repeat the mistakes they were making before (Truscott, 1996). In the context of this study, it is possible to conclude that CF plays an important role in mediating the improvement of students' writings to the standard required at the institutional level.

Ismail, Maulan, and Hasan (2008) show in their study that teachers spent hours reading learners' essays, locating and identifying errors, and, to some extent, correcting the errors. Aside from that, teachers examine the ideas students present in their essays. This is followed by their comments and suggestions, which they either write in the margins or at the end of the essays. All of this is done to achieve the aforementioned goals.

Although several studies emphasise the importance of feedback in shaping students' writing, findings from a study conducted by Twagilimana (2017) show that students are unlikely to make appropriate use of feedback from lecturers/teachers to improve their writing skills because the type of feedback practises observed is surrounded by confusion regarding what the lecturers' expectations are and thus what is required of an academically acceptable text. The study investigated the extent to which feedback

practises, as part of the strategies used in assessing student work, are relevant to the expected learning process.

Ellis (2008) claims that CF differs depending on whether it is implicit or explicit. In terms of implicit error correction, educators do not point out to students that they have made a mistake; rather, they emphasise a student's error. If this does not result in the student's self-correction, the educator must repeat the utterance in the proper form.

Klimova (2015) proposes a self-reflective essay by students at the end of the semester as another form of effective feedback that is crucial in improving students' writing abilities. It has the potential to provide numerous benefits not only to students but also to teachers. According to Kilmoova (2015), this approach allows students to critically reflect on their learning process and express what they found challenging and beneficial during their course. Teachers, on the other hand, can conclude their teaching practices and reconsider some of their teaching approaches and strategies to best suit their students' writing development. On the one hand, the self-reflective essay provides students with numerous benefits such as increased awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, awareness of their learning styles, development of their writing skills, and expansion of their meta/cognitive skills. According to Race (2006), reflection deepens learning. The act of reflecting allows us to make sense of what we have learned, why we learned it, and how that particular increment of learning occurred. In the context of this study, the researcher intends to investigate some of the feedback provided by the student tutors at the centre and lecturers to first-year dietetics students in shaping and monitoring their students' development.

Writing is an important tool for assessing students' progress and understanding, as evidenced by the subtopics discussed above. Despite this, research from various scholars indicates that most students, particularly first-year students, struggle to produce assignments that adhere to academic writing conventions of higher learning. As a result, scholars have proposed several approaches to help students improve their writing skills. This is relevant to this study because the researcher intends to investigate the assignment writing of first-year dietitian students as well as the role of the RWC in assisting students in transitioning from high school literacies to academic conventions of higher learning.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the literature review. The previous chapter's strength to the current one is that it provided the researcher with more information about how previous studies of this type were conducted. Thus, the research methodology for this study was wisely chosen by taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of previous studies of this type—which used the same methods as this study. Having said that, the current chapter discusses the methodology used in this study to generate, handle, and analyse data. The aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the University of Limpopo's Reading and Writing Centre as a student support structure through a case study of first-year dietetics students. The researcher sought to develop explanations for students' struggles with academic writing and to assess the effectiveness of the center's support for students. Thus, the methods discussed herein were relevant to the study's question and enabled the current researcher to collect and analyse data in depth.

3.2. Research methodology

The following questions were addressed in this study: (a) How does the University of Limpopo's Reading and Writing Centre help first-year dietetics students transition from secondary school literacies to academic writing conventions of higher learning? (b) What are the main challenges that first-year dietetics students encounter when writing academic assignments? (c) Has the academic writing of dietetics students improved (or not) as a result of the centre's assistance? As a result, a qualitative research methodology was deemed appropriate for use in this study to assist the researcher in adequately exploring the above questions. According to Du Plooy (2002), the qualitative approach is best suited for describing behaviours, themes, trends, attitudes, needs, or relationships that apply to the units being studied. Similarly, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state that qualitative researchers believe that approaching people and attempting to understand their points of view can lead to deeper insights and understandings of the informants. The qualitative approach was chosen to provide the researcher with an in-depth

understanding of the strategies used by RWC to transition first-year dietetics students' writing from high school literacies to academic writing conventions. This methodology is more interested in why and how events occur, as well as how they influence human behaviour. As a result, it was appropriate for this study to employ this methodology to investigate whether or not the support students receive from RWC helps to improve students' academic writing skills.

3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative methodology was used in this study, and a case study design was used to collect data. According to Creswell (2014), a case study design allows the researcher to investigate a phenomenon by focusing on a specific group of people. A case study design was useful in this study because it allowed the researcher to focus on one community of students to investigate the problem at hand while also responding to the study's questions. In this study, a case was used to refer to the first-year dietetics students. This design not only allowed the researcher to focus on a small number of informants, but it also allowed the researcher to collect data within the time frame that the researcher had set for the data collection process. Furthermore, this design enabled the researcher to generate data using a variety of methods and tools while maintaining the research's focus until the end.

3.4. Sampling

3.4.1. Population

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2012), a study population includes all species or humans who constitute a significant portion of the investigated community. Creswell (2014), on the other hand, defines population as a group of people from which a sample for the study will be drawn. Thus, the population of this study consisted of first-year students enrolled in dietetic studies at the University of Limpopo who frequently visited RWC, assistants who assisted students at the centre, and their lecturers.

3.4.2. Sampling

According to Johnson and Christensen (2004), sampling is the process of selecting characteristics of a specific group from a larger population and drawing a sample from

that population. As a result, the researcher used purposive sampling to select study participants and respondents. Purposive sampling is a sampling technique that relies on the researcher's discretion when selecting participants for the research study. Purposive sampling was used in this study to allow the researcher to select candidates who were best suited to respond to the study's question.

Purposive sampling was used in this study to select participants from Human Nutrition (dietetics) students to participate in interviews. Their participation in this study was motivated by their frequent visits to the centre for assignment assistance. The researcher requested a data base of dietetics students who visited the centre for assistance and purposefully chose those who used the centre's assistance the most. When conducting this study, the researcher aimed to include at least ten students from the start. However, only four students agreed to take part in the study. As a result, it is possible to conclude that the population of this study consisted of four dietetics students. This sample of students was deemed most relevant for providing the current researcher with answers regarding the difficulties of writing academic essays, the effectiveness of RWC assistance, and the roles that lecturers play in helping students improve their academic writing skills.

Purposive sampling was also used to select two student assistants or tutors who worked at the centre and had experience editing or reviewing first-year dietetics students' assignments. The involvement of tutors was critical to this study because it assisted the researcher in gathering information about the difficulties that students face when writing academically. The tutors also assisted the researcher in investigating various strategies used to assist dietetics students who used the RWC services on a regular basis.

In this study, two lecturers were purposefully sampled to provide information about their perceived causes of the challenges that students faced with academic writing, as well as how they (lecturers) assist students in overcoming such challenges. The RWC assistants are required to write editorial letters to the students they serve. As a result, lecturers played an important role in informing the researcher about the effectiveness of RWC based on the assignments they graded for students who used RWC. The involvement of

lecturers in this study yielded pertinent insights about how the RWC can improve the standards of its services to enhance students' academic writing skills, given the institution's mandate and the current researcher's desire to "find solutions for Africa."

3.5. Data collection

Semi-structured interviews and a review of students' assignments (documents) brought to RWC were used to collect data for this study. Interviews were conducted with students, student tutors at the centre, and lecturers from the modules under consideration for this study.

3.5.1. Document analysis

The first and second semester assignments of students were examined. The researcher examined two assignment documents for each of the four students. The first assignment was for the first semester, and the second assignment was for the second semester, for a total of eight assignments over the two semesters. One assignment was completed prior to the assistance of the student tutors at RWC, and the other was completed after the assistance of the student tutors at the centre. Initially, the researcher planned to analyse twenty assignments, two for each student per semester, and interview ten. However, due to the covid-19 regulations, the researcher was only able to analyse eight assignments. Despite this, the eight assignments allowed the researcher to maintain control of the data as well as perform clear data presentation and analysis. This, once again, aided in avoiding information overload. The decision to examine the dietetics students' documents (assignments) aided the researcher in gaining insightful information in an investigation of how the feedback provided by the student tutors assisted the students in improving their academic writing skills. Document analysis also assisted the researcher in examining the relationships that existed among different data sets and how data from different sources interacted to demonstrate how RWC intervention aided or hindered students' academic writing success.

3.5.2. Semi-structured Interviews

According to Lambert and Loiselle (2007), interviews are primarily used in qualitative research to gain a detailed understanding of the participants' experiences, beliefs, and

perspectives on a specific research question or phenomenon. This research adopted semi-structured interviews over other types of qualitative interviews. Tod (2006) believes that semi-structured interviews are essential for allowing the interviewer to ask open-ended questions that can elicit relevant responses to the study's questions. In line with this, Berg (2009) defines semi-structured as flexible question wording that allows for different phases of language to be used and encourages clarifications. According to the above explanations, semi-structured interviews are necessary for the interviewer to take control of the interview processes while allowing interviewees to fully explain their perceptions without limitations. As a result, semi-structured interviews enabled the current researcher to look for responses that detail the effectiveness of RWC assistance in addressing the academic writing challenges of dietetics students.

Students were asked about the difficulties they face when writing for academic purposes, as well as their individual efforts to overcome these difficulties. Their opinions on the effectiveness of the services they received at the RWC were also solicited. Students were also asked to express their concerns about the effectiveness of the collaboration between lecturers and RWC tutors in helping them improve their academic writing skills. Their responses to the aforementioned questions, as well as other interview questions, led the researcher to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of RWC in the development of academic writing skills.

Two RWC student tutors were also interviewed about the common challenges that dietetics students face when it comes to academic writing. The tutors were also asked about the intervention strategies they use to address students' perceived academic writing challenges, as well as their thoughts on the efficacy of their intervention strategies in addressing students' academic writing challenges. Lecturers were more likely to participate in the interviews than researchers and tutors because they have more in-depth interactions with students about academic matters. As a result, they were able to provide reasons based on their long-term interactions with students. Thus, they were interviewed about their perceived causes of students' academic writing challenges, other factors that fuel such challenges, and the effectiveness of the RWC's interventions to such

challenges. The discussed data collection processes culminated in authentic data regarding the study's main question.

3.6. Data analysis

Data analysis denotes a critical examination of the collected data in order to find responses to the research (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the researcher used the Thematic Analysis Model to develop a meaningful analysis of the collected data. Thematic analysis is a type of qualitative analysis that is used to analyse classifications and present themes (patterns) that are related to the data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2012). It vividly clarifies the data and has the potential to deal with a variety of subjects through interpretations (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis is divided into three stages: data reduction, data display, and data drawing and conclusions. This will augment the research's accuracy and intricacy, as well as its overall meaning.

As Miles and Huberman (1994) point out, data reduction is the initial stage in the model's data analysis. This is the stage at which the researcher sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organises data in order to draw and verify conclusions. This includes the steps of selecting, simplifying, and transforming the data. Miles and Huberman (1994) go on to say that the process of reducing and transforming data in qualitative research can be done in a variety of ways. "It could be through selection, summary, or paraphrase, and being subsumed in a larger pattern" (Miles & Huberman, 1994:11). Data for this study were gathered through a variety of methods. The data gathered from the semi-structured interviews was obtained through open-ended questions. As a result, the respondents had the freedom to express themselves in terms of their satisfaction as well as the researcher's expectations. Where some responses did not adequately address the probed questions, the researcher asked follow-up questions, which extended the interviewees' responses. As a result, some responses did not effectively respond to the study's questions and had to be removed in order to limit data to the context of this study and its questions. Furthermore, data reduction aided the researcher in identifying some language features that frequently appeared to be difficult in the assignments of first-year dietetics students.

The primary purpose of coding in thematic analysis is to connect different parts of the data. Coding is derived from the responses of participants, such as statements and reports, and it categorises information to frame it as theoretical perceptions (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Coding allowed the researcher to review all of the data by identifying the most important meanings of the collected data. It is determining the correct meanings for what the data is revealing (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Halldorson, 2009; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). In this study, codes were created based on student assignments and interviews with LCs and lecturers. The codes were then repurposed as themes.

Data display is another critical step in Miles and Huberman's (1994) Model. This step entails retrieving data from the data display (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). However, Miles and Huberman point out that this stage is inextricably linked to data reduction because it supplements the former. The term "data display" refers to the systematic and summarised presentation of collected information (Ibid p.11). The stage applies logic to the data that has been collected. Data display is critical for data organisation because it significantly contributes to the organisation of concepts and thoughts involved in the study.

The third step in the Miles and Huberman Model consists of data drawing and conclusions. The model suggests using some points to help draw conclusions after displaying data in various ways. Miles and Huberman (1994) highlight the following suggestions:

- The notation of any pattern or theme and the relevance of any statement especially if similar or contrasting,
- Grouping or establishing categories of 'information that can go together',
- Identifying interrelations among factors and variables, and
- Building conceptual coherence and consistency, which at the end should be used to explore the validity of the findings so that they fit the theoretical framework of the study Miles and Huberman (1994).

Because data drawing and display are complementary, they should not be separated from data reduction. Furthermore, the stages include drawing data and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The researcher was able to reduce, organise data into codes, group codes that can go together, and develop refined themes from the data collected from the assignments of the first entering dietetics students, their lecturers, and the LCs at the RWC by using the above-mentioned model in this study. Furthermore, the data analysis model mentioned above aided the researcher in answering the question: "How does the University of Limpopo's Reading and Writing Centre help first-year dietetics students' transition from secondary school literacies to academic writing conventions of higher learning?"

3.7. Quality criteria

The fundamental point of value in research is to ensure the study's reliability. In subjective research, credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability are added to reliability (Pitney & Parker, 2009). To ensure reliability, quality criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability were applied throughout the study.

3.7.1. Credibility

According to Trohim and Donnelly (2007:149), "credibility involves establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the research participant." In this study, credibility was achieved by sharing data with the participants. This gave the participant the opportunity to clarify their contributions, correct errors, and offer additional information as needed.

3.7.2. Transferability

Rothe (2000) implies that when there are parallels between contexts, the results of a subjective investigation will be transferable without a doubt. To ensure the study's transferability, the researcher provided a detailed summary of how the findings were implemented, including the location of the interviews and the interview procedures used.

3.7.3. Dependability

The quality of the integration process that occurs between the data collection method, data analysis, and the theory generated from the data is referred to as dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Collis & Hussey, 2003:278-279). Thus, in order to ensure the dependability of this study, the researcher provided a step-by-step account of the steps taken to achieve the research project's purpose.

3.7.4. Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree to which the collected data agree with the researcher's findings and interpretations. It explains how the findings relate to the data. This instructs the researcher to have accurately described the research process so that others who will examine the research design can understand it. In addition, confirmability implies that others who examine the data should reach the same conclusions as the researcher (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). To achieve confirmability in this study, the researcher ensured that the data gathered were a true reflection of the contributions of the participants and is not influenced by the researcher's personal interests and viewpoints.

3.8. Ethical considerations

It is critical for researchers to always protect the interests of the people who are used as subjects. According to Notter and Spalding (1976), participants in studies should always be given adequate protection. To fulfil this mandate, researchers must always consider factors such as informed consent on the part of participants and protecting them from harm, as well as data collection confidentiality. The following ethical issues were addressed in this study:

3.8.1. Ethicality of the study

This research was subjected to a number of examinations at the university where it is being studied. As a result, the researcher obtained a clearance certificate from the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee at the University of Limpopo. The certificate was a declaration that this study could be conducted on humans.

3.8.2. Request for permission and consent forms

Permission was requested from the heads of the Department of Health in the School of Health Sciences. A request for permission was also made to the management of the University of Limpopo's Reading and Writing Centre. In addition, respondents were asked for permission to participate in this study. As a result, prior to agreeing to participate in the study, all respondents were fully informed about it. Participants who agreed to

participate in this study were asked to sign an informed consent form to ensure the research's ethical conduct.

3.8.3. Privacy and anonymity

Participants were assured that no personal information about them would be used in this study. When it was necessary to cite the respondents' assertions, the researcher used pseudonyms. As a result, their identities are kept private, and their safety is ensured.

3.8.4. Protection and safety of the participants

The participants were assured that there were no risks associated with their participation in this study. As a result, there was no harm done to the respondents or any occurrence of events that put their safety in jeopardy. Participants were also assured that there would be no harm, punishment, or execution if they opted out of the study.

3.8.5. Voluntary Participation

The researcher emphasised that no payment or incentives would be provided to respondents prior to or after interactions with them. As a result, before they took part in this study, they were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the discussion of the research methodology that was applied in this study and its subsequent designs and techniques of data collection and analysis. The significance of the previous chapter to the current one is that it laid a foundation for the success of the current researcher to collect, handle, present, analyse and interpret the data in this chapter. Hence, the current chapter deals with data presentation, analysis and interpretation. As stated in chapter 3, data for this study was acquired from an interview of four first-year dietetics students and their assignments, and interviews with two lecturers and two student tutors from Reading and Writing Centre. Initially, the researcher aimed at interviewing ten students and analysing their twenty assignments, but not all the envisaged participants gave consent due to covid-19 and other logistical reasons. As such, the researcher managed to get consent from only four first-year students.

In this chapter, each data set is separately presented to familiarise the reader with the findings of this investigation. The thematic approach was applied to present the data. The chapter first presents data obtained from the selected assignments of the first and second semester for dietetics students, then move to the interview data. The researcher used the Thematic Analysis Model by Miles and Huberman (1994) to present and analyse data. The discussions made in this chapter strive to provide answers to the questions below:

How does the University of Limpopo's Reading and Writing Centre help first-year dietetics students' transition from secondary school literacies to academic writing conventions of higher learning?

Sub-questions

- What are the main challenges that first-year dietetics students encounter when writing academic assignments?

- Has the academic writing of dietetics students improved (or not) as a result of the centre's assistance?

Data was collected through an analysis of assignments written by the four students who participated in the study. First, the researcher analysed original assignments prior to assistance by the student tutors at RWC, followed by those refined post to intervention by the student tutors. The following themes were adopted in the analysis of the assignments: grammatical errors, plagiarism, personal pronouns, cohesion and coherence.

4.2. Documents Analysis (prior RWC assistance)

Theme: Grammatical errors

Documents in research may include, inter alia: policies, acts and written essays. In addition, the material may also be public records, textbooks, letters, films, tapes diaries, themes and reports (Neuman, 2006:323). This study reviewed four assignments of first-year dietetics students.

The assignment required students to discuss the process of non-verbal communication. The main aim of the assignment regarding writing, was to examine the students' academic and communicative writing skills. This included adherence to grammatical rules, tense consistency, punctuation and the ability to express meaning through writing. The findings revealed that students experienced challenges regarding prepositions, conjunctions, punctuations and concord in writing. To add on this, the challenges affected meaning in the students' work because ideas within which these errors were discovered were distorted of meaning. It is assumed that the meaning would have been better expressed if the identified errors did not occur. The language that was used to administer the assignment was English. English language was a second language to all the students whose assignments were reviewed. From this, it was observed that students had a lesser vocabulary of English language to effectively express themselves in academic writing. The researcher therefore found that the shortcomings of students' writing converge to affect students' skills of writing.

For example, assignment one shows how the student struggled with grammatical structures as quoted in the following:

Clothing must be considered when going for job interview because when interviewee wear casual attire while they require suit work, it means the personal appearance is now opposing the meaning. Personal appearance helps to establish our social identity.

From the above quote, the student has omitted the article between **when** and **interviewee**. Additionally, there is a concord error on the sentence. According to the subject-verb agreement, if there is a singular subject, the verb should end with **s**. This was not the case with regards to student one. In the same paragraph, the student omitted the preposition **at** between **suit** and **work** which distorted the intended message.

Assignment two also experienced problems with grammatical structures as quoted below:

People respond to us the basis of our physical attractiveness and our clothing, grooming, styles and accessories are the ones that modify our appearance.

From the above example, assignment two has constructed a sentence that has an incomplete thought by placing the words **us** and **the** next to each other. The sentence resulted in a fragment and ultimately loss of meaning. Such mistakes were noticed throughout the assignments of the students. Another language errors were noticed in the use of personal pronouns in academic writing.

Theme: Personal Pronouns

The use of personal pronouns in sentences is another common error identified in the examined assignments. The study found that first-year dietetics students made use of personal pronouns such as **we**, and **us** in their assignments. In scientific disciplines, it is encouraged to avoid the use of first person to maintain an objective, impersonal tone and shift the focus on the material at hand rather than the author, which is not the case of case with the above student. This again could suggest that the findings included in the assignments of the students are of their own personal experiences, and not findings from scholars in the related field they are writing on. Such mistakes illustrate students' lack of knowledge and experience with regards to academic writing. This thought is in line with

Cross and Carpentier (2009) who mention that some first-year students struggle to adjust to the university atmosphere because they lack the cultural capital required to succeed in their studies, not to mention the shortcomings of education provided in particularly poor schools.

This was a similar case with referencing/ plagiarism. Students experienced challenges whenever they were supposed to acknowledge their sources.

Theme: Plagiarism/ referencing

It is required of academic writers to acknowledge concepts, theories and literature that exist in their varying disciplines. This could be done through various methods of referencing. Despite this knowledge, students demonstrated inability to acknowledge sources and lack of knowledge on using scholarly sources. The inability to acknowledge sources can be expanded to two findings; that some students attempted to cite and reference their work but had limited knowledge of the method of referencing that was used in the assignment. This resulted in the misapplication or errors in citing and referencing. On the other hand, the inability to acknowledge sources was used to refer to students' who use internet sources without citing or referencing them. To this problem, an indication raised of students' inadequate awareness of plagiarism policies. Hence, some were found to use the copy and paste method without making quotations nor citing the authors. An example from assignment three below indicates how the student failed to acknowledge sources and the tendency to copy and paste.

'People with expectations of appropriateness, see and evaluate the way you look. The choices we make express meaning to those around us. The way people prefer certain hairstyles, clothes, and jewellery as well as the way they want to maintain their bodies'.

From the above example, the student did not acknowledge where the information for the assignment was obtained from as per the academic writing rules, painting a picture that the ideas come from the student. This resulted in plagiarism, a factor that is prohibited in academic writing.

Assignment four also presented challenges of how to acknowledge sources and in-text referencing as indicated in the example below:

Hall mentions that proxemics is the preference of space use in conversational interaction. Proxemics is the study of how space is used in human interactions. For example, authority can be communicated by the height from which one person interacts with another. If one stands while the other sits or lies down, the person standing has placed himself or herself in a position of authority. Moreover, proxemics is the study of personal space and the degree of separation that individuals maintain between each other in social situations. Hall specifies four spatial zones namely: intimate, personal, social, and public'.

The above example shows the student's attempt to acknowledge "Hall" as the source of information but did not indicate the year in which the author had written the statement. This again suggest that most first-year students are underprepared for university and rely on the high literacies they were previously used to.

The above examples indicate how students use ideas from scholars within the field of their study without acknowledging where the ideas come from. As such students run to the internet and write any information that is aligned to the questions of their assignments. This leads to plagiarism, and usage of unscholarly sources in their scholarly assignments. Ellery (2008: 514) mentions that first entering students are inexperienced about what constitutes plagiarism and are often the perpetrators of plagiarism. In addition, Beute, Van Aswegen and Windberg (2001) state that this challenge ranges from in-text referencing, citing, direct quotation and paraphrasing, and results from the motivation to produce good grades, laziness, and the easily accessible information from the internet. Another challenge experienced by first-year dietetics students is cohesion and coherence, which will be presented below.

Theme: Cohesion and Coherence

Cohesion and coherence are deemed as crucial factors of academic writing given their effect on the readability and logical flow of the argument of a text. Information and ideas are sorted into paragraphs to make the writing more logical and to ensure that the argument flows and develops logically. This can be achieved through the use of cohesive devices: however, in addition, therefore, regardless and many others. The application of these devices has the ability to bring the connectedness between sentences and form an easy to comprehend statement. However, this appeared to be a challenge for the dietetics

students. For example, in assignment one, the student failed to construct a paragraph that is connected and contains a single idea.

Verbal communication involves the use of words or speech or auditory language to express emotions or thoughts or exchange information. Non-verbal communication involves the use of visual or non-verbal cues such as facial expressions, eye or body movements, gestures, and many more without speaking. Nonverbal communication is multi channelled while verbal communication is single channelled. Verbal communication comes from the mouth, but nonverbal communication comes from the entire body we use hands, facial expression and other things. Verbal communication happens in a given time frame while nonverbal communication is continuous.

From the above example, assignment one is trying to make a comparison between verbal communication and non-verbal communication in one paragraph. The student explains what verbal communication is, then moves to non-verbal communication, then goes back to verbal communication, and so on. This style of writing could affect the reader's focus in trying to get a better explanation on the differences between the two. A better approach, would have been to explain one aspect of communication, provide examples, and support with the available literature, and go on to explain the other aspect of communication in another paragraph. This would allow the writer to formulate paragraphs that have a single idea and are easy to comprehend. To support this, Odell and Hobbs (2001) state that, when a paragraph has coherence, the ideas are arranged in a logical progression, or an order that makes sense so that the reader moves easily from one idea to another.

An example below from assignment four also presents challenges with sentence connectivity.

'Proxemics is the preference of space use in conversational interaction. Proxemics is the study of how space is used in human interactions. For example, authority can be communicated by the height from which one person interacts with another. If one stands while the other sits or lies down, the person standing has placed himself or herself in a position of authority. Proxemics is the study of personal space and the degree of

separation that individuals maintain between each other in social situations. Hall specifies four spatial zones namely: intimate, personal, social, public'.

From the above example, assignment number four failed to compose flowing sentences through the use of cohesive devices. For instance, in between **interaction** and **proxemics is the study** ... in the above example, the student could have applied the additional cohesive devices such as **to add on this, additionally, moreover** and so forth to connect and construct flowing sentences and achieve coherence in the paragraph. In light of this, Aguib and Bouaziz (2017) note that most students struggle with cohesive and coherent writing. The students rather focus on their content rather than writing cohesive and coherently to better communication skills through writing.

The above sections presented data obtained from assignments of the four first-year students in the first semester prior to the assistance of student tutors at RWC. The findings indicated that students experienced grammatical incompetence, lack of knowledge on referencing, the use of personal pronouns, and failure to construct cohesive and coherent paragraphs. As such, the next section looks at the same students in the second semester after receiving assistance at RWC. This is to examine the efficiency of the centre on improving the students' writing abilities.

The following section provides data that was taken from four assignments of the same first entering dietetics students in the second semester after seeking assistance RWC. This was to allow the researcher to examine whether the RWC is efficient in developing the academic writing skills the first-year dietetics students. The analysis uses similar themes that were used to analyse pre-marked assignments above: grammatical errors, plagiarism, and cohesion and coherence. However, it should be noted that in this section, analyses of the themes were dependent on areas that the language consultant had provided feedback to the students. This means there are themes which the researcher did not provide an example on because the language consultant had not made a comment on the theme in the assignment brought to the centre, such as the use of personal pronouns.

4.3. Documents Analysis (post RWC assistance)

The following section demonstrates the results that were generated from the first assignment of the second semester of the same four dietetics students that participated in the study. Although the topic of this assignment was different from the one that was analysed previously, the contents of both assignments were targeted at evaluating the students' communicative and academic language writing skills. In the previous assignment submitted in the first semester, the texts exposed a number of omission of prepositions, problems with cohesion, inability to connect sentence and ideas, inability to punctuate and to use verbs and subjects correctly. However, in the second semester assignment and after receiving help from RWC, the students' writing was better but slightly committed grammatical errors as in the previous assignment. The students were given an assignment to outline human nutrition and its role to evolution. Although the topic of the assignment did not intend to address the communicative skills of the students. The assignment intended to improve the writing skills of students, this includes writing an introduction, body and conclusion.

Theme: Grammatical errors

Even though there were signs of improvement in terms of the types of grammatical errors committed in the first semester, students still committed other grammatical errors such as the use of punctuation marks and contractions in the second semester, which mostly emanated from lack of editing.

An example from assignment number four is as follows:

Children are shown that they decisions.it arouses interest in learners to ask queries concerning life.

In the above example, on **decision.it**, it was found that the student did not start a new sentence with a capital (this happened frequently in the assignment) and did not create spacing between sentences. The language consultant at the centre provided feedback as follows:

There should be spacing after the full stop before you begin your next sentence. Also capitalise at the beginning of a new word.

It was further found that the student did not start with a capital letter from the beginning of sentences on many occasions in the assignment. Similarly to such errors, assignment number two produced the following grammatical error:

If offenders are on parole, they also don't need state to provide them with clothes, bedding, toiletry....

From the above example, assignment two used contractions in a formal assignment, wherein he was to write in full. The student tutor at the centre attempted to assist the student by providing feedback as follows:

*In formal writing, kindly avoid contractions and write in full, for example **do not instead of don't.***

This implies that students could not separate the language used in the academic writing, and the language acceptable outside the classroom. Cummins (2000) categories this as Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) which they mainly use in their social conversations (Cummins, 1999) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which is applied in formal settings.

Theme: Plagiarism/ referencing

Although the students received assistance from the RWC, they still experienced difficulties on acknowledging sources. It was found that the students sometimes misapplied the referencing method used in the assignment and at times did not acknowledge sources at all. However, in the second semester, when the students tried to reference, they appeared to have an idea of what is expected of them, although they still committed minor referencing errors. For example, assignment number three wrote the following:

According to the Longman dictionary, Nutrition is the process of providing or obtaining the food necessary for health and growth.

The above example indicates the progress from dietetics students in the second semester after receiving assistance from the centre. The student had an idea of referencing/ acknowledging the source and committed less errors. However, the student could not

appropriately apply in-text referencing. The student highlighted the name of source Longman dictionary, but did not indicate the year in which the information was published. The language consultant at RWC tried to assist the student by providing feedback written as follow:

Include the year the dictionary was published in brackets.

This was in line with assisting the student on how to properly apply in-text referencing. In line with students' challenges to reference their work, Beute, Van Aswegen and Windberg (2001) mention that referencing has been a challenge for most students at tertiary. This challenge ranges from in-text referencing, citing, direct quotation and paraphrasing. Similarly, assignment number four struggled with in-text referencing.

Theme: The use of personal pronouns

Although the students frequented the centre for assistance, the researcher found that the students were still subjective in their assignments by still using personal pronouns in their assignments. For example, assignment three wrote:

I will be discussing what nutrition is, and why does it matter, and the relationship between diet, health, and disease.

In the above example, it was found that the students still used personal pronouns even after submitting the assignment at the centre. However, the reviewed version of the document indicates the following feedback aimed to assist the student to improve their academic writing:

Refrain from being personal in academic writing. In this case, rather use "this assignment discusses."

From the above section, it was found that students used personal pronouns in their assignments, which is a subject that is not encouraged in academic writing. The students tutors at the centre provided feedback to assist the students avoid using personal pronouns in their assignments.

Theme: Cohesion and Coherence

With regards to cohesion and coherence, the student tutors did not indicate where the students failed to maintain coherence and cohesion in their assignments. As a result, the researcher was unable to present data of the above theme in this section.

The extract presented above indicates that some students' writing improved after taking into consideration the comments that RWC student tutors gave them on their first assignments. However, there were still notable errors of academic writing. The assignments demonstrate that the students spent little time on the development of their academic writing skills. Again, this raises a question as to whether lecturers do enough to assist students to develop academic writing skills or whether the student tutors are well equipped to support first-year students in developing good academic writing skills.

The following is data drawn from interview held with the four first-year dietetics students. The interviews were conducted to allow the researcher to gain a detailed description of the writing challenges the students experienced as first-year students, their experiences with the writing centre, and whether the centre was efficient enough to assist them to make a smooth transition from high school literacies to the academic writing conventions of higher learning.

4.4. Presentation of data from semi-structured interviews with four first-year dietetics students

It should also be noted that this section has adopted the themes: Grammatical errors, plagiarism/ referencing, cohesion, and coherence. The researcher also included perceptions about writing centres to the list of themes. This was as the result of the responses from the students. In order to ensure anonymity, pseudonyms such as Nomsa, Amo, Jeph and Steph were used for the students.

Theme: Grammatical errors

The analysis of data for this section was drawn from different questions. For instance, the students were asked the following:

What were some of the academic writing/ languages challenges that you experienced as a first-year student?

In response to this question, Nomsa said the following:

Sometimes we find it difficult to respond to assignments in English. We know the answer, but fail to adequately express what is expected of us. Our lecturers, then complain that our work has grammatical errors.

A follow-up question was asked about specific challenges with grammatical errors such as punctuation, concord and spelling. Steph responded as follows:

In high school, mastery of the English Language was not given much attention by our teachers. The main focus had always been on us obtaining good grades in Mathematics and Science, and I think this is the reason most of us who come from public schools struggle with basic grammar such sentences structure, concord, and punctuating correctly.

Jeph also experienced similar challenges and stated the following:

My struggle with academic writing was when I was told to be always be objective in my assignment by refraining from the use of personal pronouns. I initially struggled to do this, but got an idea of what is expected of me as I frequented the centre for assistance.

Amo responded to the same question as follows:

I usually struggle with vocabulary and grammar needed in writing, and expressing my thoughts on the assignments we are given. Because of this, whenever we are given an assignment, I would mainly focus on providing information on the topic without paying attention to grammar rules.

From the above responses, the students indicated that English language was a challenge for them to adequately express their ideas in assignment writing. Additionally, the study found that because of insufficient vocabulary and grammar rules, students paid attention

to the contents relating to the topic of the assignment without focusing on grammar rules. This could be due to their socio-economic background as most of them do not come from English language background, ultimately resulting in grammatical errors in their writing.

Another issue that appeared to be troublesome for the first-year students was plagiarism. Students appeared to have insufficient knowledge and experience on how to acknowledge their sources.

Theme: Plagiarism/ referencing

When asked questions that enquired about students' understanding on how to reference and the concept of plagiarism, students were asked the following:

One of the requirements of an academically written text is to ensure that you do not plagiarise. What is your understanding of the concept, plagiarism?

In response to this, Nomsa highlighted:

After we were given our first assignment, we were told that we should always acknowledge our sources, because failing to cite our sources leads to plagiarism which is a crime in academic writing. I found this time-consuming, and challenging to understand because I was not used to acknowledge sources for my assignment back in high school.

Similarly to the above question, Amo mentioned:

I think referencing/ in-text referencing should be given more time. This is because we taught by experienced people who spent less time on the subject, leaving us confused on how to properly acknowledge our sources in-text referencing, and have a biographical list where we should include all the sources we used in our assignment.

A follow-up question was posed on when the students first learned about the concept of referencing/ plagiarism, and how easy or difficult it was for them to acknowledge their sources! In responding to this, Jeph mentioned:

Referencing/ plagiarism is something that I first heard when I got here at university. At high school, we have never been taught about it. This is why I find it hard to understand how it works, and know the different referencing styles available.

Steph responded as follows to the question:

We were introduced to referencing in our English class here at university where we were told that we are supposed to acknowledge sources. I found this hard to manage as there are many rules revolving around referencing. For instance, we were told that how we reference books is slightly different from how we reference journals in our biographical list.

The responses above show that students are not experienced when it comes to in-text referencing and producing a reference list. The students come to university without being exposed to how referencing works. This led to the students resorting to a copy and paste method.

Another important skill to be mastered in academic writing is writing coherently and ensuring that your sentences and paragraphs are cohesive.

Theme: Cohesion and coherence

Participants were asked about their understanding of cohesion and coherence and their importance in academic writing. They responded as follows:

Nomsa

I always struggle to organise my thoughts coherently in a paragraph. My teachers tell me to maintain one idea in a paragraph, but my ideas are always disorganised.

Similarly, Amo said:

My struggles with cohesion and coherence is applying logical connectors to make links in between my sentences. I was always told by my teachers that my ideas are hard to follow in my assignments and tests.

On the same question, Jeph mentioned:

I do not understand the definition of cohesion and coherence to detail. This is a subject that we were not fully taught about. This makes it difficult for me to establish and maintain cohesion and coherence in my essays.

On cohesion and coherence, Steph mentioned:

I was taught that whenever we write our assignments, we should write clear introductions, body and conclusions, as well as plan the flow, developments and arguments of our work. This is something I mostly struggle with.

To achieve cohesion and coherence, paragraphs and sentences need to be clearly linked to each other to logically and linguistically form a whole. Every paragraph needs a focus or a theme and all parts of the paragraph must contribute to this. However, this appeared to be a challenging factor for the first-year dietetics students who mentioned that they did not understand the concepts: cohesion and coherence. The students stated that organising and writing in a logical manner was still problematic for them. According to the responses of the students, this challenge could be traced to the limited time spent on teaching the students about the meaning of the concepts and how to fully apply them. Due to this, many institutions have resorted to the establishment of writing centres, wherein students can develop their skills on such language features. In light of this, the next section looked at the students' perceptions about the writing centre.

Theme: Perceptions about the writing centre

Students were then asked general questions about the writing centre to get their perceptions about the centre. This was done to examine how the students felt about assistance they obtained from the tutors and their English lecturers. In response to the following,

What were your experiences with the centre, and did you receive the assistance you needed to excel in your academic writing?

Amo responded as follows:

After we had submitted our assignments at the centre, the language consultants reviewed our work and highlighted where we had committed mistakes, and where to improve going forward. We were also given an opportunity to do a one-on-one sessions where they elaborated on the comments they had highlighted on our assignments. This assisted us to fully understand what they meant with their comments, which clarified us on areas where we were confused.

In response to the same question, Steph highlighted:

The centre is really good for our development because we are assisted by our peers, which gives us the freedom to ask questions where we do not understand. This is not the case in the lecture hall, which are normally full and make it difficult for us to ask for clarifications.

Nomsa responded as follows:

The learning environment at the centre is friendly and encouraging. After submitting group assignments, we are organised in groups with our peers whereby we discuss the mistakes committed in the assignments, and other academic writing challenges. In this process, we are able to help each other, while the student tutor facilitates.

On the same question, Amo highlighted:

Taking our assignments to the centre can sometimes be time-consuming because you still have to wait for feedback from the tutors, work on your mistakes before you finally submit to the lecturer.

Following up on the above, the students were asked the following:

Do you think the student tutors at the centre were doing enough to assist you?

Jeph responded as follows:

Sometimes the student tutors were very fast in explaining certain concepts to us, which resulted in us being confused.

On the same question, Steph alluded:

Yes, during the session with the student tutors, there were dictionaries and pamphlets that we could refer to, to deepen our understanding of the concepts we struggled with.

Nomsa said:

Initially, the student tutors reviewed our work and went through the feedback with us so that we understood everything. For this, I feel the student tutors were doing their utmost best to upskill us.

However, Amo stated her dissatisfaction with some of the tutors and responded as follows:

Sometimes the tutors do not identify all the language errors committed. You would only realise that when you finally got feedback from the lecturers.

On how they dealt with feedback received from the tutors, the students were asked the following:

How easy or difficult did you find to deal with feedback from the centre?

On this question, Amo responded:

It was sometimes hard to understand the written feedback from the centre. The feedback was too brief and did not clearly outline how I can improve going forward. I felt the student tutors' comments were not for first-year students with little experience like us.

On the same question, Steph highlighted:

I do not like feedback on grammar rules, sentence construction, punctuation, spelling, as I feel belittled. I rather be given feedback on shortcomings or direction in terms of content or how effectively an issue is addressed. It is very deflating to put hours of work into the content of an assignment and then receive negative comments on the use of grammar and use of commas, etc and very little feedback on content.

Jeph said:

Tutors at the centre really tried to help us though sometimes I felt that our language mistakes were overwhelming for them as well. As a result, some of the feedback given was not as helpful.

On the contrary, Nomsa responded as follows:

Student tutors tried to give us as much feedback as possible, despite the number of assignment drafts that they had to deal with.

Students were also asked about their views on how they thought services at the reading centre could be improved. In response to the question:

What do you think should be done to improve services at the RWC?

Amo mentioned:

*Their feedback must be clear, I sometime receive comments such as **find another way to do it**. I find this confusing as I thought I had written the right thing, and expected a clear direction if the student tutors thought I did not do the right thing.*

Similarly, Jeph highlighted:

The centre should have a website where they put important information necessary for the development of student writing. After receiving assistance from the centre, students can always revisit the website to deepen their understanding of what they were assisted on.

On the same question, Steph attributed:

Doing tutorial videos on Youtube where student tutors teach us on important academic features such as referencing would really assist us. This is the most challenging aspect. As such, we will need to revisit the concept frequently.

Nomsa responded on the same question as follows:

The centre should edit our assignment rather than reviewing. I feel by doing so, we will learn how to write properly based on the changes they made on our assignments.

When asked the following question:

Do you think the English lecturers were doing enough to assist you with your assignments, or you only had to rely on the RWC for assistance?

Amo replied:

Some lecturers are very constructive and helpful with their feedback and I appreciate these lecturers very much. I also know that they are very approachable if I have any questions. However, we had to go to the centre to supplement what our lecturers had taught us.

Similarly, Steph responded:

Our lecturers sometimes pose challenging questions that encourage critical thinking and help us to be cautious on committing certain grammatical errors in our next assignment attempt.

On the same question, Jeph responded

Our lecturers' guidelines are sometimes not clear on what is expected, and I am most confused when the question is very broad with no clear directions.

Lastly, Nomsa said:

Sometimes there are underlined sections, without any explanation on what I did wrong. From this, I find it difficult to know what the underlined sections on my assignment mean and how I should avoid committing the same mistake next time.

From the above responses, the students indicated the significance of the centre in the development of the writing academic skills. The section outlined students' challenges in writing, their perception of the writing centre, and how they deal with the feedback from the centre. Additionally, the students reflected on the assistance they received from the lecturers with regards to improving their writing.

The following is data drawn from interview questions held with two English lecturers responsible for the first-year dietetics students

4.5. Presentation of data from the semi-structured interviews with the English lecturers

In this section, the researcher used similar themes followed when presenting data from interviews with the students above: grammatical errors, plagiarism cohesion and coherence, and perceptions about the writing centre. The decision of the researcher was also based on the responses received from the participants in this section. The section analyses and interprets the responses that were generated from the probed questions.

Theme: Grammatical errors

In response to the following:

What are the challenges that students encounter in writing their assignments, and where could this emanate from?

Lecturer 1 responded as follows:

Other students do not pay attention to the usage of academic language because they are not thoroughly exposed to it. The use of appropriate grammar rules is a common challenge to most of the students. Some students' work lack punctuations and as result impacts badly on their sentence construction skills. This creates difficulties for one comprehend their work at the first attempt of reading their work

Similarly, lecturer two said:

There are occasions where students' sentence construction is much better while other times their work reflects poor language competency. For instance, this is seen when they compose sentences that do not adhere to grammar rules such as subject-verb agreement, punctuation marks, sentence patterns to mention a few.

From the response taken from the two lecturers, the researcher found that the students find it difficult to use the English language during formal assessment such as assignment writing. This resulted in poor academic vocabulary, poor sentence construction, concord, and failure to punctuate properly among other difficulties. This can be traced back to the students' socio-economic status wherein most of them come from underprivileged backgrounds that saw them going to under-resourced schools that did not effectively develop their proficiency in English.

The next theme focused on plagiarism and challenges students faced when writing essays

Theme: Plagiarism

When asked the following:

How easy or difficult do you think it is for your students to acknowledge their sources of information when writing essays, and how do you assist them?

Lecturer 1 responded as follows:

When given assignments, some students find it difficult to use the English language to express their thoughts. Because of this, the students resort to plagiarism, copying and pasting what they come across on the internet, and should they attempt to write in their own words, their written work mostly reflects the influence of their mother tongue.

Lecturer 2 mentioned:

It is very clear that the concept of plagiarism is foreign to especially our first-year students. They mostly find it difficult to understand how to reference properly, especially in-text referencing. As a result, one needs to remind them on how referencing should be done whenever possible.

From the above section, it was found lecturers struggle to evaluate students' language in their assignment. The lecturers complained that students produce assignments that are not free from grammatical errors, and are often plagiarised. The lecturers expressed that the concept of plagiarism could be a subject that was foreign to the students as they struggled to acknowledge their sources and arrange their bibliographical list. The next section looks at cohesion and Coherence.

The lecturers were also asked questions related to how students constructed their essays with regards to cohesion and coherence.

Theme: Cohesion and Coherence

The lecturers were asked the following:

What are your impressions about students' essays and how they construct them?

Lecturer 1 responded as follows:

Some students still battle with constructing flowing sentences and paragraphs that have the same idea. Other students struggle to apply connectors of sentences to make connections between sentences while other students still have a problem of understanding the different connectors of sentence, consequently applying them incorrectly.

Similarly, another Lecturer mentioned:

Most of the students still find it difficult to introduce and conclude a topic. They also struggle to create paragraphs with the main and supporting ideas, and creating links between paragraphs.

The above section highlighted lecturers' perceptions on students' abilities/ struggles to write cohesive/ coherent paragraphs. From the section, the lecturers mentioned that students to introduce and conclude a topic. They further alluded that the students struggled to use connectors of English to compose logical sentences. Similarly to this, Aguib and Bouaziz (2017) investigated students' challenges with regards to the usage of cohesive devices from a discourse analysis perspective. The study examined 23 argumentative essays in terms of their grammatical and lexical cohesive devices. The results of the study revealed that the common issues found in the 23 essays was the misuse, overuse of some cohesive devices, as well and ambiguity. Aguib and Bouaziz (2017) further note that most students struggle with cohesive and coherent writing.

The lecturers were also asked questions to get insights on their general perceptions about the university writing centre.

Theme: Perceptions about the writing centre

In response to the following:

Do you think the writing centre is helpful in improving students' writing skills or not?

Lecturer 1 alluded:

I think RWC is a good initiation wherein students are assisted by their peers in their writing challenges. However, I feel the centre should provide more training to the student tutors in order to effectively assist the students. This is because sometimes students still produce the errors even after I have encouraged them to submit their work at the centre.

Lecturer 2 mentioned:

The establishment of the book club, and the writing competitions they hold occasionally at the centre are good for promoting literacy levels among students. Not only does that increase the students' vocabulary, it also hastens the process of developing their writing skills.

When asked a follow-up question:

How do you think students feel about assistance from the writing centre?

Lecturer 1 responded as follows:

I think students appreciate the efforts of the centre. Their work during the first semester is usually difficult to assess, but as soon as they visit the centre, the students start to get a sense of what and how they are supposed to write their introductions, body, conclusions and reference their work.

Similarly, Lecturer 2 mentioned:

Students are mostly comfortable working with their peers. I feel this will help them improve and develop their writing skills. My most concern is whether the student tutors are well equipped to support the students develop their academic writing skills.

In response to the following:

How do you think students react to feedback received from the centre and what are their attitudes towards feedback received?

Lecturer 1 said:

*I think the feedback from the student tutors at the centre is sometimes confusing, I sometimes see comments such as **rephrase** without providing a detailed description of how the student should rephrase and do better next time.*

Similarly, Lecturer 2 highlighted:

Lecturer 2

After going through the comments on the students' assignments, I have realised that student tutors are normally brief in their feedback, which might make it difficult for the

students to understand and improve on their work based on the comments. However, I like their approach of one-on-one sessions, where they elaborate more on their written comments in an attempt to assist students to correct their grammatical errors.

In response to a follow-up question:

What do you think should be done to improve the service from the RWC to enhance students' academic writing skills development?

Lecturer 1 highlighted:

I think there should be a discussion between English module lecturers and the administrators at RWC, wherein we will try to integrate our content with their work. In this way, the student tutors will effectively manage to assist the students that visit the centre to develop their writing skills.

On the same question, lecturer 2 responded:

The centre should try to find sponsorships to allow the student tutors to travel to other institutions that have writing centres. This will allow the student tutors and coordinators to come up with fresh ideas on how they can better the services at the centre.

The above findings indicate the perception of the English lecturers on first entering students' writing abilities. The lecturers indicated that the students produced grammatical errors such as concord, not punctuating correctly, and reflected a lack of cohesion and coherence. The lecturers further mentioned that the students struggled with acknowledging their sources. The lecturers outlined that the initiation of the centre, is a good strategy to promote and support the writing skills of the students. They however added that a collaboration with English lecturers that teach in various faculties could help improve the services rendered at the centre.

The next section presents data from student tutors at RWC.

4.6. Presentation of data from tutors at the RWC

This section presents data developed from the responses of two student tutors at the RWC. The section has adopted similar themes as those followed above: grammatical errors, plagiarism, cohesion and coherence, and perceptions about the writing centre.

Theme: Grammatical errors

In responding to the following question:

What are the common academic writing challenges experienced by first entering dietetics students, and what would be the possible reasons that led to those difficulties?

Tutor 1 responded is as follows:

Students' assignments expose lack of knowledge on grammatical skills such as punctuation, spelling, concord, and sentence structure. When you read their work, you could tell that they know what they are talking about, but struggle to express themselves effectively in writing. I believe this emanates from the fact that most of them come from public schools where English language is not given much attention.

Tutor 2 responded to the same question as follows:

I think most students, especially in the science stream, pay little attention to grammar rules. Most of them omit words in between sentences, construct long sentences that are not well punctuated, making it hard for the reader to understand.

The above section highlighted student tutors' perceptions about grammatical errors that they normally come across when students make submission at the centre. The study revealed that student assignments that are submitted at the centre usually expose knowledge on grammatical skills such as punctuation, spelling, concord, and sentence structure. Student tutors expressed that these challenges were mostly common among students in the Science stream. The student tutors believe that the students spend little time on fixing the language in their assignments.

Student tutors were also asked questions relating to students' challenges to reference their work, leading to plagiarism.

Theme: Plagiarism

In response to the following question:

One of the challenges that students struggle with is acknowledging their sources of information. How do you assist students with the problem of plagiarism or skills of acknowledging their sources?

Tutor 1 replied as follows:

During our training sessions, referencing is a subject that is given much attention so that we can manage to advise students in a satisfying manner. As such, during our session with the students, we go through the steps of in-text referencing and how to list inclusion sources used in in-text referencing in the biographical list.

Similarly, tutor 2 responded as follows:

We always encourage the students who come to the centre to dedicate time to proofread their referencing. This allows them to check if all the sources used in in-text referencing are included in the biographical list.

The above section noted student tutors' concern about students' inability to acknowledge sources during in-text referencing and composing a bibliographical list. It was revealed that this is one of the most challenging academic features that students experience. The student tutors expressed that after assisting students on this feature, they then encouraged the students to always proofread their referencing to ensure that all sources used in the in-text referencing are also included in the bibliographical list.

Students also struggle with how to structure texts. Their paragraphs are in most instances disconnected and incoherent. The tutors were then asked about the challenges students encounter with regards to cohesion and coherence.

Theme: Cohesion and coherence

In response to the following:

What are your perceptions about the ways in which students construct their essays in terms of cohesion and coherence?

Tutor 1 replied:

Students sometimes do not understand the structure of assignment writing as a whole, this includes how to properly write an introduction, body and conclusion.

On the same question, Tutor 2's response is as follows:

From the assignments students submit at the centre, it is quite clear that students do not understand the concepts of cohesion and coherence. Their ideas are usually disorganised. It gives a perception that students have little knowledge of writing skills. Their main focus is on providing content for the topic assignment. I feel that first entering students face these challenges because they were never taught of such, because many of them come to the centre to get assistance on how to overcome these challenges.

A follow up question to find out about the strategies used to assist students was as follows:

What are the predominant strategies utilised by RWC student tutors to assist first enterings students' transition from high schools literacies to the academic writing style of higher learning?

Tutor 1 responded as follows:

As a centre, we offer one on one sessions wherein we assist a student according to the specific challenge they have. This helps the students to be free and go on to bring forth other challenges they may have concerning the academic writing style of higher learning. Another thing we do is that, we give them the opportunity to go through the feedback highlighted on the reviewed document to allow them to bring follow-up questions on where they did not understand.

In response to the same question, tutor 2 replied:

We have initiated a book club wherein we encourage students to read books and share what they have learnt from the books. This is in line with increasing the knowledge base and vocabulary necessary for the students to easily express themselves in English whenever they write assignments, tests and examinations.

The above section highlighted the perceptions of the student tutors on certain strategies the centre employs to support student coming the centre. From the section, it was highlighted that student tutors review students' assignment and go on to hold one-one-session to clarify the students on what was highlighted on the document. Additionally, the student established a bookclub to help students increase their vocabulary.

Student tutors were also asked questions based on their perceptions about the writing centre and how their services could be improved.

Theme: Perceptions about the writing centre

In response to the following:

Do you think the writing centre effectively assists the students in improving their writing skills?

In response to this, tutor 1 highlighted:

We have students who frequent the centre. These students are consistent in seeking assistance from the centre. From their consistency, we are able to monitor their progress, of which it is mostly positive.

On the same question, tutor 2 highlighted:

Sometimes we are unable to monitor the progress of students since some come once to the centre and never again. As such we fail to monitor if our services were effective or not.

Following up on the above, the tutors were asked the following:

Do you think students appreciate advice and guidance provided at the centre?

In responding to this, tutor 1 highlighted:

Most students, not only first-year students, normally seek assistance on how to create an automatic table of contents, page numbering and referencing. These are three most challenging academic aspects students struggle with. However, in their second submission of assignment, after receiving assistance from the centre, a number of them show progress, which gives us an impression that our work is valued and effective.

To the same question, tutor 2 responded:

There are students who come back to the centre to give us feedback on how the centre has assisted them to obtain better marks, and that is when we realised that our work is appreciated. However, there are also students who come to the centre once and never come back. This makes us question whether the student was satisfied with our services, or dissatisfied that they went to seek assistance elsewhere.

Another follow-up question was asked as follows:

How do students react to feedback given?

For this question, tutor 1 responded:

As a centre, we do not do language editing, rather we do language reviewing, which means that we advise the students on how they can improve on their writing, rather than editing their work. As such, some students do not respond well to our feedback on their documents. Most of them expect an edited version of their work.

The response of tutor 1 was also echoed by tutor 2, who added as follows:

Students understand better when we go through our feedback with them. This is where students have a chance to ask follow-up questions.

With regards to their perceptions on how the centre could be improved, tutors responded as follows to the following question:

How do you think services could be improved at the centre for students' academic writing skills to improve?

Tutor 1 highlighted:

I think as the centre we should establish partnership with other institutions that have a writing centre. Through the partnership, we could collaborate when we hold training sessions and share knowledge on how best we can assist students coming to the centre for assistance.

On the same question, tutor 2 responded as follows:

The centre absorbs student tutors from all faculties of the university. Some of these student tutors are not well equipped when it comes to language features. As such I feel we should hold more frequent training sessions to ensure language competence among the student tutors.

From the above section, it was observed that RWC has several strategies used to help support the writing of students. The strategies that the consultants use include one-on-one sessions and feedback sessions, the establishment of a bookclub, and writing competitions, and further collaboration with other institutions to help improve student's writing challenges. The challenges that the student tutors highlighted include among others: grammatical errors, poor introduction, body, conclusion, and referencing/ intext referencing among.

This chapter presented data drawn from eight assignments of four first entering students. The first four was take from the first semester, while the other four was taken from the second semester. The chapter further presented data from interview questions conducted with the four first entering students, two English lecturers, and two student tutors from RWC. From the presentation of the finding above, the study revealed that academic writing has and still is a challenge for most first-year students. First-year dietetics students in this study produced assignments that reflected poor sentence construction, lack of cohesion and coherence, plagiarism and the use of personal pronouns in academic writing. The lecturers of the students complained that the students lacked interest in the work and produced poor writing that mostly reflected the influence of the spoken variety rather than the written variety. This suggested that students were not prepared for the demands of higher learning. The students resorted to the RWC for assistance to improve their writing skills. It was highlighted by the students that the centre 'strategy, that is- one-on-one sessions was an effective strategy to aid the learning process and they were comfortable to engage the language consultants about their struggles in writing.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter drew discussions on data presentation, analysis and interpretation. The significance of the previous chapter to the current one is that, in the current chapter, the load of data that the researcher collected and sorted was reduced or summarised into smaller parts that are easy to understand relate to the aims and questions of this study. This chapter presents discussions of the findings highlighted in chapter 4.

5.2. Summary of key findings

This study sought to investigate how the RWC in University of Limpopo contributed to students' improvements of the English writing skills. The study focused on a case of first entering dietetics students at the University of Limpopo. Two methods of data collection, document analysis and interviews, were used to generate insights from the participants regarding the phenomenon of this study. Thus, all methods of data collection and analysis, as well as the applied theory, were used in pursuit of getting answers for the questions below:

How does the University of Limpopo's Reading and Writing Centre help first-year dietetics students transition from secondary school literacies to academic writing conventions of higher learning?

Sub-questions

- What are the main challenges that first-year dietetics students encounter when writing academic assignments?
- Has the academic writing of dietetics students improved (or not) as a result of the center's assistance?

This section summarises the findings of the study by limiting them to topical discussions—each of which address a specific research question.

5.2.1. How does the University of Limpopo RWC contribute to the transition of first entering dietetics students from secondary school literacies to academic writing conventions of higher learning?

Some first-year students struggle to adjust to the university atmosphere because they lack the cultural capital required to succeed in their studies, not to mention the shortcomings of education provided in particularly poor schools (Cross & Carpentier, 2009). It must be noted that even students from well-resourced schools sometimes struggle to meet the academic literacy demands at university. For this reason, a number of institutions have been established writing centres to mitigate student writing challenges. This includes, RWC which is a writing centre at UL, which has an intention of assisting first-year students make a smooth transition from high-school to tertiary. The centre operates weekly and assists students with academic writing challenges such as composing an introduction, body, and conclusion and referencing. The centre further guides and supports students on grammar rules such as punctuation marks, sentence construction among others. In the context of this study, the study revealed that there some first-year dietetics students who frequented the centre for guidance on writing.

When interviewed about their experience of the centre, the study revealed that the first-year students were mostly comfortable working with their peers at the centre. The study further found out that the reason behind this was that students felt that being assisted by the student tutors at the centre made it easy for them to engage in the lesson, and ask questions on confusing areas, ultimately improving and developing their writing skills. To assist the students, the study found that the centre applied direct feedback on the assignments of students, one-on-one sessions, established a book club to promote literacy levels and increase the vocabulary of students. From this, the first-year demonstrated that one-on-one sessions are the most suitable approach for their learning as they were most comfortable during the session. The study, however found that the students believed that the direct feedback on their assignments did not help their case as the feedback was brief and did not clearly outline how they should improve moving forward. The students rather preferred that the student tutors edit their work and allow them to improve based on the changes the student tutors had made. The study further

revealed that the student felt belittled when they were rectified on grammar rules and not on their content.

With regards to the lecturers, the study revealed that the lecturers believed that the centre is a good initiation, but outlined that the centre should provide more training to the student tutors in order to effectively assist the students. They lecturers questioned if the student tutors were well equipped to provide support to their fellow peers.

On this, the study found out that student tutors at the centre do not do language editing, the centre rather reviews the assignments of students, and goes on to provide support/feedback on how they can improve on their writing. As such, some students did not respond well to the feedback on their documents as most of them expected their work to be edited. The student tutors however outlined that there were students who came back to centre to express their gratitude on how the centre had assisted them. This highlighted the role and importance of the centre. Gordon (2014) defines a writing centre as a learning environment where students can meet with peer tutors and receive direct feedback on their writing, ultimately improving their writing abilities. Additionally to this, Delport, Lackay, and Richards (2019) describes the role of writing centre to be liberating students from academic writing challenges and leading them into full participation in the disciplinary communities.

5.2.2. What are the main challenges encountered by first entering dietetics students in academic writing of assignments?

Despite the fact that tertiary is a region where students should have mastered grammatical aspects which will allow them to be exceptional writers, the study highlighted that some first-year dietetics experienced challenges in producing paragraphs that are free from grammatical errors, sentences that are logical, and still did not master the subject and verb agreement, writing an introduction, conclusion and referencing their work was a challenge for them. Their lecturers also complained that the students do not understand the academic language and composed sentences that were hard to evaluate, and depicted the influence of the mother tongue.

In addition to the challenges that students experience, student tutors mentioned that students sometimes do not understand the structure of assignment writing as a whole, this includes how to properly write an introduction, body and conclusion. From the interviews conducted with the students, the study further revealed that students do not understand the concepts of cohesion and coherence. Their ideas are usually disorganised, which gives a perception that students have little knowledge of writing skills. The student tutors expressed that students may encounter these challenges because they were never taught of such in high school. Due to this, the study revealed that the student focused on providing content for topic of the assignment rather than the writing according to the academic writing conventions.

The above comments are supported by Kruger and Bevan-Dye (2013) who explored the important supportive role played by the supervisor and the language editor in this regard. The study found that students lacked elementary language skills, such as correct grammar, the ability to organise paragraphs coherently and referencing, and resorted to plagiarism. Due to this, the study found that supervisors, who in this study are regarded as the MKO (More knowledgeable other), at the centre were the primary resources for language development in general and writing development in particular. The MKO supported poor writing of students, acted as a writing mentor, modeled good academic writing, and linked students to other writing support networks. This also demonstrates the significance of the writing centre, which Gordon (2014) defines as a learning environment where students can meet with peer tutors and receive direct feedback on their writing, in an attempt to assist them improve their writing abilities.

Both lecturers and student tutors agreed that their support to especially the first-year students was enormous, despite the fact that students arrived at the university with poor academic writing skills. Towards the end of the second semester, students showed signs of improvement in terms of grammar and referencing.

5.2.3. Has the academic writing of the dietetics students improved (or not) after receiving assistance from the centre?

At the centre, the study revealed that the students were introduced to the higher academic writing style such as constructing an introduction, conclusion and referencing/in-text

referencing, which was something new to the students. From the assignments that were reviewed by the student tutors at the centre, the study further found out that the students were also assisted with basic grammatical skills such as subject-verb agreement, punctuating and encouraged to thoroughly edit our work before submission, which improved their writing in the second semester. This in turn highlighted the role and function of the centre, which is to support and upskill students who struggle with writing. The lectures of the students outlined that the having the centre is a good initiation and provides students with an opportunity to freely engage with their peers on academic challenges. Student tutors outlined that it is significant for students to be consistent in seeking assistance at centre as it gives the centre an opportunity to monitor the progress of such students, and ultimately provide the necessary support. This is line with the theoretical framework of the study, Constructivist Zone of Proximal of Development (ZPD) and Scaffolding theory coined by Lev Vygotsky (1896 – 1934). The theory has in the past been employed by researchers to explain the significant role played by educators, peers or a More knowledgeable Other (MKO) (student tutors in this instance) in guiding and supporting the learning and development of students (Stone, 1998; Krause, Bochner and Duchesne, 2003; Hammond, 2002; Daniels, 2001). The theory describes the support of an MKO who intends to bridge the gap between the existing knowledge of students, and what they do not know, with the aim of assisting students reach their language competence levels.

The above comments were also revealed in this study wherein student tutors provided comments on the assignments of students and went on to hold one-on-one sessions to deepen their understanding on issues they struggled to understand. The study revealed that the one-on-one sessions were significant in improving the writing of the students. However, the study also revealed that the students struggled to understand the written feedback on their assignments from the centre. The students preferred the one-on-one sessions wherein they could be clarified on the feedback made on their assignments.

From the interviews conducted, there were several suggestions that the participants raised in an attempt to better the services at RWC. Such suggestions included a website where important information necessary for the development of student writing could be

uploaded. This according to the data of this study will deepen what the students were taken through at the centre as they could always revisit the website for clarity. It was further suggested that the centre should have a Youtube channel where student tutors teach important academic features such as referencing, writing an introduction, conclusion, creating an automatic table of contents and other aspects that are difficult for students. In addition to this, it was suggested that the centre could form collaborations with other institutions which have a writing centre. This is where they could exchange ideas on how writing centres can be improved for better services.

The above chapter presented discussions of the findings highlighted in chapter four. From the findings, it was observed that first-year students struggle with academic writing conventions of higher learning and basic grammatical skills such as punctuating correctly, constructing logical sentences among others. The students relied on the services of RWC to assist them transition to the writing style of higher learning. From the services of the centre, it can deduced that the centre employs strategies such as one-on-one sessions, and established a bookclub that was observed as paramount to the vocabulary development of students. However, the students, lecturers, and student tutors highlighted several interventions that can be deployed to better the services at the centre. Among other interventions, the participants suggested a collaboration with other institutions, and the use a website and YouTube channel to upskill students who visit the centre for assistance.

The next chapter presents the summary of the chapters of the study, the recommendations, limitations to the study, and conclusion of the study.

Chapter 6

Summary of chapters, recommendations, limitations to study, and conclusions

6.1. Introduction

How does the University of Limpopo's Reading and Writing Centre help first-year dietetics students transition from secondary school literacies to academic writing conventions of higher learning?

Sub-questions

- What are the main challenges that first-year dietetics students encounter when writing academic assignments?
- Has the academic writing of dietetics students improved (or not) as a result of the centre's assistance?

This chapter discusses the recommendations, the shortcomings of the study, future directions for this study and conclusion. The procedure in this chapter is that it starts by providing presenting the summary of all the chapters, highlighting some of the important aspects provided in all the chapters, recommendations, limitations of the study, future directions and conclusion.

6.2. Summary of chapters

Chapter 1

Chapter one presented the general introduction of the study—detailing discussions on the background and motivation of the study, the significance of the study, the problem statement of the study, the objectives of the study and role of Theory in the study. This chapter played an important role to familiarise readers with the motives of the current researcher for conducting this study. This was done through immense elucidation of why the identified problem is of concern to this study and why it is important for the current researcher to conduct an investigation on the identified problem.

Chapter 2

Chapter two presented literature review. This chapter included a review of previous research studies that were conducted regarding the phenomenon of the current study. Thus, the chapter did not only help the researcher to generate scholarly arguments that would only be used to justify his views, but they also helped the researcher to identify best methods that were used to conduct a study of this nature. This has resulted in both an awareness of the current trends regarding the challenges that students face in writing, as well as insights on how such challenges should be examined through research.

Chapter 3

Chapter three of the presented the methodologies used for the study which as follows. The researcher applied qualitative methodology to explore the phenomenon of this study. The subsequent and selected designs and techniques of the qualitative methodology were relevant improving in-depth answers to the questions of this study. The researcher advisedly selected the methods that yielded satisfactory data for this study, and has used chapter three to provide justifications for his choice of the qualitative methodology and other chosen designs and techniques.

Chapter 4

Chapter four provided discussions on data presentation, analysis and interpretation pertaining to the data acquired from first entering dietetics student assignments together with data drawn from interviews. This chapter demonstrated how the accumulated data responded to the questions of this study by performing an in-depth analysis of all data sets acquired during data collection. It was in this chapter that the researcher informed the reader of all the insights that emanated from the collected data and demonstrated how they respond to the questions of this study.

Chapter 5

Chapter five presented the summary of the key findings of the fourth chapter.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 provided practical recommendations to help improve all the concerns of this study regarding the processes and methods lecturers and RWC tutors use to improve

students' writing skills. The chapter also provided suggestions for conducting research of this nature in the future—considering some of the challenges that were experienced by the current researcher especially in applying methodology, collecting and analysing data.

6.3. Recommendations

- From the study, it is recommended that more first-year students should make use of the RWC as a tool that would allow them to smoothly transition from high school literacies to the academic writing conventions which they are inexperienced with.
- Vocabulary is an essential skill in academic writing; students with a high vocabulary are likely to succeed in their academic work (Cooper and Van Dyk, 2003). Therefore, it is recommended that students should read more often, mainly academic related articles for it will improve their vocabulary and lead them to be aware of the difference between the spoken written variety.
- It is also recommended that lecturers should pay attention to their students' usage of language and try to rectify encourage them to be conscious of their grammar.
- Since some students are inexperienced with using the academic writing conventions of higher learning, the study recommends that the lecturers of the students should give more writing assignments to the students, this will allow the students to get used the style at universities required when writing assignments.

6.4. Limitations of the study

This study has succeeded in exploring the identified problem and responding to the questions of the study tailored to address the identified problem. However, the study experienced a challenge during data collection. The researcher initially aimed at analysing sixteen first-year assignments, but could not achieve this due to covid-19 regulations. This challenge limited the current researcher from gathering more information regarding the effectiveness of the RWC on students' writing. The other limiting factor for this study was the outbreak of the 2019 Corona Virus (Covid19). The shutdown of institutions of higher learning confronted the researcher with a challenge of collecting data as the restrictions slowed down the researcher on data collection processes.

6.5. Conclusions

This study has examined the efficiency of RWC support on first-year students' improvement of academic writing skills, in an attempt to assist the students make a smooth transitions from high school literacies to the academic writing conventions of higher learning. The study revealed that the students received support from the lecturers and the centre to assist them improve their academic writing skills. After receiving assistance from centre, student showed significant improvements in the second semester assignments. This signified that students have the potential to write for academic purposes and need consistent support and feedback on their writing skills. Student tutors expressed that students' writing highlighted a number language challenges. Lecturers also raised concerns that students' writings were difficult to evaluate as them experienced a number of writing challenges. Among the challenges that lecturers and tutors raised concerns with, this study found that students experienced challenges with basic components of academic writing such as tense, punctuations, conjunctions, cohesion, paragraphing, citing and referencing–aloof which fuel the exasperation of assessing students' written works. Thus, it is the suggestion of this study that the methods that the UL RWC uses to intervene to the challenges of students' academic writing should be extended to secondary schools (FET phase) to make the transition of students from basic education to tertiary education writing easier.

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Appendix A

Presentation of data from semi-structured interviews with four first-year dietetics students

What were some of the academic writing/ languages challenges that you experienced as a first-year student?

One of the requirements of an academically written text is to ensure that you do not plagiarise. What is your understanding of the concept, plagiarism?

What were your experiences with the centre, and did you receive the assistance you needed to excel in your academic writing?

Do you think the student tutors at the centre were doing enough to assist you?

How easy or difficult did you find to deal with feedback from the centre?

What do you think should be done to improve services at the RWC?

Do you think the English lecturers were doing enough to assist you with your assignments, or you only had to rely on the RWC for assistance?

Appendix B

Presentation of data from semi-structured interviews with two English Lecturers

What are the challenges that students encounter in writing their assignments, and where could this emanate from?

How easy or difficult do you think it is for your students to acknowledge their sources of information when writing essays, and how do you assist them?

What are your impressions about students' essays and how they construct them?

Do you think the writing centre is helpful in improving students' writing skills or not?

How do you think students feel about assistance from the writing centre?

How do you think students react to feedback received from the centre and what are their attitudes towards feedback received?

What do you think should be done to improve the service from the RWC to enhance students' academic writing skills development?

Appendix C

Presentation of data from semi-structured interviews with two student tutors

What are the common academic writing challenges experienced by first entering dietetics students, and what would be the possible reasons that led to those difficulties?

One of the challenges that students struggle with is acknowledging their sources of information. How do you assist students with the problem of plagiarism or skills of acknowledging their sources?

What are the predominant strategies utilised by RWC student tutors to assist first entering students' transition from high schools literacies to the academic writing style of higher learning?

Do you think the writing centre effectively assists the students in improving their writing skills?

Do you think students appreciate advice and guidance provided at the centre?

How do students react to feedback given?

How do you think services could be improved at the centre for students' academic writing skills to improve?

