

A STUDY OF THE ACADEMIC WRITING PROFICIENCY OF LEVEL ONE  
STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

by

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## Abstract

Of all the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing, that students are expected to acquire in the schooling days, writing is deemed the most important as it is the specific skill which can be easily assessed and therefore measured. In addition, writing is also seen as the most physical of the four language skills. This study, therefore, takes a critical scrutiny at the writing proficiency of level one students at the University of Venda. The study is underpinned by the fact that the majority of the students at the University of Venda are Second Language learners of English, yet they are expected to write academically acceptable essays in English which is the language of teaching and learning at the university. This places enormous burden on the students as they do not only have to grapple with issues of inter-language but also with the chaotic nature of the English language and its orthography.

The study is an action research in which the researcher examines his own teaching of academic writing vis-à-vis the performance, hence, the writing proficiency of his students. It was carried out in the qualitative paradigm with a strong emphasis on the ethnographic approach to research. Students written texts, interview schedule and questionnaires as well as questionnaires for lecturers were utilized as data collection instruments. Sufficient empirical data were collected which helped to unmask numerous socio-cultural challenges which level one students encounter when writing different texts for summative evaluation.

The study established that level one students lack adequate proficiency in academic writing which is a major requirement for university studies. There are numerous factors which impede students from acquiring adequate proficiency in academic writing which include the following: the alarming influx of students which culminates in the admission of underprepared students, lack of commitment by students to improve their academic writing proficiency and institutional factors. As a result, students lack the capacity to use academic vocabulary, construct complex sentences and write paragraphs using the

required English format. Some of these challenges can be addressed through concerted efforts by all responsible stakeholders at the University of Venda.

The study identified some of the factors engendering academic writing proficiency of level one students of the University of Venda and categorised them into different themes that developed over the course of the study. The results deduced from data sources confirm that students experience numerous challenges which impede them from acquiring a particular threshold of academic writing proficiency expected from university students. Therefore, the researcher proposed specific strategies on how the identified problems can be dealt with and recommendations based on the current situation at the University of Venda.

**Key words:** Academic writing proficiency, Orthography, Writing process, Written corrective feedback and Genre approach