



**REGISTER COMPETENCE IN ACADEMIC WRITING: A CASE STUDY OF THIRD-LEVEL
ENGLISH STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation titled - **REGISTER COMPETENCE IN ACADEMIC WRITING: A CASE OF THIRD-LEVEL ENGLISH STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, LIMPOPO PROVINCE** - is my original work, and it has not been previously submitted to this institution or any other university for certification. The dissertation has been complemented by referenced works duly acknowledged. Where text, data (including spoken words) graphics, or tables have been borrowed from other sources, including the internet, these are specifically accredited in accordance with anti-plagiarism regulations.

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Date: 21 FEBRUARY 2023

DEDICATION

- First, I would like to convey my gratitude to the Lord, God Almighty, for the strength and the resilience He gave me throughout this study.
- I further dedicate this study to my parents who raised me in a humble background and contributed immensely to my achievement as an academic.

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- This work has not been easy to accomplish, and I would not have been able to do it without the help of the people and authorities listed below. Dr Lambani and Mr Bvuma, my supervisors, for all the invaluable advice and guidance they provided throughout the project.
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ABSTRACT

The use of unsuitable registers has been a critical concern with students at universities, colleges, and in English Second Language (ESL) contexts. While the appropriate use of registers is essential for coherent spoken and written discourses. However, students in ESL contexts seem to encounter difficulties in the use of appropriate registers due to various factors. The purpose of this study was to explore register competence among third-level students specialising in English Didactics at the University of Venda. The participants were 15 third-level students in the academic year of 2020. This study employed a case study design with a focus on the qualitative research method and a critical discourse and thematic analysis were employed as methods of data analysis. This study adopts a prescriptive grammar in the evaluation of the register competence. The findings of this study reveal that the register knowledge and its suitable usage among the selected third year-level student educators appeared to be an obstacle to their academic writing due to the variations in the use of the five distinct registers, namely, static, casual, intimate, informal, and formal. Furthermore, the following features were present in student educators' written work, namely, passive voice, lack of parallel structure, colloquialism, slang, use of personal pronouns, and phrasal verbs which are mostly considered inappropriate features for academic writing. Academic writing should be given extensive attention in English curriculum content such that the students master the appropriate writing style and register usage. The pedagogical implications from this study are that the lecturers teaching English second language should enlighten the student educators with appropriate knowledge to enable them to use registers appropriately and advance students' understanding of differences in the English language registers. This would pave the way for possible research arenas, and strategies to mitigate the inappropriate use of registers.

Keywords: *Academic writing, coherence, cohesion, diction, figure of speech, register*

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English Second Language
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
IC	Intercultural Competence
IS	Intercultural Sensitivity
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
RBUs	Rural Based Universities
SADC	Southern African Development Community
TLT	Transformative Learning Theory
UNIVEN	University of Venda
USA	United States of America
Vs	Versus
E.g	Example Given

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Communication is a two-way process of transmitting information or messages from one person or group to another (Perloff, 2018), and occurs through verbal or written format (Pooley, 2014). In other words, the speakers and writers cannot be separated from the communication process, as it is people who express their ideas, perceptions, and perspectives (Richards, 2013). Speakers and writers need a medium to express their intentions and messages, and the required medium is verbal and non-verbal language (Short, 2015).

This assertion is consistent with what has been articulated by Yang and Pan (2023), who states that language enables people to articulate their points of view, ideologies, and perspectives towards one another and to express communicative needs, hence, language is used constantly as a means of communication by people in their daily lives. Moreover, communication takes place on all occasions and is strongly influenced by various parameters, such as sociolinguistic factors (Serlinker, 2012). In the current study, the researcher refers particularly to the English language, which, has gained great recognition worldwide, in distinctive sectors.

In line with studies conducted in this area, students in academic institutions in South Africa use English in all forms of communication and even as the language of instruction in almost all subjects, except African language studies (Chudinov, 2007). Research has indicated concerns about irregularities and misunderstandings among students mostly observed in the English second language situations (Eaton, 2012). In South Africa, English is regarded as a second language, the language of instruction and as the lingua franca between students, faculties and departments, therefore the register matters in all these different communicative events.

Slavin (2003) highlights that the term “register” can be understood in two ways. In the broad sense, it is a linguistic diversity associated with situational parameters, such as the interlocutors, environment, modes of communication, tasks, or topics. Some researchers use the term to refer to the specific vocabulary used by different professional groups or used in specific situations (Wollheim, 2011). The narrow definition of the term, focusing

on vocabulary, is unacceptable since, as already suggested registers analysis should not be limited to items of vocabulary only but should include other aspects of the language (Yule & George, 2014).

In addition, Walker (2005) emphasises a different aspect of registers, describing them as sets of language elements associated with discrete occupational or social groups. Several studies, therefore, have focused on the registers used by specific groups, such as sports announcers, students, researchers, or even parents who utilise 'baby talk' with very young children (Richards, 2013). The term, however, is more strongly associated with situations or communication events, rather than with specific groups of people, which is why Du Plooy's (2009) narrow definition is difficult to accept. In the context of this study, the researcher adopts the definition of Joos (2010), that establishes register variations in terms of when and how they are used for different situations, purposes and audiences, that are fundamental to learners of English as a second language (L2).

Registers are embedded in all forms and modes of communication, with discrete variants of the language used (Gravetter, 2011), as well as the activities undertaken, the participants and their roles in the communication, and the communication medium involved (Yang & Pan, 2023). As this concept of register has not been comprehensively explored in the literature, for example, the work of Yule (2014), only focused on the style and features involved in the register usage. The current researcher, therefore, perceives this as a topic of some significance in the context of the English second language learning, to interrogate this concept in depth.

The use of the terms - register, style, and genre - varies from scholar to scholar, some previous studies have shown that the problem of register style exists in various language contexts, for example, in Chinese (Walker, 2005). Wollheim (2011) analysed several styles of Chinese adopted by users like - news reporters, lawyers, advertisers, government officials, academics, and artists - and noted that Chinese linguistics scholars tend to use different styles of Chinese, in different physical and social contexts. Young (2010) specifically stated that register has a role in pedagogical grammar. This aspect of registers appears to be a focus in language communities.

Similarly, the results of Thiher's (2017) study showed that there are challenges with registers when teaching and learning English as a second language (ESL) around the world, particularly at universities. Pioneering work in the United Kingdom (UK) in the early 2000s by Richards (2013) made clear that literacy standards in schools and universities are very low and that academics often complain that students cannot write according to the rules of academic requirements. This relates to formal writing based on the characteristics of deviation noted in various registers (Yule, 2017). Work in this area has been heavily influenced by Slavin (2003) who argued that poor grammar has an impact on students' registers in higher education. This has been aggravated by the influence of social media language, whereby, many students are unable to form correct sentences and paragraphs, which in turn affects their registers.

Studies conducted at Ghanaian universities revealed some of the following grammatical and lexical errors university students make in their L2 writings - register misuse, concordance errors, wrong tense, wrong word usage, wrong collocation, ambiguity, punctuation errors and wrong use of idiomatic expressions, (Serlinker, 2012). In the same vein, Norquisit (2017) further pointed out that from the beginning of their language development, students do not acquire any abstract syntactic structures, and this impairs their linguistic competence, particularly, ability to differentiate between registers. This problem is well reported in the literature, although the contributing factors are underexplored.

Students' difficulties with academic language may be related to inexperience with the language requirements of college learning and assignments (Karasik, 2004). In South Africa, too, there are growing concerns about the high levels of poor writing by students in schools and colleges (News24 06/30/2019). Media reports show that students entering higher education struggle to write effectively and are therefore underprepared for higher education (Kgalema Motlanthe, 04/22/2010; News24 06/30/2019).

One of the most influential work in this area is the work of Pooley (2014) who articulated that writing, by students worldwide, poses challenges related to second language English and that the main weaknesses are due to poor proficiency resulting from - poor sentence skills, grammatical inaccuracies, and imperfect academic writing skills. The English

language has gained immense recognition and university and college students use English in all forms of communication; the challenges and the inappropriate use of registers have been the subject of several previous studies and literature (Perloff, 2018 and Norquist, 2017).

This situation still causes confusion in research communities, as researchers and educators are faced with the question of when and how to prevent the use of inappropriate registers in communication events (Knapp & Hall, 2006). As reported in the literature, for many decades, registers have been the focus of research to examine and understand the factors that influence the use of registers by students in formal settings, particularly, among university and college students (Yule, 2012). It remains unclear, why using a register appropriately seems one of the difficult and complex language skills to master by ESL university students since this is an academic environment where students are expected to write in an appropriate language and adopt a writing style that portrays them as experts.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Research reveals that writing poses challenges for students within the English Second Language contexts, across the globe and the major weaknesses are usually attributed to poor proficiency arising from - poor sentence skills, grammatical inaccuracies, and imperfect academic writing skills (Al-Marsumi, 2017; Short, 2018). Students at universities, however, are expected to have perfected their writing skills, including the correct choice of register in formal writings, such as essays.

Academic writing may be viewed as one of the difficult and complex skills to master mainly because speaking and writing differ, hence, both follow their own rules. To produce an excellent piece of writing, students should follow, among others - the rules of grammar, appropriate diction, logically connected sentences, and relevant figures of speech. Student educators studying English at the third-year level, at the University of Venda, are on the verge of being launched into the society to serve as educators who have majored in English, however, their written work does not demonstrate proficiency in the language; this has caused some concerns.

In view of these concerns, research which should serve as breakthrough is expected to lead towards the identification of strategies to develop register mastery among the non-native speakers and speakers of English in written discourse and spoken communication, especially, among student educators. This study, thus sought to explore the use of registers in academic writing of third-year level students of English at the University of Venda.

1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

To explore the use of English register in academic writing of third-year level student educators studying English, at a rural-based university, in Limpopo Province.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The current study has the following objectives:

- 1.5.1 To classify the English register variations used in academic writing by third-year level students of English, at the University of Venda.
- 1.5.2 To identify contributing factors which are hindering the appropriate use of register by students studying English, at the University of Venda.
- 1.5.3 To suggest some strategies which could enhance the students' appropriate use of register in academic writing.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were formulated for this study:

- 1.6.1 What are the variations of English register used in academic writing by third-year level student educators studying English, at the University of Venda?
- 1.6.2 Which contributing factors could be hindering the appropriate use of register in academic writing?
- 1.6.3 What strategies could be employed to enhance students' appropriate use of registers in academic writing?

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study may offer profound insights concerning the mastery of register variation in English second language. It sought to unearth students' proficiency in register usage by taking into consideration different factors which may hinder appropriate use of registers. This is a topic of importance because it will pay attention to an essential aspect of language proficiency as registers are not only concerned with discrete varieties of English from a geographical perspective but rather, by a wider vision of the role of English in language hybridity on a global scale. Significantly, it was envisaged that this study may explain why certain types of register occur more regularly than others, challenges encountered in identifying and using appropriate registers and strategies that can enhance its usage.

The results would, therefore, enable students to be aware of register requirements in academic setting and suggest relevant resources and activities for promoting appropriate academic writing. With these findings it is anticipated that student educators can be assisted to improve the language competence of their learners.

1.8 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study was delimited to academic writing and classes of language register. In addition, this study was confined to an analysis of colloquialisms, the passive voice, slangs, contractions - in participants' language register as these are aspects that pertain to language use. This study explored the use of register in academic writing with a focus on written language in a formal setting.

1.9 DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.91 Academic writing

Pooley (2014:5) define 'academic writing' as any writing that fulfills the purpose of education in a college or university, whereas, Moore (2010:9) define it as a process of thinking that uses written language. This study adopts both Baker's (2011) and Aladeyomi

(2007:6) definitions of academic writing because both view writing as a core academic activity that is not merely a technical skill but one which incorporates critical thinking. For this study, the concepts 'writing', 'student writing' and 'academic writing' refer to essays for academic purposes; these terms were used interchangeably.

1.9.2 Coherence

Biber (2009) explains that coherence is achieved when sentences and ideas are connected and flow together smoothly. An essay without coherence can inhibit a reader's ability to understand the ideas and main points. Coherence allows the reader to move easily throughout the essay from one idea to the next, from one sentence to the next, and from one paragraph to the next. The Oxford Dictionary (2019) indicates that coherence refers to the general sense that a text makes sense through the organisation of its context. In writing, it is provided by a clear and understood structuring of paragraphs and sentences in writing.

1.9.3 Cohesion

Perloff (2018) notes that cohesion refers to the logical flow and connection in a written text and is achieved through the use of devices linking sentences together so that there is a logical flow between ideas from one sentence to the next. Cohesion in paragraphs can be achieved by the use of linking devices and logical connectors in sentences. These devices include a variety of elements, for example, conjunctions, the use of pronouns, and the repetition of certain words. It is important to note that conjunctions function at the grammatical level while linking devices work with meaning.

1.9.4 Diction

This refers to the choice and use of words and phrases in speech or writing; individual word choice or diction affects the overall tone or attitude of communication, hence, diction pieces should be appropriate to the audience and purpose. The tone may be objective or subjective, logical or emotional, intimate or distant, serious or humorous, depending on the structure and individual selections of diction (Llamas, 2007).

1.9.5 Figures of speech

A figure of speech is the use of a word that diverges from its normal meaning or a phrase with a specialised meaning not based on the literal meaning of the words, such as a metaphor, simile, or personification. Figures of speech often provide emphasis, ensure the uniqueness of expressions; they are also known as a “rhetoric devices” or illocutionary acts (Eaton, 2005).

1.9.6 Register

A register refers to the level of formality within the use of language, in both spoken and written communication; these could include, the language used on occasions like - political debates, interviews, academic settings and conversations (Knapp, 2006). It is a subset of a language used for a particular purpose, event, or social setting (Paden,2008). In turn, Joos (1961:7) explains “register” as the use of styles or varieties of language usage depending on the purpose, topic, audience, status, and relationship between interlocutors as well as the context.

1.9.7 Style

This is how communication is written, as opposed to the meaning of what is written in a text; as part of the general meaning of a text, style influences the reader’s impression of the information itself, the style includes diction and tone. The main goal in considering style when writing is to present information in a manner appropriate for both audience and the purpose of the writing.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2. INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviewed relevant, dependable, and recent literature related to the current study and discussed the theoretical framework of the study, on register competence in academic writing. A literature review aids to establish a link between what the researcher is proposing to examine and what has already been studied. It further enables the researcher to show how this study would contribute to the existing body of knowledge or profession. Mouton (2001) defines a literature review as a “scholarship review” since the works that are being examined are those of other scholars. The primary aim of a literature review, therefore, is to contribute towards a clearer understanding of the nature and meaning of the problem that has been identified (Beasley, 2002). The literature review is significant as it enables the researcher to ascertain the extent to which previous researchers might have already addressed the main research question and the approach that had been taken.

Mouton (2001) further claims that the review of the literature provides background information and summaries of the existing knowledge or related studies that have been conducted on the research topic under study. This allows the researcher to identify gaps that have not been explored within the field of study and prevents duplication of previous studies. This sentiment is further supported by Slavin (2003), who affirm that without a thorough review of the related literature, a researcher cannot identify a sound theoretical framework for a study. According to Babbie (1993), the literature review helps the researcher to make important decisions about the methodology to be used to ensure that the research effort is appropriate to complement existing knowledge in a meaningful way (Aladeyomi, 2007). Biber (2009) add that the literature review allows the researcher to identify methodological, contextual, and conceptual weaknesses in previous studies. This study examined how register competence is an essential element for coherent communication on different situational occasions. This section therefore compares, scrutinises, and examines the consulted literature related to the research problem. The

researcher in the review discusses literature like articles, internet sources, reports, and books, with the intention of investigating the research problem at hand.

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theory is a set of interrelated constructs or concepts, definitions and plans that represent an ordered interpretation of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). This study examined the use of register by third-year student teachers, hence, the researcher adopted the theories: academic literacy and the register theories.

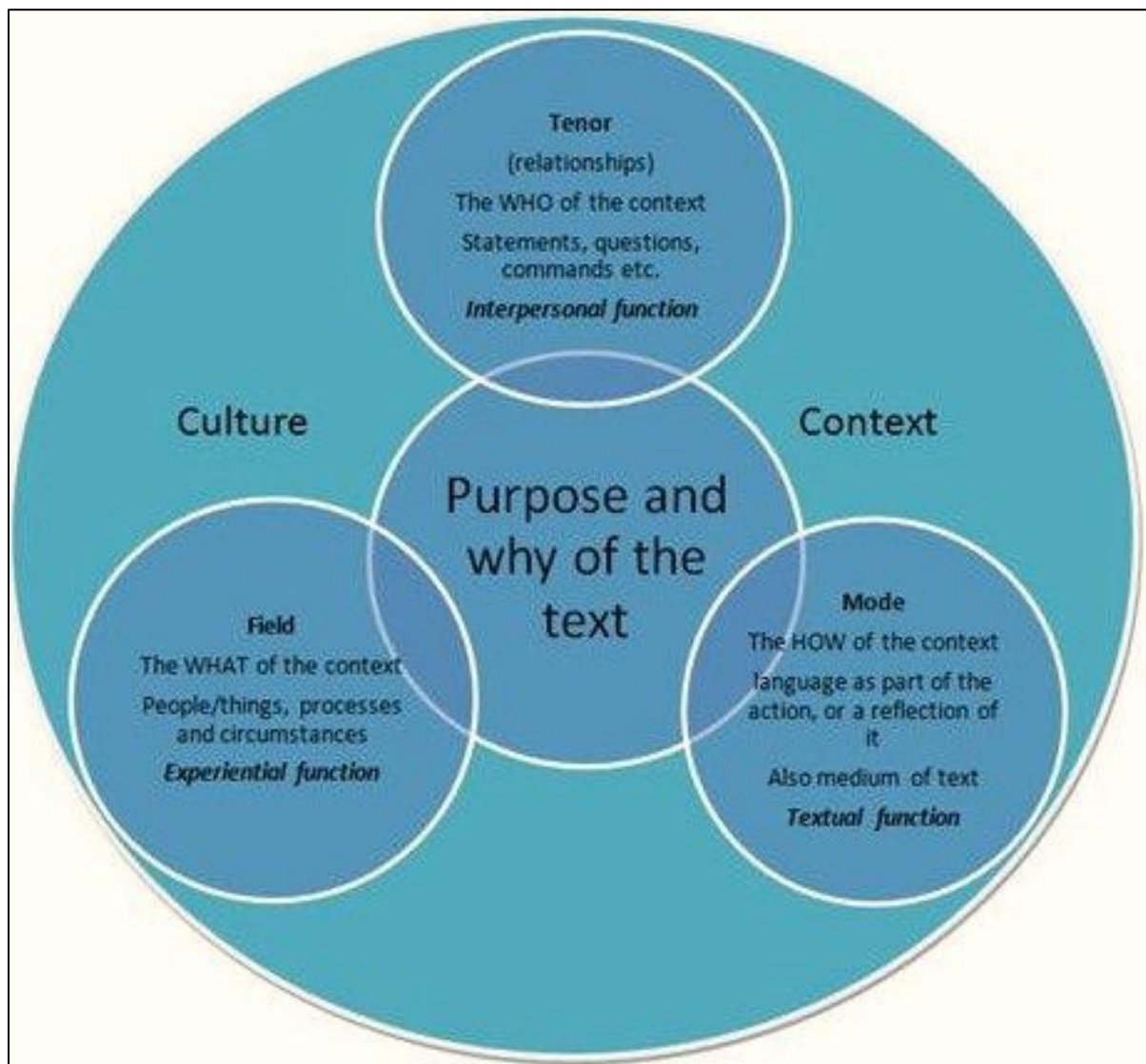
2.1.1 Academic Literacy Approach

The current study is underpinned by the Academic Literacy (AL) approach developed in 1998 by Lea, and Street. The founders of the Academic Literacy approach believe in an in-depth analysis of student perceptions and attitudes when writing. The AL approach focuses on writing within disciplines; proponents view writing as a communicative act that involves the exchange of observations, information, thoughts, or ideas between the interlocutors (Lea & Street, 1998). The AL approach is consistent with Jurecics' (2006) assertion that writing is not a formula or a set of exercises to be drilled and corrected, but an intractable process in the teaching and learning process. Students' perceptions and experiences of writing in ESL contexts are important, as such insights can provide a better understanding of why students continue to struggle with their writing and can inform teachers of effective ways to develop and improve students' writing skills (Llamas, 2007).

The academic literacy approach helps to discover many dimensions of student academic writing, including its impact on student writing. Academic writing is an ideologically inscribed knowledge construction with its own generic, scientific, and discipline-specific writing practices (Yule, 2012). Paden (2008), advice that assessing students' writing in ESL contexts is important as it can help to better understand why students continue to struggle with their writing and can inform faculties in higher education institutions on effective ways to develop and improve students' writing skills.

2.1.2 Register Theory

This study was further substantiated by the register theory proposed by Michael Halliday, one of the first linguists to pay particular attention to the concept of the register in the 1960s and 1970s. He interprets this term as a semantic concept that can be seen as a configuration of meanings typically associated with a particular situational configuration of field, mode, and tenor, (Halliday, 1990). The linguistic features (specific expressions, lexico-grammar, and phonological features) and the values of the three dimensions (field, mood, and tenor) determine the functional diversity of a language (Halliday, 1994).



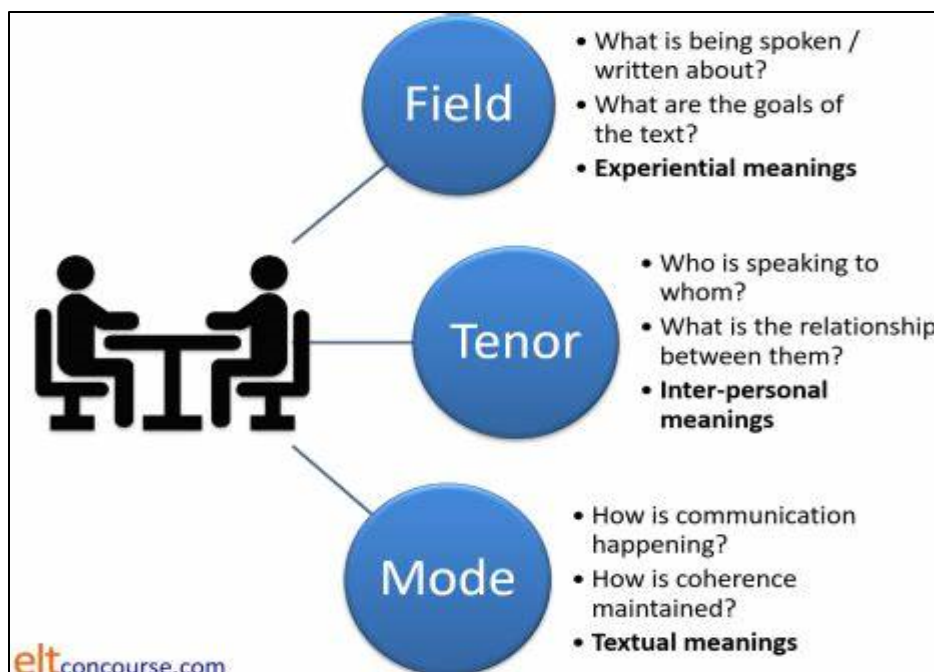
Adapted from English Language Teaching Centre, Haliday 1989

Figure 1: The parameters of Register Usage

The **field** of discourse is defined as “the overall event in which the text functions together with the goal-directed activity of the speaker or writer; it thus includes the object as an element” (Halliday, 1994:45). The field describes activities and processes taking place at the time of writing. The analysis of this parameter focuses on the whole situation, for example, when a mother is talking to her child. The mode of discourse refers to the function of the text in the event and therefore includes both the channel of the spoken or written language, spontaneous or prepared and the genre or rhetorical mode (narrative, didactic, persuasive, phatic communication among others (Halliday, 1994:46). This variable determines the role and function of the language in each situation. The discourse tenor, sometimes called the “style” (Odebunmi, 2007), describes “the people participating in an event and their relationships and status. Tenor refers to the nature of role interaction, the set of relevant social relationships, permanent and temporary, between the participants involved in language use” (Halliday, 1994:52).

These three parameters can be used to specify the context of the situation in which language is used. Haliday and Hasan (1964) describe a register as a variety according to use, in the sense that each author has a set of variants and chooses between them at different times. This usage-related framework for describing language variations (as opposed to the user-related varieties, called dialects) aims to uncover the general principles governing the variation of situation types and understanding which situational factors determine which linguistic features (Halliday, 1978).

In the Hallidayan functional theory of language, analysts are interested not only in what language is but why language is, not just what language means but how language creates means. The context here refers to the ‘context of the situation’ and the ‘context of the culture’; both influence the words and structures that text producers use. The register or situational context is the set of meanings, the configuration of semantic patterns typically referred to under the specific conditions, along with the words and structures used in realizing those meanings.



Adapted from eltconcourse.com

Additionally, the functional theory of language addresses the variables of field, tenor, and mood, and is a useful abstraction relating variations in usage to variations in social context. An analysis of the register of linguistic texts allows authors to uncover how language is maneuvered to create meaning. This has found a popular application in critical discourse analysis, therefore, this theory addresses the field, tenor, and mode register variables (Aladeyomi, 2007). Register theory highlights how linguistic decisions contribute to the realization that language use in spoken context differs greatly from written discourse. Analysis of registers helps students to understand the context of the situation's factors that determine the nature of choices related to the registers to be used in each setting; it focuses on the appropriateness and accuracy of using English register in formal communication.

The register as a theory of language variation according to situational contexts and its focus is the systematic connection between a situational context and the language variety to be used. Regarding register classifications, this theory helps to understand the register to be used in academic writing because the three parameters, namely tenor, mode, and field, are the guidelines that allow the authors to use the correct register in each context.

These three parameters can be used to specify the context of the situation in which the language is used. This theory, therefore, allows students to use an appropriate register in formal settings because it emphasises the differences between language types such as technical, formal, and everyday languages.

2.2 COMMUNICATION

The speakers and writers cannot be separated from the communication process and their lives; people need to interact with others as they cannot live alone (Paden, 2008). Through the process of communication, people can change their opinions, ideas, thoughts, and intentions; meaning interlocutors transmit messages to each other. In addition, when conducting communication, people need a medium to express their intentions and messages (Norquisit, 2017). The most appropriate medium is language since it can carry a message through symbols. This is consistent with what Knapp (2006:23) has suggested, that “language enables people to say things to one another and expresses communicative needs”, in other words, language is constantly used as a means of communication by people in their daily lives – in ordinary interactions, in business, industry and academic endeavours.

The most common form of communication in business and industry is between manufacturers and consumers. In business, someone will do whatever it takes to get the maximum profit and success from their businesses (Karasik, 2004). “One of its effects is advertising. It represents images of life in daily life. Advertising is identified as the texts that do their best to grab people's attention so that they turn to them” (Murar, 2008:70). The purpose of advertising is to influence and motivate the public to buy and use the products or services or to follow advocated ideas (Baker, 2011). Advertisers disseminate information about their products using appropriate and effective language, thereby, customers get an idea of the product on offer and then may decide to purchase it (Norquisit, 2017). Film promotion is a type of advertisement to promote a film.

A film advertiser wants to provide information about a particular film and try to get the public to see the film, therefore, he or she uses interesting and attractive languages. According to the explanations above, the language used in film advertising has a

peculiarity, for example, as compared to the language of prayers (Mouton, 2011). For these reasons, speech cannot be separated from the speaker; the language and its speaker are influenced not only by linguistic but also by non-linguistic factors. The linguistic factors are the elements contained in the language structure, while the non-linguistic factor may be social and situational factors (Odebunmi, 2007). The social factors are elements, such as the interlocutors' status, education, gender, economic background, while situational determinants are inclusive of type of communication events, geographical location, and other environmental attributes.

According to Mazayev (2005), the situational factors focus who speaks to whom, when and about what language, which diversity is paramount. This, therefore, means that the situational factors consist of setting of the place, time, nature of the events and physical environment. This is manifested in different ways of speaking, or in language varieties, such as in the use of style, slang, colloquialism, register, and so forth.

Murar (2008:69) continues that "language diversity arises due to social diversity and language function. He then classified linguistic diversity in terms of social diversity and its function in the social community". English film advertisements, for instance, automatically have a variety of standard English words or sentence structures. These variants depend on usage - the message style and the message receiver. Consistent with this opinion, Aladeyomi, (2007) note that the varieties of languages are referred to as 'registers for specific purposes', therefore, the language used in advertising constitutes a register.

Register represents a language variety based on its function. Usually, the register patterns follow some existing ones, but new ones evolve either by addition or by reduction of some elements, as registers are dynamic, and they follow evolution of society. For these reasons, the approach related to register analysis is sociolinguistic (Mazayev, 2005). Gravetter maintain that: "Sociolinguistics is that branch of linguistics that studies precisely those properties of language and language that require reference to social, including contextual, factors for their explanation" (2011:15).

2.3 DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION OF REGISTER

The term “register” is defined as a variety of language used for a particular purpose or in particular communicative situation (Halliday, 1994). For example, when speaking officially or in a public setting, an English speaker may be more likely to follow prescriptive norms for formal usage than casual setting. As with classes of language variation, there tends to be an aspect of register which is defined by use, not the user in the communication (Norquisit, 2017).

The concept of register has been variously discussed by Mazayev (2005), in their studies related to language use. Fundamentally, it refers to variations in language determined by Function, Medium and Formality or Style. An English language teacher is less concerned with particular variations, rather, with universal characteristics of language as found in authentic contexts. Unfortunately, grammarians' descriptions of language provide little information on frequency and range of occurrence, such that there is no way of distinguishing the common and useful from the rare and esoteric (Knapp, 2006). A corpus of language was studied to discover the frequencies of occurrence of verb forms and types of noun phrase. It was found that in verb usage, simple forms predominated (Karasik, 2004) and that the distribution of forms was seen to be related to language function.

Similar results were achieved in the analysis of the register use, where simplicity rather than complexity was a salient characteristic (Gravetter, 2011). It was concluded, therefore, that the English language course writers need to take such findings into account, although much published material appear to be uninformed by corpus-based research (Yule, 2014). Finally, the contextualisation of items to be taught should be guided by a study of their authentic occurrence rather than by notions of what fits into contrived classroom situations.

In sociolinguistics, the term “register” refers to “specific lexical and grammatical choices as made by speakers depending on the situational context, the participants of a conversation and the function of the language in the discourse” (Halliday 1989:70). Dialects are particularly characterised by social or regional variation, whereas register

concerns functional variation in its usage in various communicative events (Du Plooy, 2009). These two notions, however, are not entirely independent of each other; Paden (2008:108) states “one man’s dialect is another man’s register”; in other words, linguistic features which are part of one speaker’s dialect might belong to a specific register for another speaker. Nevertheless, many linguists hold the view that speakers often only control one or two social varieties of language (standard and dialect), while they use a “wide range of register” (Chudinov, 2007).

In contrast to dialect, which Halliday (1990) defines as a “variety of language according to the user”, register focuses on the “variety according to use.” Registers, thus, are characterised by “differences in the type of language selected as appropriate to different types of situations” (Beasley et. al., 2002:14), which means that “there is a close relationship between language and context of situation”. Most linguists agree with this definition, however, two perspectives of register classes can be distinguished. The first approach, as proposed by Halliday (1978), is context-based, while the second perspective differentiates registers on the basis of text collections (Burns, 2000).

Halliday (1990) defines the term “register” as “situationally defined varieties. He also agrees with Aladeyomi, (2007), partially, that “important components of the situational context include the purpose of communication, the physical mode (spoken or written), the production circumstances, and various demographic characteristics of the speaker/writer”; these must be taken into consideration.

Llamas (2007) chiefly focuses on the grammatical characteristics of different text types in line with Baker, (2011). He does not infer from the context which linguistic features will probably occur in a text, rather, “he looks at register only from the text end as a set of texts that exhibit relatively high/low frequencies of occurrence of particular grammatical features” as also articulated by Slavin, (2003). Biber (2009) distributes registers to various kinds of texts, and afterwards he investigates their linguistic differences or similarities. Register shares many linguistic features – such as nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and they are distinguished by the relative use of these features” (Paden, 2008:27). According to Stander (2001), several linguistically and situationally similar kinds of texts

constitute a register, however, each register plays a significant role in situational communication based on different styles.

In his corpus-based approach to English grammar, Biber (2019) considers four major registers: conversation, fiction, newspaper language, and academic prose, however, he further elucidated that a register can be defined “at almost any level of generality”. The four registers of his approach can be further subdivided, for example, newspaper writings include news reportage and editorials as well as reviews (Moore, 2010). This means that there is, as in Halliday’s approach, a considerable number of possible registers.

In his analyses, Babalola (2007) examines lexico-grammatical structures of text samples from each register and concentrates on the actual use of these features in different varieties of English. In this way, he can describe a specific register according to its linguistic features, hence, it is possible to distinguish the major registers from each other, with more or less clear-cut boundaries. Joos (1961) established that there are five classes of register namely, formal, consultative, casual, informal, and frozen. “Each level has an appropriate use that is determined by differing situations, thus, the appropriate language register depends upon the audience, the topic, purpose, and location”. Writers must control the use of language registers to enjoy success in every aspect and context of communication.

Baker (2011:90) explains that “register is a broad concept that covers all forms and kinds of communication, in terms of the linguistic forms used, the activities performed, the participants and their roles in the communication, the medium of communication, and the interconnectivity between one linguistic form and another”. The term ‘register’ took its root from Stander’s (2012) bid to analyse language along “field of content distinguished by general subject matter and interest of the participants”.

2.3.1 Variation of Register

The features of register may be more apparent in other languages, for example, the familiar *tu* in French and its equivalent elsewhere, and the elaborate honorific code of Japanese (Naftulin, 2013). Even a slight acquaintance with other languages can help the teacher to develop the students’ conception of register (Slavin, 2003). In the current

researcher's understanding, English is less distinctive but not less complex in this respect. As well as choice of words, there are such matters as varying intonation, more laconic speech with intimates and the deliberate use of slang or grammatical deviation to lighten a formal situation as can be seen with English.

2.3.1.1 *Language Register*

There are five language register or styles. Each level has an appropriate use that is determined by differing situations. It would certainly be inappropriate to use language and vocabulary reserve for a boyfriend or girlfriend when speaking in the classroom; thus, "the appropriate language register depends upon the audience (who), the topic (what), purpose (why) and location (where). One must control the use of language register to enjoy success in every aspect and situation that one encounters" (Haliday, 1994:29).

2.3.1.2 *Static Register*

This style of communication *rarely or never* changes; it is "frozen" in time and content, for example, the Pledge of Allegiance, the Lord's Prayer, the Preamble to the US Constitution, the Alma Mater, a bibliographic reference and laws. "This type of register remains motionless throughout and does not change in all contexts. It is quite significant to highlight that the language used and tense in this piece of writing may rarely change" (Moore, 2010:89). The *frozen register* is referred to as "static register," such as, printed unchanging language. The wordings are exactly the same every time they are spoken and written.

Frozen register is a characteristic of poetry and liturgy; not a word can be changed (Llamas, 2007). Language plays an important role in the daily life of human beings; hence, it is commonly understood that language exists in a society; they are interdependent. In other words, language needs the society where it exists, and the society needs the language in their daily life. This is in line with what Pooley (2014) says in his book - *Language the Social Mirror* – that there is no human society that does not depend upon, that is not shaped by and does not itself shape language.

2.3.1.3 Formal Register

This register is used in formal settings and is standard in nature. “This use of language usually follows a commonly accepted format and is usually impersonal and formal (Yule, 2012). A generic format for this register is speeches. e.g., sermons, rhetorical statements, and questions, pronouncements made by judges, announcements”. Some scholars concurred and extended the notion of purpose and audience in the use of this register (Perloff, 2018). Formal register can include everything from an academic essay to wedding vows. The academic essay is formal because it includes standard structures, complex sentences, and precise vocabulary.

Moreover, this type of language is used in formal settings, is one-way in nature and usually follows a commonly accepted format; it is usually impersonal and very structured. Common occasions for this register are speeches, sermons, academic writing, pronouncements made by judges and announcements (Babalola, 2007). Consequently, Naftulin (2013:21) notes that the overall organisation of “language in context is shown in its register”. According to him, “the language is context-complex as it is organised globally along the dimensions of stratification, meta-functional diversification, and potentiality” (Slavin, 2003). This organisation produces the following set of stratal sub-systems - context, semantics, lexico-grammar and phonology/graphology.

The wedding vows are an example of extremely formal language that must be stated the same way each time as part of a ritual (Serlinker, 2012). Formal records are some that all students will learn for the duration of their school education period, therefore, it implies learning the rules and information necessary to speak and write according to the specifications accepted by the language Academy (Stander, 2001).

Formal register is used in a variety of settings and not just educational. During one’s class exercises and exams, the writer will use it, but not only in academic settings, since it is also convenient at a professional level, or in the presence of civil authority. In other words, throughout one’s life, one will experience various formal communication situations in

which one will have to make use of the formal register, hence, it is important to know, read, study, and practice it. It is the best way to learn the correct use of the language, with all its rules (Richards, 2013).

Formal register has a series of characteristics, and it is essential to clearly know how to use it in appropriate context, thus, sentences have standard requirements which are used in an orderly and regulated way with a wide range of vocabulary (Norquist, 2010). For instance, some accepted practices with academic writing are that, pronouns and synonyms may be used to avoid repetitions and redundancies; a topic or idea must be fully developed before changing the subject; writers must use connectors to establish a relationship between the ideas discussed; paragraphs must be organised and there must be ample correct presence of punctuation marks; vocabulary must be specific; sentences can be long and complex; no essential words must be omitted and no fillers or idioms are used (Yule, 2012; Norquisit, 2017).

2.3.1.4 Consultative Register

This is a standard form of communications where users engage in a mutually accepted structure of communications, and it is formal and societal expectations accompany the users of this speech. Consultative Register is professional discourse, for example, it is used when strangers meet, for communications between a superior and a subordinate, doctor and patient, lawyer and client, lawyer and judge, teacher and student, counsellor, and client (Babalola, 2007).

Consultative register follows most of the same rules as formal-regulated speech and writing but has a different general purpose - to get help from a higher-placed individual (Halliday, 2011). These acts are bidirectional (back and forth) or sometimes multidirectional, therefore, they require users to engage in mutually accepted structure of professional discourse, (Aladeyomi, 2007).

2.3.1.5 *Casual Register*

This is informal language used by peers and friends. Slang, vulgarities, and colloquialisms are normal; this is “group” language. One must be a member to engage in this register - buddies and teammates - and it manifests itself in chats, emails, blogs, and letters to friends (Baker, 2011). The register is demonstrated on the social media platforms, in relaxed environments for non-formal communication and entertainment purposes (Moore, 2010).

Casual register, therefore, is used in writing and speech with people in the same group or team; this is informal language used by peers and friends (Yule, 2012). One must be a member of a group to engage in this register, for example, buddies and teammates, in chats, emails, blogs, and letters to friends (Paden, 2008:17). This type of register appears to be tricky and strange to those who do not belong to this group when they are trying to make sense of the language usage.

2.3.1.6 *Intimate Register*

This communication is private; it is reserved for close family members and for intimate people, for instance, husband and wife, boyfriend and girlfriend, siblings, and parents and children. This style demonstrates “free and fair conversation among the participants without them being mindful of rules and appropriateness in terms of usage” (Llamas, 2007:29). One can usually transition from one language register to an adjacent one without encountering repercussions, however, skipping one or more levels is usually considered inappropriate and even offensive (Naftulin, 2013).

2.3.1.7 *Informal Register*

This section discusses the instances of informal register usage on various non-formal occasions and the rules governing such usage in communicative events. The informal register, or “colloquial language” is used in informal, familiar, and relaxed contexts;

speakers use this variety in natural and everyday conversation and it is characterised by being spontaneous, relaxed, and expressive (Lambani & Nengome, 2017:09). Within the speech registers, as we have noted, we distinguish between uneducated and cultured language, and the latter in turn are subdivided into formal and informal (Haliday, 2008). In reference to the informal register, we will be talking about the language that we use when conversing with people with whom we are familiar, hence, the tone and use of the language is much more colloquial (Yule, 2012). In this case, even though, “speakers have deep knowledge of the language and its rules, because they are in a context of familiarity and closeness with friends and very intimate people, they put aside cultured conditioning and use a very colloquial way of speaking” (Baker, 2011:79).

It is quite noticeable, that informal register has a series of very particular characteristics that differentiate it from the formal and vulgar language (Babalola, 2007). The most noticeable ones are that non-extensive vocabulary is used, in which “repetitions and reiterations abound, and It is a very expressive language, since the sender does not have the feeling that he must keep rules and special forms of courtesy except for the basic ones” (Perloff, 2013:20). Subsequently, it is common for many fillers to be used and in general, simple, and short sentences are used. Subsequently, informal register is used in very conversational environments, in casual meetings between friends and family, with co-workers in free time, with trusted people, and so forth (Knobbs, 2017). When writing and speaking, many contractions are often added including puns, exaggerations, non-standardised phrases, colloquialisms as well as abbreviations, especially in writings.

Informal registers are noticeable for words being omitted and ‘shortcuts’ which are sought to say a lot in a noticeably brief time and with shorter sentences. The use of diminutives, nicknames and the like are normal. The same idea is often repeated and idioms are used that only have meaning in the specific context of the interlocutors. Certain phrases may be vague, although they are likely to make sense to the recipients because of the common context (Norquist, 2012).

2.3.2 Register - Style in Sociolinguistics

Some of the pioneering work in registers was undertaken in the early 1990s by Halliday and Hasan. There exists a very extensive literature on the topic of registers, hence, it is not a new topic in linguistic studies. Halliday and Hasan (2006) elucidated that registers have “linguistic features which are typically associated with a configuration of situational features—with particular values of the field, mode, and tenor...” (p. 22). Halliday and Hasan (2006), state the “field” as “the total event, in which the text is functioning, together with the purposive activity of the speaker or writer” (p. 22). “Mode” is “the function of the text in the event, including both the channel taken by language—spoken or written, extempore or prepared” (p. 22). “Tenor” is “the type of role interaction, the set of relevant social relations, permanent and temporary, among the participants involved” (p. 22). These three values - field, mode, and tenor - are the determining factors for the linguistic features of the text. Moore (2010) points out that Halliday & Hasan’s “tenor” (2006) is roughly the equivalent term for “style”, which is a more specific alternative used by linguists to avoid ambiguity.

The use of the term’s “register”, “styles” and “genre” vary among scholars some previous studies showed that the issue of “register-style” exists in many languages, for example, Chinese (Llamas, 2007). Paden (2008) and Pooley (2014) analysed several styles of Chinese adopted by news reporters, law-practitioners, advertisers, government officials, academics, and artists. Subsequently, Stander (2001) noticed scholars in Chinese linguistics tend to use different styles of Chinese in different physical and social contexts. Slavin (2010, 2011) explicitly stated that register-style plays a role in Chinese second language pedagogical grammar. Previous research indicated that the issue of “register-style” is crucial in analysing the linguistic structure of Chinese as well as in the teaching and learning of Chinese as a second language.

Karasik (2004) corroborated that there are two perspectives on register usage - narrow and broad. The narrow perspective equals register with jargon, such that the terms

available for describing particular fields of specialisation form the register of such fields. Words, like “thermodynamics” (physics) and “injection” (medicine), for instance, are different from each other because they point to different specialisations. Halliday (1978) deals extensively with the three dimensions of register as explained earlier. Field as explained earlier, refers to the “on-going activity and the particular purpose that the use of language is serving within the context of that activity” (Perloff, 2018:62). In other words, utterances or words employed reveal the kind of activity that is going on. The following expression, for example, has as its field, the activity of clay moulding: “clay is flattened and placed on top and a heap of sand on a bench” (Knapp, 2006). The lexis or vocabulary has a good deal of influence on the field.

Slavin (2003) highlights the differences between technical language and everyday language and according to him, technical language does not employ everyday terms, full standard syntax, and structures. It is reasonable to agree with Yang and pan (2023) that a high proportion of vocabulary items are potentially capable of being used by multiple registers, in other words diverse types of field or certain words or utterances are found to describe more than one activity.

Pooley (2014) reiterates Halliday’s (1984) recommendation that mode should be considered in terms of two concurrent continuums, which combines language and situation distance that is, spatial/interpersonal distance and experiential distance. In the words of Richards (2013), “the spatial/interpersonal distance ranges situations according to the possibilities of immediate feedback between the interactants. Language is always formed in a society, therefore, since the members of the society have different background and activities, there are also different languages (Andersen, 2000); the language of teaching is different from the language of delivering of speech, for example (Archibald, 2011). Each of them has its own characteristics that are called *register* and in linguistic analysis, different styles of language are technically called registers in a given situation.

Moore (2010) view register from a sociolinguistic perspective. They state that if sociolinguistics is a wide-ranging term, a register is equally tough to explain comprehensively. Broadly conceived, a register is a language variety viewed with respect to its context of use (Naftulin, 2013) who also argue that a register entails text and implies a relationship between text and context.

2.4 ACADEMIC WRITING

Academic writing and research papers in high schools and post-secondary educational settings, such as colleges and universities, must adhere to the strict rules of grammar, spelling, and accuracy (Serlinker, 2012). In fact, many high school and college teachers subtract a certain score from the student's submitted essay and penalise students' overall grades for the research paper for grammatical and spelling errors, for example as for informal use of language, (Baker, 2011).

Informal writing does not have to adhere to the established formal rules of grammar and speech. Informal language and writing accept, tolerates, and permits the use of aspects, such as colloquialisms, slang, figures of speech, clichés, improper and broken syntax, incomplete sentences, sentence fragments and other grammatical prohibitions that are not tolerated when formal writing and language are required (Norquist, 2017). Colloquialisms, for example, are informal words and phrases that are conversational, everyday words and phrases that are not acceptable in terms of formal writing and speech (Babalola, 2007).

Academic writing and all the aspects involved therein are lengthier and more extensive than other types of essays and they are typically focused on and above the level of straight knowledge and recall (Odebunmi, 2007). They, therefore, consist of some in-depth synthesis and analysis of a subject or topic so that the author can demonstrate an in-depth knowledge and understanding of a topic or subject that cannot be tested by a teacher or professor on a simple multiple-choice test or examination (Yule, 2016).

Academic writing is one of the most critical skills at university because most assessment tasks require a demonstration of learning through writing.

As Llamas (2007:373) argue, one of the underlying assumptions of an Academic Literacy model is that educators need to be concerned with literacies more generally across academic contexts and focus not only on the assessed texts produced by students, but such as the papers students submit for grades or examinations they take.

Several researchers suggest the use of effective feedback in academic writing pedagogy (Du Plooy, 2009; Baker, 2011; Richards, 2013). For instance, Chudinov (2007) and Ferris (2008) maintain that students should be shown their strengths and weaknesses so that they can improve on their future work. Stander (2001) continues that some academics think feedback does not work as students are only concerned about the grades they receive from their assignments. She, however, found that students were motivated to improve when they receive constructive feedback and suggested that tutors should provide appropriate guidance and motivation rather than diagnosing problems and justifying the marks. Similarly, Slavin (2003) suggests that ESL teachers need to make explicit the purposes of their feedback so that students know how to handle feedback and use it to their benefit.

Baker (2011:28) suggests the following solutions to teaching and responding to academic writing, namely: “teacher education where teachers are trained to effectively respond to student writing; adequate exchange of information by writers (students) and readers (lecturers/tutors); and those teachers should also teach writing as a process”. Du Plooy (1997), however, found that tutors often gave vague comments which students were not able to understand and use effectively.

2.4.1 Essay Writing

This is a type of formal writing that must be well organised, thoughtful, coherent, and authored in a logical and consistent manner with a smooth flow of information from the introduction of the essay to the paragraphs of the body of the essay, to the conclusion, or

summary, of the essay (Chudinov, 2007:19). Essays are usually divided into the following categories which, at times, may overlap.

Descriptive essays are those that describe people, places and things in vivid detail that gives the reader an opportunity to gain a deep understanding and appreciation of the topic that is being discussed (Norquist, 2017). Students' competence is mainly tested through an essay whereby students are required to showcase their creativity in academic writing (Du Plooy, 2009). Descriptive essay is the tool used for an assessment of English language knowledge where students comfortably produce a piece of writing as required by the topic (Karasik, 2004).

2.4.1.1 Personal Writing

Richards (2013) elucidated that this type of writing is usually personalised and reflects personal perceptions, feelings and perspectives in my situations pertaining to life and circumstances around one's life. Personal writing reflects reality, and it is a sharing of one's thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences (Paden, 2008). This kind of essay is usually written in the first person, 'I' (Aladeyomi, 2007). To convey sincerity, the essay should be written from personal experience, which could also be acknowledging the experiences which one has gained second hand, for instance, how your parents met, or experiences one has read about (Yule, 2012). The register usage is not based on formal and informal style, on the contrary it can go beyond these types to casual and intimate styles to express ideological justification and arguments.

2.4.1.2 Narrative Writing

A narrative paragraph or essay tells a story, although it could be a true, unlike a fabricated short story or play, (Slavin, 2003). Narrative writing is best used to illustrate the "personal developmental path" a person (often oneself) has taken to reach a particular point in his/her life (Odebunmi, 2007:20). Subsequently, it is normally written from a first-person point of view, although, a true narrative writing is unusual because it is demanding (Yule, 2013). A narrative must have a conflict that is overcome as this is the core of any narrative form of writing, be it a paragraph, an essay, or a story (Llamas, 2007). In an essay, it

usually means a single incident/anecdote, where the narrator experiences some brief challenge that is met and (hopefully) survived.

This "overcoming" should in turn lead to some form of understanding. Simply describing or explaining one's surroundings is not a narrative; one needs a (brief) establishment of setting, an explanation of the challenge, and the resolution of this challenge. In other words, one needs a plot. This writing style is not restricted to any choice of register and the writer can express his or her ideas without being anxious about register usage.

2.4.1.3 Descriptive Writing

Descriptive writing paints a picture, which tells the readers what something looks like, feels like, tastes like, sounds like, or smells like - without action or events (Paden, 2008). It does not explain a relationship or a process beyond oneself as it focuses on one's immediate subjective perceptions (Baker, 2011). Thus, descriptive writing connects the outer world with our feelings. "It is usually concerned with creating a verbal picture of what we experience and feel at one moment, and it will use many rich and vivid adjectives and adverbs" (Babalola, 2007:26). This writing is personal in nature and colloquial, therefore, contractions cannot be penalised owing to the flexibility of the style.

In this type of essay, a writer should make the reader, for instance, long to smell the rich essence of the trees, the haunting call of the wolves, or the rank odour of the sewer... if that is what is being written about! (Pooley, 2014:10). Descriptive paragraphs and essays are usually written from the first-person point of view and are much more emotional and personal than expository writing (Richards, 2013). It should be said that a writer will rarely write a purely descriptive passage, for normally this type of writing is mixed with other styles as a supplement.

2.4.1.4 Persuasive Writing

According to Stander (2001) persuasive writing is probably the most common form of writing at the university level. Persuasive (or argumentative) writing attempts to convince the reader that the point of view or course of action recommended by the writer is valid. To accomplish this, the writer must develop a limited topic which is well defined and

debatable and has more than one side (Yule, 2012). It is necessary that the author understands other sides of the topic so that the strongest information to counter other arguments can be presented (Shinde, 2015). In the same vein, Knobbs (2017) states that one may present these opposing points of view, but they must be summarised at the beginning and then quickly refuted. This kind of writing is mainly informed by a static register and prose analysis, however, in the cases of responses to topics, these may be informal or formal depending on the specified instructions.

If a student is not sure how to write a persuasive essay, then they simply stick to one's side of an argument. While persuasive writing attempts to prove one's point of view, it is usually written in an objective, third person point of view; such a stance helps demonstrate writers' objectivity (Yule, 2012). Argumentative writing is said by some to be more rational and empirical (based on facts), whereas "persuasive" writing will often use emotional appeals to manipulate the reader's sympathy (Serlinker, 2012). Most writing experts view the two terms as synonymous as few essays are so coldly dispassionate that they will not use strong and loaded language to win an argument; analytic facts are always a good way to persuade the reader to one side over another.

2.4.1.5 Discursive or Expository Writing

Expository writing "exposes" or explains things about a subject. It is also sometimes called "information writing" because it gives information about a person, place, thing, relationship, or idea (Wollheim, 2013:17). To accomplish that, it is best developed using clear reasons, facts and statistical information, cause and effect relationships, or examples (Perloff, 2018). Expository paragraphs are factual, hence, they are written without emotion and usually written in the third person.

A writer, nevertheless, can use "I" in expository writing if the focus is on external, neutral descriptions and explanations, rather than personal feelings as such feelings move one into "descriptive writing" (Norquist, 2017). Subsequently, expository paragraphs and essays are sometimes confused with descriptive writing, because both involves much detail in describing things (Yule, 2014). The big difference is that expository description tends to focus on external objects, situations, and processes, to explain something in a

neutral, matter-of-fact manner. Descriptive paragraphs, on the other hand, tend to focus on the writer's emotional responses from their perception of the world at one point in time (Sullivan, 2010).

2.4.1.6 Writing Based on Visual Stimuli

Aladeyomi (2012) presumes that visual stimuli may include pictures, photographs, advertisements, billboards, quotations, slogans, or poems. The stimulus may spark an idea that one wishes to pursue and for second language users, it is an opportunity to use one's preferred topics or vocabulary (Knobbs, 2014). An eye-catching title is the key to linking the stimulus with one's content which must be relevant to the stimulus and the title (Shinde, 2016). This type of writing is not controlled by the register as this essay is informed by the writer's impression and most writers utilise the casual or informal register in a flexible manner.

2.5 ACCURACY AND FORMALITY IN ACADEMIC WRITING

Complexity in academic writing comes from the fact that the standard written form of the English language, which is compulsory to be used with this type of writing, is different from the language that is spoken daily (Baker, 2011). The vocabulary used by the written language is more varied than the one used in conversations. Academic writing also uses more complicated and complex words that are not normally used when talking with someone face-to-face. The grammatical aspect of the written language is different because we do not normally use some grammatical constructions in speaking, such as subordinate clauses and passives (Llamas, 2004).

Phrases in written language are noun-based and those in spoken language are verb-based, hence, making academic writing different from face-to-face communication or other types of writing (Paden, 2008). In close connection with complexity is formality, therefore, academic writing may not make use of colloquial expressions that we consider natural in daily dialogues we have with friends or colleagues. The degree of formality should, thus, be high in academic writing (Odebunmi, 2007).

2.6 ACTIVE VOICE

In traditional grammar, the term *active voice* refers to a type of sentence or clause in which the subject performs or causes the action expressed by the verb; this process is usually contrasted with the *passive voice*. Writing style guides often encourage the use of the active voice, however, the passive construction can also be quite useful, especially when the performer of an action is unknown or unimportant (Babalola, 2007).

The studies on the use of the passive voice, and to a large extent, the prevalence of the passive voice is determined by academic conventions (Aladeyomi, 2007). The use of the passive voice in formal writing has a number of significant textual functions. Based on the analyses of academic prose, the passive voice is ubiquitous and remains a prevalent feature of academic text, in various disciplines, however, it is usually not encouraged in academic writing (Moore, 2010).

2.7 DICTION

Language is used by human beings in their daily life as a means of communication. In the communication process, someone will have to choose certain words. One word is arranged together with other words to make a perfect utterance. Someone who has a rich vocabulary is able to choose the proper words to express his or her ideas. According to Perloff (2018), choice of words or diction is the ability to differentiate the meaning of ideas and to find out words, which are proper with the situation, condition and feeling of the writer.

Writers are usually expected to use vocabulary suited for the type of writing as some words that have almost the same denotation can have vastly different connotations (Naftulin, 2013). Subsequently, Slavin (2003) elucidates that one way to achieve proper tone is to imagine a situation in which one is saying the words being written; this might be a conversation or situation with a close friend, where there is freedom to use slangs or other casual forms of speech.

On the contrary, academic writing demands formal language and there is no room for personal digressions or usage of slang words, although, students' pieces of writing should sound unique and quite inviting to the educator or other readers (Pooley, 2014). Writers

choose specific words and phrases depending on the outcome they are trying to achieve. Diction can - create a certain tone that supports purpose, while at the same time, the purpose of a piece of writing determines its diction. In fiction, writers often use informal diction and figures of speech - words used for non-literal meanings, like similes and metaphors. If a scientist is publishing a paper on his/her research, however, the language will be technical, concise, and formal, written for a specific audience and supporting the setting/context. In fiction writing, similarly, the language an author uses supports the basic story elements, like the setting (Baker, 2011).

Diction aids to establish when and where a story is set by using language native to that time and place. This is called “colloquial diction”. For instance, a story set in New York City will have a distinctive style of language, compared to a story that takes place in London. A writer’s attitude towards the subject of a story comes through in the words they use. This helps establish tone and impacts readers’ emotional response (Stander, 2001), hence, the tone of a horror novel will be very different to that of a romance novel.

2.8 STYLISTIC AND STYLE

The term “style” is different from “stylistic”. In analysing a language style, it requires a particular approach called stylistics which is the study of the use of language. In *KamusLinguistik*, Kridalaksana explains that the term stylistic means (1) study of language used in literature, interdisciplinary science between linguistics and literature (2) linguistic application of language style in literature (2001). Turner (in Lyons, 1981) describes stylistics as the part of linguistics which concentrates on variation in the use of language and often, but not exclusively, places special attention on the most conscious and complex uses of language in text (1977). Furthermore, he argues that stylistics means the study of style based on the form of the word, from a scientific or at least a methodical study (1977).

2.9 FIGURES OF SPEECH

A figure of speech is the use of a word that diverges from its normal meaning, or a phrase with a specialised meaning not based on the literal meaning of the words in it, similar to a metaphor, simile, or personification. Figures of speech often provide emphasis, freshness of expression and clarity (Du Plooy, 2009). These figures of speech are quite useful in academic writing because it gives personality to one's piece of writing, jolts passive reader into attention, improves the clarity of an article and makes the writing more interesting and thought-provoking to readers (Beasley, 2002).

In the same vein, Burns (2000) in his book, *Fundamentals of Poetry*, explicates a figure of speech as an expression in which the words are used in a non-literal sense to present a figure, picture, or image. It can be concluded that the figure of speech contains figurative language to express a thought, picture, or image. Chudinov (2007) in his book analysed certain figures of speech, usually used in language of advertisement. This was done with the assumption that there are many kinds of figures of speech as noted below:

2.10 THE FINDINGS OF PREVIOUS STUDIES ON REGISTER USAGE

There exists a very extensive literature on the topic of incoherent and incohesive writing among university students. The student composition of Higher Education is diverse in terms of race, linguistic background, and cognitive development (Norquisit, 2013); however, the dominant academic discourse seems to privilege students from middle-class backgrounds (Bacha, 2012). Some students struggle to cope with institutional literacy expectations because the medium of instruction is English, which is not necessarily the native language of many students. Nonetheless, these students are expected to think and write using standard literacy practices (Karasik, 2004). For instance, to be proficient in academic writing, students are expected to be a critical and analytical thinker (Norquisit, 2017). Furthermore, they are expected to apply myriad of human skills and organise their thoughts in a methodical manner, while applying specific disciplines' instructions and conventions.

The following are classic comments about students in relation to the academic writing expectations of a university: *she does not understand why she fails in her essays even*

though she puts a lot of effort in writing these essays (George, 2014); the student refers to a plethora of studies and mention other authors but still her marks are always under 50%; the lecturer always indicates that her student's essay is just student's opinions, or she is copying from other people (Gravetter, 2011); her ideas do not make sense and she is not thinking like a university student. These comments indicate that the lecturers fail to understand that some of the students came from previous disadvantaged schools where high school teachers do not teach these academic literacy skills (Karasik, 2004:19).

These comments illustrate the diverse literacy and schooling experiences of students and how these impact on their academic performance. Good quality academic writing in higher education is expected to reflect students' ability to read critically, interpret, analyse, and synthesise ideas as well as use writing as a discursive space for constructing social identities (Knapp, 2006), however, very often the academic writing projects of these students do not meet these expectations.

Given some of these students' backgrounds, the academic staff are supposed to find ways to systematically address these gaps (Kumar, 2005). Maintaining high standards of academic writing in higher education is not negotiable but this should be considered against the backdrop of the demographics of the student body. "The need to take cognisance of the diverse schooling backgrounds of students, although, the university expects students to produce essays of good quality, but it is oblivious of the fact that many of its students are from poor and under-resourced schools in rural or peri-urban areas in South Africa"; they are English second or third language speakers, but they are still expected to write proficiently in English.

These students come with different literacy experiences but when the lecturers are marking their essays, they want logical organisation of idea and refined use of language, even though in class, lecturers can detect that students face challenges in understanding basics concepts in English and features of academic discourse. Much research has highlighted the process of student socialisation into the university culture and understanding of academic discourses as key challenges. In this context, under-

resourced schools have failed to prepare students for the challenging world of higher education, (Mazayev, 2005:16).

The comments highlight the social class system negatively affecting the educational system in South Africa. For instance, whilst learners from “more middle-class urban schools are taught how to summarise, are allowed to practise writing assignments using secondary literature, or write poetry, African language students’ accounts featured parrot learning; learning language solely via rules” (Murar, 2008:43). The student body in South Africa is still dominated by students from rural and peri-urban schools with “a baggage of experiences, attitudes and skills that are not properly suited to university work” (Meyers, 1988: 143).

Consequently, understanding and applying the highly complex cognitive skills in academic writing is very challenging for students from these backgrounds. “Academic writing challenges are evident in language usage, conceptual and stylistic flaws in scholarly papers submitted by students, therefore, many students still struggle to master some of the basic academic writing conventions”. Murar (2008) claims: “Marking student scripts is very stressful and frustrating to me because of the way these students write. Sometimes it takes me more than 30 minutes to mark a three-page essay. Their writing is fraught with all types of errors that you can never imagine, from spelling mistakes to poor sentence skills, lack of coherence, cohesion, argumentation”. The lecturers do not usually feel like they are marking university scripts as his testimony hinges on several error types that recur in student writing tasks.

Student academic papers are usually superficial in terms of development of “problem, theory and argument” as they are unable to conceptualise the topic using knowledge from different sources (Gravetter, 2011). Noticeably, students’ “inadequate research skills and/or the lack of meta-cognitive skills to read, interpret and synthesis different texts usually culminate in papers with a paucity of ideas, which are often devoid of evidence or substantiated claims” (Karasik, 2004). In addition, to the paucity and superficiality of ideas, most students submit assignments that are unedited and lack careful organisation.

Knapp (2006) articulates that students seem not to understand that academic writing is a process which involves drafting, revising, and redrafting. “Marking students’ essays in this university is one of my worst nightmares” (Kumar & Ranjiti, 2005), hence, he is usually not motivated to mark because the essays are poorly written, on all levels. Murar (2008) highlights that the introduction, body, and conclusion in student written work are not linked; paragraphs are illogical and often are not well developed; sometimes he feels like rewriting the essays for the students and wonders whether they read these papers before submission (Mazayev, 2005). Many students’ academic papers are fragmented with no structural connection between the introduction, body, and conclusion.

Students often grapple with or fail to apply the concept of coherence and cohesion whereby they “select and order ideas to lead to a sound and well-argued conclusion” (Mouton, 2011: 502). This shows that student academic papers are often devoid of transition devices which enhance coherence and cohesion in academic writing. They are written with no clear statement of purpose or thesis which develops from the topic and permeates throughout the paper. Thirdly, the papers are usually fraught with mechanical weaknesses, especially in areas like paragraph and, sentence construction (grammar and syntax) as well as style. In some of these essays, sentences are often truncated and convoluted because these students still grapple with grammatical aspects such as noun-verb agreement, tenses, and spelling. These weaknesses also recur because students misconstrue academic writing as a product and not a process, which requires drafting, editing, and re-drafting (Murar, 2008).

2.11 SOCIOLINGUISTIC FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC WRITING

One key factor that has contributed to the writing challenges of college and university students is the ubiquity of social media among higher education students today (Gravetter & Forzano, 2011). The increasing access to the writing genre of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Blogging has impacted on the quality of student writing. When writing academic papers, these students often encounter difficulties switching from

informal social media writing style that they now use often, to the more restricted and more conservative formal academic style (Knapp, 2006), consequently, the spending endless hours on Facebook and twitter, mean they unconsciously transfer instant messaging style to their academic writing.

In contrast, students in higher education are expected to produce “knowledge which is social accountable, reflexive, trans-disciplinary and problem-orientated” (Karasik, 2004). Students constant use of Facebook and twitter means that when they must write essays, they forget that they are supposed to use formal English (Yule, 2012). The lecturers always emphasise that the Facebook style of writing is inappropriate for academic essays, but students still do it because every day, they are on Facebook, and it certainly affects the way they write. They know they are supposed to take control and change the way they write, however, Facebook is part of them, and it is difficult for them to transition to formal academic writing.

For students to change, lecturers need to continue providing useful comments (George, 2015). The interest in technology-based teaching and learning, especially in universities of technology means students have developed new writing styles while they deal with the chaos of the media world, daily (Du Plooy, 2009). The positive influence of social media on student writing cannot be ignored, for this participant, the use of Facebook genre in academic writing shows the maturity levels and cognitive development of students. This is evident from their inability to handle the different writing genres or to edit their own writings (Gravetter, 2011).

For most students, the university is a completely new world, a complex one which “involves adapting to new ways of knowing, new ways of understanding, interpreting and organising knowledge” (Du Plooy, 2009). For instance, a communication lecturer argued that students were yet to make the transition from high school to university, claiming that: “University students still think and act as if they are in high school. The way they interpret essay topics and express their thoughts in academic writing show clearly that they are not yet university students.”

Lecturers expect students to demonstrate some high order thinking skills, but the quality of their writing is a sharp contrast of what is expected of university students (Norquist, 2017). The university expects its students to possess critical and analytical skills, which they can use to deal with academic challenges in higher education. With these skills, “students can use academic writing to unlock disciplinary discourses and construct new identities as well as make meanings of their social lives in a university environment” (Karasik, 2004), however, comments “suggest that students struggle with academic writing because they have not been fully socialised into the university space, therefore, they cannot access and interpret the highly specialised discourses of higher education” (Mazayev, 2005:72).

The narratives further revealed students often encounter challenges with academic writing because they do not receive regular quality feedback on academic papers (Knapp, 2006). While lecturers complained about large class sizes, students blamed the lack of lecturer attention to their academic writing (Yule, 2012). The following excerpts from a lecturers highlight the position: “We all teach our students that writing is a process that involves drafting and redrafting, but we do not give them the opportunity to redraft their essays. In addition, students cannot do that because of the large classes that we teach” (George, 2015:107). Owing to that the feedback is seldomly given to the students for improvement on their pieces of writing.

Academics state explicitly that it is usually difficult to give comprehensive feedback when marking more than 200 scripts and submit marks in 2 weeks (Norquist, 2017). Students complained that English is not their first language and that they have difficulties in understanding assignment topics (Joos, 2011). At tertiary, students are expected to think deep, to argue, to think out of the box but it is difficult for some of students because they come from poor high schools, where such students were not trained to think out of the box (Mazayev, 2005). Unfortunately, the lecturers do not usually provide comments that can help students to improve their writing skills. The significance of individual attention

and regular constructive feedback cannot be undermined in the development of academic writing skills (Yang & Pan, 2023).

In these studies, most of the results show that for student writing to improve, there should be regular feedback through one-on-one interaction between students and lecturers. When this happens it “will be a useful moment of intersection between the content and the individual approach to learning as well as the site of interaction between the socially determined aspects of literacy and the individual response” said Mazayev *et al*, (2005: 7). Some of these excerpt presupposes that students struggle because they are not very proficient in English Language, “the role of English language proficiency cannot be ignored in this case, academic writing is more than just stringing sentences” (Chudinov, 2007:50). In other words, academic writing is part of a specialised discourse of higher education, which involves critical, analytical, and reflective thinking skills.

Students who do not apply academic skills in their writing, subscribe largely to the deficit skills model rather than the socialisation and academic literacies models (Du Plooy, 2009). In reflection exercises, lecturers mentioned that students lack the emotional readiness and intellectual maturity that often enable university students to take control of their learning process. These deficiencies severely affect the way they approach the whole learning experience especially, the way they handle academic tasks, including academic writing, therefore, one issue is that when the lecturers give an essay assignment, they always leave it until the last minute, preventing them from treating essay writing as a process. This point highlights one of the factors which contribute to the poor quality of student writing, for example, at the University of Cape Town (Gravetter & Forzano, 2011). These discussions illustrate clearly that students do not understand the role of academic writing at higher education level, affirming why university undergraduates do not accord writing tasks the respect they deserve.

2.11.1 *Inadequate Mastery of Academic Literacy*

Most students perceive academic writing as something for study and teaching skills rather than the interplay of academic literacies or the process of socialisation into discipline-specific discourses (Du Plooy, 2009). Consequently, they become dependent on lecturers “to perform most of the regulatory and reflective functions desired in the learner” (Knapp & Hall, 2006:304). Students approach academic writing with negativity and misconceptions, which stem from their imaginations of a university as a place of technology. For them, the practice-orientated focus of the university should disregard academic writing as a critical practice in the learning process for they do not understand that “academic writing is designed to be an enriching learning experience” (Kumar & Ranjiit, 2005: 471).

2.11.2 The Use of Social Interactive Approach to Teaching Writing

Students approach writing with mixed feelings and often “regard it as a time-consuming and unpleasant chore” (Du Plooy, 2009: 147). Moreover, the case of large classes discussed above is compounded by immense pressure on lecturers to increase throughput rates and increase research outputs. This compromises the individual attention that lecturers can give to students, as mentioned in the preceding discussions. Individual attention often transforms into a rewarding relationship which usually develops from the “social interactive approach to the teaching of writing” (Naftulin, 2003: 2), however, lecturers do not spend time to appreciate every piece of student writing as a developmental process.

2.11.3 The Lack of Constructive Feedback on Students' Writing Tasks

Reports on the studies conducted in the Higher Education sectors, constantly expound that instructors do not give comprehensive feedback and/or request resubmissions because there is no time (Al-Marsumi, 2017). Lecturers are always under a lot of pressure to perform numerous functions but with very little time, for example, at postgraduate level supervision, they must ensure that students write papers and present at conferences or write articles for publication. There are complaints that facilitators encounter which are

inclusive of the increasing pressures endured by Academic literacy Lecturers at the institutions of Higher Education due to massification issues and these pressures affect the way lecturers instruct and assess students' writings (Karasik, 2004).

Moreover, improving any problematic literacy issue, such as academic writing, "is clearly an arduous and slow process, and requires much commitment" (Gravetter & Forzano, 2011: 50). In evaluating student writing, lecturers tend to concentrate on the mechanics of the writing, such as language-syntax, grammar, and plagiarism, instead of continually recognising academic writing as process which "involves negotiating social relationships, attitudes and values" (Karasik, 2004: 90). For example, the drive against plagiarism in universities has tended to provide lecturers with a platform to easily condemn student writing even though these students are novice writers (Du Plooy, 2009). Constantly, situations occur where students have been encountering a lot of problem with academic writing. These students try to write their own arguments, but the lecturer would accuse them of plagiarising and although, the student knows using another person's idea is permitted they do not know how to use other information to support their own ideas (Joos, 2010); lecturers ask students to reference but they have not been taught the process (Yule, 2014).

Students blame lecturers' apparent obsession with plagiarism as one of the contributing factors to the low quality of academic writing at Institutions of Higher Learning (Norquist, 2017). From this context, the issue of plagiarism seems to have far-reaching implications for the way students write.

Ownership and originality are essential in academic writing, however, many academics tend to measure these novice writers against the works of experienced authors whose credibility as good academic writers span over several years of practice (Yang & Pan, 2023). Lectures seem to ignore the fact that plagiarism at this level involves not only students' ability to generate their own values, attitudes, and feelings as well as their ability to recognise such in other writers (Babalola, 2007: 89/90). Large classes have resulted in a decline in feedback on writing assignments because the focus is on pass rates - "end-

learning of assessment, formal procedures around quality assurance marking procedures and external adjudication” (Bailey, 2008: 2).

Owing to the quality of feedback being compromised significantly, writing ceases being a process to being a product, where the emphasis is on the finish product. Students are not offered the opportunity to navigate the process of drafting and re-drafting, which are essential for the development of academic writing (Du Plooy, 2009). Universities in South Africa do understand the role of academic development courses, especially in the development of writing skills, but it does not offer them the prestige and value that they deserve (Biber, 2011).

The following comment from a lecturer supports this view: students think that the university is not investing enough to develop the academic skills of our students. In the instances of literacy, the University does not want to provide adequate support because it does not generate subsidies like the core disciplines (Baker, 2011). Unfortunately, the universities believe developing academic literacy is an easy process and anyone can teach it, therefore it is pointless to recruit more lecturers with suitable qualifications and experience (Aladeyomi, 2007), however, some of these lecturers do not publish and cannot teach academic writing. Although this has not been established, inadequacy of qualified Communication and Academic literacy lecturers accurately reflects the priorities of a university (Biber, 2009). Using lecturers without the right qualifications as a strategy to cut the cost of investing in these courses, has had visible negatives effects on the way the courses are taught and assessed. For instance, these lecturers have tended to ignore the academic writing components embedded in the courses’ outlines, partly because they are unfamiliar with the theoretical conceptions that underpin student writing in higher education (Richards, 2013); nor, do they understand the role of constructive feedback in the writing process (Odeunmi, 2007). For unqualified lectures, providing constructive feedback especially in large classes is a waste of valuable time, moreover, the instructions provided by this calibre of lecturers are usually very convoluted and confusing to students who are already grappling with the intricacies of academic writing.

2.13 THE FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENTS' WRITING

Research shows that student writing poses specific challenges for ESL teaching and learning contexts across the globe, specifically in higher education institutions (Ivanic and Lea 2006; Lea 2004; Muhlenfeld, 2014). On the international front, particularly in the United Kingdom (UK), in noting the relationship between writing and literacy, Lea and Street (1998) reported that literacy standards in schools and higher education institutions are very low, and academics often complain that students cannot write properly. Biber (2009) confirms this view and argues that dealing effectively with students' literacy difficulties and, in turn, poor academic writing skills, is a challenge that universities across the world must contend with.

Several studies in South Africa confirm these reports and have identified some factors that influence and impact negatively on student writing. These factors include students' low literacy levels and under-preparedness, (Van der Walt, 2009); students learning in a second, third or fourth language (Beasley, 2002; Baker, 2011), and lecturers and tutors adopting inadequate approaches in teaching academic writing, (Al-Baldaw, 2011). These factors are discussed below:

2.13.1 Student Under-preparedness

Various studies indicate that ESL students tend to be underprepared for university studies (Crystal, 2021; Mouton, 2011). Under-prepared students find it difficult to cope with the writing tasks that are expected of them in higher education teaching and learning contexts (Archibald & Katamba, 2011), consequently, their experiences of academic writing tasks tend to be negative.

These studies show that there is a strong link between student writing difficulties and under-preparedness. Murar (2008) attributes the problems of under-prepared students' experience with writing at university to the wide gap between writing expectations and demands between school and university. This means that universities should expect first-

year students to be inadequately prepared for the required writing skills because, as Hirst et al., (2004) assert, students are not equipped to deal with the academic or tertiary literacies required of them. Universities, therefore, should be expected to put in place proper structures that can support under-prepared students to enable them to address their specific academic writing needs.

2.13.2 Staff Under-preparedness

Staff under-preparedness is another challenge, for in some instances under-preparedness tends to be perceived and ascribed to students only, however, as Muhlenfeld (2014) argues, the problem of student writing is exacerbated by lecturers and tutors who are not adequately prepared to provide the appropriate support to under-prepared students. Naftulini (2003:12) argues that “lecturers and tutors need to consider the possibility of their own under-preparedness to address the specific writing problems of the diverse student body that they are required to teach each year in the first-year classroom”.

To address academic writing difficulties, lecturers or tutors should perceive themselves as active participants in the process by making sure that they are fully equipped and trained to help students improve their academic writing skills. The particular concern is that lecturers and tutors tend to perceive academic writing as a school problem or the duty of someone else, that is, as an external and additional task that is not part of their teaching duties. As Anderson (2000) and Moore (1998) indicate, some lecturers seem to think that students’ writing difficulties should not be addressed by lecturers. Moore (1998) reports about such sentiments of some tutors which are an indication of the realities ESL students have to contend with at university level. These comments also show the frustration and confusion some lecturers and tutors experience when faced with ESL students’ difficulties in language use, in particular, with academic writing. It is necessary, therefore, that both lecturers and tutors are adequately trained to address ESL students’ specific writing skills that are required at the university.

One of the problems, however, is that universities tend to mainly adopt the study skills referred to as the “deficit model” in addressing students’ academic writing difficulties.

According to Gravetter (2011), “the limitations of the study skills model are that they label ESL students as not having any language and suggest that their language problems can be solved through introducing remedial English classes taught by English language specialists”. Research, however, reveals that writing is a complex process and takes time to develop.

It is a mistaken belief, therefore, that students can learn and improve their writing skills in ESL contexts virtually overnight, through a few remedial classes by language specialists (Mazayev, 2005). In addition, there is little academic writing done in high schools that prepares students to be smoothly integrated into academic discourses used in tertiary institutions (Halliday, 1994). The challenge of academic writing cannot be attributed to one factor but a myriad of factors, including colonialism and apartheid, which were instrumental in the marginalisation of blacks in South Africa.

This had resulted in resources being awarded to whites while other races received inadequate amounts. The problems of underprepared teachers, ineffective teaching of writing in schools, which also provided fewer writing activities and fewer opportunities for learning in a second, third and fourth language, are some of the factors discussed in this section.

Student writing and success in developing general communication skills through discipline-based modules is at the centre of teaching and learning in Higher Education (Biber, 2009). On the other hand, writing and academic discourse and producing academic texts are difficulties that many students encounter as they shift to higher education (Baym, 2005). Brown (2007) reported that professors were not willing to teach beginning students to write in the mode of discourse valued in the disciplines.

As Mazayev (2005) argues, the transition from secondary school to foundation studies at tertiary level poses a serious challenge for many in terms of academic writing. Understandably, lecturers are also frustrated and complain about their students’ reading and writing deficiencies (Knapp, 2006), despite this, students should be shown, comprehensively, their strengths and weaknesses so that they can improve on their future work.

Similarly, Baym (2005) posits that English Second Language lecturers need to make explicit the purposes of their feedback so that students know how to handle feedback and use it to their benefit. Paden (2008) suggests the following solutions to teaching and responding to academic writing challenges - provision of education programmes to train lectures to respond, effectively to student writing; adequate exchange of information by writers (students) and readers (lecturers/tutors); and lectures should themselves become writers and teach writing as a process. Llamas (2007) found that tutors often gave vague comments which students were not able to understand and use effectively, thereby compromising their performance.

There is a tendency where some tutors' feedback on student writing focuses mainly on the mechanical aspects of language. Aladeyomi (2007) found that ESL students found lecturer feedback unsatisfactory when it focuses only on grammatical errors. He indicates that many ESL students feel that they need more help, not only with grammatical errors, but the whole concept of academic literacy, hence, they think that the lecturers' responsibility is to model all these aspects of English. He further argues that feedback that gives clues, (talkback) is more effective in helping students to revise than on what is corrected (feedback) (ibid). Similarly, Paden (2008) found that feedback on student writing focused on correcting surface features of language.

Odebunmi (2007), however, noted that learners expect error correction from their teachers and if they (learners) do not get that, they (teachers) may lose their credibility. In the same vein, Baym (2005) found that surface structure correction was the most common type of correction used as an approach to teaching writing skills and language structure, however, the approach was not effective. She continues that students felt that the types of feedback they got were uninspiring and ineffective in improving their writing. Al-Baldaw *et al.* (2011) assert that grammatical accuracy influences students' marks to a lesser extent, and tone and style only marginally, and that feedback on student writing is largely in the form of brief written comments, with corrections of grammar also being common, however, this approach has limited effect.

2.14 THE USE OF VOCABULARY IN STUDENTS' WRITING

Vocabulary is central to language use in both formal and informal occasions. The choice of lexicon is pivotal, and attention should be paid to the process; a writer, for instance, should know that there is some distinction between words and their synonyms. This distinction is important when it comes to the general use of English language (Eaton, 2009). The study shows that formal writing is mainly credited based on the use of lexicon when articulating ideas in many instances. This is corroborated by Lambani and Nengome (2017), in his study related to language use by native and non-native speakers which highlighted that there are different types of vocabulary.

2.14.1 Formal and Informal Verb Usage

The literature on this topic is plentiful, however, this still persists to be a critical concern in student's written work. Factors contributing to this remain unknown, thus, has led to speculation that the inappropriate register usage may be the cause of problems with vocabulary choice (Yule & George, 2014). In the same vein, Paden (2008), expanded that another feature of academic writing is a tendency to use formal vocabulary, hence, students in their writings should:

- Avoid using extremely basic sounding vocabulary, for example, *'get', 'do', 'keep', 'give', 'have', or 'make'*. Instead *'get'* can be replaced by *'obtain'*; *do* → *perform*; *keep* → *retain/maintain*; *give* → *provide*; *have* → *include* and *make* → *create/formulate*.

Yule (2012) elucidate that these kinds of words ought to be avoided in academic writing as there are colloquial words and expressions or are vague terms.

- *'stuff', 'lots of', 'a lot of', 'some', 'thing', 'a bit', 'sort of', 'kind of', 'great', 'really', 'huge', 'like', 'about', or 'basically'*. Rather *'a bit'* can be replaced by *'slightly, fairly, rather'*; *sort of /kind of* → *reasonably, relatively, rather, somewhat* *lots of/ a lot of* → *a number of, numerous, a significant/considerable number of* *really /very* → *highly, extremely, exceptionally* *like such as about* → *around/approximately/ in the region of* *basically* → *essentially/fundamentally*.

The use of verbs either formal or informal has not been taken as a problem as this mainly causes some confusion but not misunderstanding. Students need to be aware that the

choice of formal or informal communication is informed and directed by the use of register for the particular setting, purpose, and audience through the field-mode-tenor analytical approach.

2.14.1.1 Misuse of Homonyms

Biber (2009) elucidates that one of the major problems with language usage is that the spoken language does not easily differentiate the language the sameness of the sound and meaning of these words with respect to spoken versions being unrecognised. Homonyms are words that sound the same, but differ in meaning, spelling, and usage. When writing, these words can easily be confused, consequently, the reader will fail to understand the idea. Typical homonyms which are often misused are *here vs. hear, hole vs. whole, its vs. it's, know vs. no, knew vs. new*, and so forth.

2.14.1.2 Confused Words

The sameness of sound of some English words seemed to be a problem for some speakers and writers, although, this fact is hardly taken into cognisance when using the language in all contexts. Apart from homonyms, there are words which are similar in spelling and sound, thus, are often confused. Such words as *accept – except, affect – effect, loose – lose, quite – quit – quiet, then – than* will not be identified by a computer spell checker. So, it is important to proofread one's essay carefully to ensure that one has used the correct words. Moreover, the second language and first additional language users usually encounter challenges in relation to the use of homonyms and homophones in their written work (Ellis, 2001).

2.14.2 Wrong Word Forms

Fundamentally, vocabulary tends to be tricky and challenging based on the comprehension of word forms and their rightful use in unique occasions. Students can make mistakes in writing a word form; this is mainly in reference to parts of speech / word classes. For example, it is a common mistake for students to write a verb instead of an adjective, which can considerably change the meaning e.g., *disable people* instead of

disabled people. The words are mostly misused due to the confusion on the meaning that each lexical category expresses in the context of text creation, whether spoken or written (Selinker, 2003).

2.14.1.3 Non-standard Vocabulary

Llamas (2007) states that vocabulary is quite dynamic and complex in relation to its use and form, as such, language standardisation is central to vocabulary usage. Vocabulary in the context of second language users sometimes is compromised with respect to the occasion and purpose of the communication and its channel. Another critical point is the borderline between a stylistic and a vocabulary error; this can be seen in the use of non-standard words like *wanna, gonna, kinda* in formal academic writing. Although these words are generally understood by the reader, when used in academic writing, they produce an unfavorable impression and must be avoided.

2.15 Passive Voice Constructions

Passive voice is a grammatical construction in which a head noun functioning as the subject of a sentence, clause, or verb is affected by the action of a verb or is being acted upon by the verb (Crystal, 2021), therefore, the noun functioning as the grammatical subject is typically the recipient of the action denoted by the verb rather than the agent. Likewise, in another study, Al-Baldaw (2011) states that in passive voice, the object of an active verb becomes the subject of the passive verb. In active voice the subject is the doer, while in the passive voice the subject receives the action. In addition, only transitive verbs are used in the passive. As explained above, “when an active voice sentence in any tense is converted into a passive voice sentence, the object of the active voice sentence should become as a subject and the verb should be used in past participle form”; most of the learners, however, face difficulties in learning the passive voice.

In this sense, Baym et al., (2005) elucidate that in learning passive voice, a few problems occur due to mis formation of passive verb, such as, - active order but passive form, wrong position before agent and passive order but active form - therefore, teaching

passive voice to English Second language or English as Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) learners has been a challenge for teachers. In a related study, Archibald and Katamba (2011) states that many ESL/EFL teachers are aware from their teaching experience that teaching the meaning, uses and functions of the passive voice seems one of the problems in L2 grammar instruction on passive voice construction.

The use of the passive voice with various complex tenses and aspects, such as past perfect progressive or the future perfect (*The letter will have been written by tomorrow*) are found in today's English, be it spoken or written (Paden, 2008). Another point that has been made repeatedly in various studies is that L2 writers tend to avoid or misuse complex passive voice constructions (Celce-Murica, 2002).

The use of the passive voice, and to a large extent, the prevalence of the passive voice is determined by academic conventions (Baym, 2005). The use of the passive voice in formal writing has a number of important textual functions. Based on a large number of corpus analyses of academic prose, the passive voice is ubiquitous and remains a prevalent feature of academic text, in various disciplines (Brown, 2004).

2.16 USE OF CONTRACTIONS IN ESSAY COMPOSITION

The scholars argue on the use of contractions in academic writing as these are evident in the students' written work. Based on the findings of Baker (2011), contractions are not usually used in formal writing, even though they are very common in spoken English. In formal writing, one should write words and phrases in full, not the contracted form. In formal writing, one should use, for example, *cannot* instead of *can't*, *have not* instead of *haven't*, *will not* instead of *won't*, *could not* instead of *couldn't*, *is not* instead of *isn't*. These are just a few examples of contractions. Contractions can be used if one is quoting someone's exact words in one's writing. "Two-thirds of my eighth-grade students can't read at grade level," the professor stated.

2.17 SLANG USED IN SOCIAL MEDIA

There have been multiple previous attempts to address the use of slang in formal writing in previous studies. Pei and Ganor (1984) cited in (Yang and pan, 2023) state that slang

is a style of language in fairly common use, produced by popular adaptation and extension of the meaning of existing words and by coining new words with disregard for scholastic standards and linguistic principles of the formation of words; these are generally peculiar to certain classes and social or age groups. Similarly, Babalola (2007), concurs with other researchers that slangs are common in informal writing and spoken English used in certain region or area; these include - *awesome/cool, okay/ok, check it out, in a nutshell*.

2.18 ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Short (2018) elucidated on the use of abbreviations and acronyms in academic writing by both students and academics wherein it was highlighted that abbreviations and acronyms are not encouraged because they are misleading in certain occasions. Paden (2008:106) has this to say:

If one uses an acronym or abbreviation, write it out the first time. When using acronyms, write the entire name out the first time it appears, followed by the acronym. From then on, you can use the acronym by itself: National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT). For abbreviations, write the complete word the first time, then use the abbreviation. influenza => flu, United States of America => U.S.A or USA, tablespoon => tbsp, Kansas => KS.

Similar points are emphasised in the study conducted by Odebunmi (2007), on the evident use of social media abbreviations or slang in students' formal assessments. The authors recommend - *do not use slang abbreviations or symbols that you would use in friendly emails and texts such as, LOL (laugh out loud), ttyl (talk to you later), 9, &, b/c (because), w/o (without), w/ (with).*

Al-Marsumi (2017) adds other examples - *spaced out, right on, hang up, and rip off (from old words having new meanings), pig and fuzz (policeman)*. Others like - *rope, cool, dig, stoned, bread, and split* - have a wide domain of meaning (Al-Baldaw, 2011). Slang is often taken from social media and is considered a sign of social awareness and shared knowledge of popular culture.

This particular branch of slang has become more prevalent since the early 2000s as a result of the rise in popularity of social networking services, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. This has created new vocabulary associated with each new social media venue, such as the use of the term “friending” on Facebook, which is a verbification of “friend” used to describe the process of adding a new person to one's list of friends on the website, despite the existence of an analogous term “to befriend”.

According to Baker (2011), this term is much older than Facebook, but has only recently entered the popular lexicon. Other examples of slangs found in social media, include a general trend toward shortened words or acronyms. These are especially associated with services such as Twitter, which now has a 280 character limit for each message and therefore requires a briefer, more condensed manner of communication. This includes the use of hashtags which explicitly state the main content of a message or an image, such as, food or photography.

2.19 COLLOQUIAL LANGUAGE

Colloquialism, as a literary device, implies using informal or everyday language in literature and they may not have universal usage and acceptance. Colloquialisms generally have a geographic nature, as a result, colloquial expressions usually belong to a regional or local dialect (Literary Devices, n.d). Leech and Svartvik (1) quoted in (Biber, 2009) regard “the colloquial language as the equivalent of an umbrella term for informal language calling it the first form of language that a native-speaking child becomes familiar with”.

Aladeyomi (2007), explains that the word “colloquial” which comes from Latin, “colloquia” (conversation), is usually used in a conversation not in a written form. There are many expressions called colloquial in the dictionary which come from slang expressions, such as - *don't, I'd, we'll, fixed (=bribed), pretty (=very), funny (=peculiar), take stock in (=believe) and O.K!* Colloquialisms are defined as informal words and phrases that are conversational, everyday words and phrases that are acceptable in informal writing and speech, but not acceptable in terms of formal writing and speech.

Comprehension of informal or colloquial language is easier compared to formal language, therefore, it is sometimes used for some certain public communications such as

newspapers and advertisements. In general, colloquialism is any informal word or expression used aptly in conversation among the general public (Perloff, 2018). Dictionaries often display colloquial words and phrases with the abbreviation *colloq.* as an identifier” (Colloquialism, n.d). In the same vein, Alwasiah, (1985) explains that: “colloquial language, colloquial dialect, or informal language is a variety of language commonly employed in conversation or other communication in informal situations. The word colloquial by its etymology originally referred to speech as distinguished from writing, but colloquial register is fundamentally about the degree of informality or casualness rather than the medium, and some usage commentators thus prefer the term *casualism*”.

The word “colloquial” has been defined by the American College Dictionary as “characteristic of or appropriate to ordinary or familiar conversation rather than formal speech or writing.” In this definition, it does not show that a colloquial word is improper or inappropriate or careless. Alwasiah (2015) calls colloquialism any word or expression that may accurately be used in conversation among educated persons. He maintains that this definition of colloquial word accords the term wider and more acceptable usage, same as other popular words and phrases as well as idiomatic constructions. Colloquial expressions include those that are not strictly idioms, abbreviated or clipped versions of more formal words, such as, 'ad' for 'advertisement' (Alwasiah, 2005). Baker (2011) highlighted some colloquialisms in academic writing as:

- *Sort of (Meaning kind of), What's up (Meaning what's happening?), Wanna (Meaning want to), Going bananas (Meaning going crazy or getting angry), All wet (Meaning confused and incorrect), Put out (Meaning inconvenienced), Shove off (Meaning leave), Go nuts (Meaning going insane), Gonna (Meaning going to), Buzz off (Meaning go away), The middle finger (Meaning a profane gesture), Go to hell (Meaning a curse).*

The findings of other scholars reveal that slang and colloquialism are used often in students' academic writings in, for example, some Cameroon English institutions. In their investigation of various corpora of written discourse Naftulin et al (2003) found the

preponderance of constructions in discourse, which are, but not limited to -casual and colloquial discourse – as evident in students’ writings. These constructions include indefinite and universal pronouns (for example, *something*, *anyone*, *nobody*, and *everything*), contractions (for example, *don’t*, and *isn’t*), casual hedges (for example, *anyway*, *sort of*, and *kind of*). Colloquialisms may vary among various geographical regions, for instance, the southern states of America use colloquialisms like “y’all” which is understandable by them but not always to those in other regions of the country.

2.20 THE IMPACT OF SUBCULTURE ASSOCIATIONS IN WRITTEN DISCOURSE

Norquist (2017) elaborates that often, distinct subcultures create slang that members use to associate themselves with the group, or to delineate outsiders. Slang terms are often known only within a clique or ingroup. For example, “Leetspeak” or “1337” was originally popular only among certain internet subcultures, such as software crackers and online videogames. During the 1990s, and into the early 21st century, however, Leets has become increasingly more commonplace on the Internet, and it has spread outside internet-based communication and into ordinary spoken languages.

Aladeyomi (2007) expounded other types of slang as including terms such as – “SMS” (short messages) which is used on mobile phones, and “chatspeak”, (for example, “OL”, an acronym meaning “*laughing out loud*” or “*laugh out loud*” or “ROFL”, “*rolling on the floor laughing*”), which are widely used in instant messaging on the internet. Subcultures are often forms of counterculture, a term which can be defined as ‘going against a standard’, it follows those slangs that have come to be associated with countercultures.

2.21 THE USE OF JARGON IN ACADEMIC WRITING

A jargon is a set of terms and expressions used by a social or occupational group, but not used and often not understood by the speech community as a whole, according to Brown (2007). Al-Baldaw (2011) explains that each field has its own jargon, and an outsider may not understand; for example, jargons in linguistics include terms like phoneme, morpheme, syntax, and semantics.

2.22 THE USE OF PERSON PRONOUNS

In relation to student writing, specifically, essays, Babalola (2007) compared three corpora of essays written by university students in Sweden, the United States and Britain. Paden (2008) found that the Swedish EFL students use more first-person singular pronouns than their counterparts in the United States and Britain. Baker (2011) suggests a classification of discourse functions. In the functions, there were no examples of expressing self-benefits or acknowledgements, which would require the use of first-person singular pronouns, and this is not surprising as they are not usually associated with essays and are more likely in the type of research papers focused on in Hyland's study. Similar results were found by Biber (2009) in their examination of the essays of Singaporean university students where they point out that while such usage of first-person singular pronouns is necessary for large scale research projects, they are not part of the normal essay writing procedure of students. Several studies are unanimous about the use of active voice in pieces of writing intended for heterogeneous audience. Paden (2008) further found that the use of passive voice is more problematic as students hardly distinguish between active and passive voice in their formal writing.

2.22.1 The First- and Second-person Point of View in Writing

In the findings of a study conducted by Llamas (2007) argue against the use of first-or second-person pronoun in academic writing by researchers, writers, and students in various academic tasks; in formal writing, usually we do not use first person or second person pronouns unless it is a quote. The students and professionals avoid using:

- *I, You, We, Us*
- **You** can purchase a car for under \$10,000 can be rephrased as - **One** can purchase a car for under \$10,000. A car can be purchased for under \$10,000.

- **You** will probably see an elephant on an African safari becomes - **One** may see elephants on an African safari. Elephants are a common sight on African safaris.
- **We** decided to invest in the company becomes - **The group** decided to invest in the company.
- In formal writing it is better to use **passive voice**. **Passive sentences:** The bone was eaten by the dog; the research was completed by the students in 2009.

Active sentences: The dog devoured the bone. The students completed the research in 2009. In 2009, the students completed the research. For example, in a rule above I wrote, “Apostrophes are even added to nouns to show ownership.” I wrote this sentence in a passive voice. To make it active, I could write: “Additionally, add an apostrophe to a noun to show ownership.” “Use apostrophes with nouns to show ownership.” The studies discourage the use of passive voice in academic writing and books.

2.23 DRAWBACKS OF RETROSPECTIVE STUDIES

Several studies in the literature have examined challenges faced in academic literacy, however, the use of unsuitable registers continues to be an unresolved problem and there has not been any study to explore this area with respect to interactionist and variationist sociolinguistic perspectives. An essential constraint on all the work discussed in this area is the unsatisfactory articulation of sociolinguistic features contributing to inappropriate usage of register on certain occasions. A study of this issue is rarely reported in the literature, hence, there has been very little effort and attempt to mitigate this problem. The status, functions, and features of English in particular regions of the third world appear to be universal since this study reported on misconceptions and mistakes in register usage in different countries.

2.24 SUMMARY

This chapter presents the theoretical framework on the register competence in academic writing and factors influencing student writing at the university of Venda. The types of register are highlighted in reviewed previous studies, however, only register and factors that are relevant to this research are discussed. The register and features s are common

used by non-native speakers where they seem not to regard them as mistakes and errors in their everyday sentence construction.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focused on the proposed philosophical foundations, the research design and methodology that drove the study. Accordingly, it describes the population of the study, sampling procedures, data collection instruments, data analysis, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research instruments and ethical considerations. This chapter further outlines the significance of the methods and procedures that were utilised to collect and analyse the data. A research methodology is a way of solving a research problem systematically; it is, therefore, a science of how research is conducted (Kothari, 1985:21). In concurrence, Blaikie (2000:7) suggests that methodology is “the analysis of how research should proceed.” The entire research plan is based on the concept of the right methodology for the research topic (Baker, 2011:8).

3.1 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The Interpretivist paradigm was used in this study, interpretivist researcher learns about reality through participants' impressions of the scenario being examined, thus interpretivism is the appropriate paradigm for the current study. According to Kothari (2004) and Thanh & Thanh (2015) studies using the interpretivism paradigm chooses participants using non-probability approaches when the decision is purposeful, and the small number of people and sites contain specific information crucial to the research topics.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Kumar (1996) defines a research design as a procedure or plan adopted by the investigator in answering questions, validly, objectively, accurately, and economically; Mouton (1996) sees a research design as the knowledge of “how” to do things. There are many research designs, however, this study adopted a qualitative research approach, which used a case study design.

According to Berelson (2003), qualitative research studies human behaviour within the context in which it would occur naturally without the researcher’s interference. “A qualitative study attempts to understand ordinary people’s perceptions, perspectives, and

understandings of a particular situation as well as to describe and interpret an experience by determining the meaning of the experience as perceived by people who have participated in it” (Archibald, 2011:139).

Qualitative research is an enquiry process of understanding a social or human phenomenon based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, by reporting detailed views of informants and conducted in a natural setting (Best, 1993). In accordance, this study details the aspects pertaining to the use of register in academic writing by third year-level university students.

One of the main reasons for using a qualitative research approach as for this study was that it is most suited for reaching the aim of understanding the usage of certain language register in communication. This approach enables a researcher to comprehend the sociolinguistic factors and register competence as well as the contributing factors to an inappropriate use of a register. Beasley (2002:393), assert that a qualitative research produces accurate data, thereby, strengthening the trustworthiness of the findings. Qualitative research approach, therefore, was used for the gathering, analysis, and the presentation on the use of registers by selected students in a tertiary institution. This research design enabled the establishment of a frequency count of identified sociolinguistic factors and the use of registers; the approach was also appropriate for identifying statistical variables to attain the objectives of the study.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Kothari (2004), a case study is a research method involving an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination of a subject of study, as well as its related contextual conditions. In other words, a case study is a research strategy and an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context.

The advantage of case study is that the subject is observed in a completely natural and real-life environment. This study employed a case study because the data are in linguistic forms, constituting words, phrases, or sentences rather than numbers to depict the elements related to the use of registers by third year-level students studying English at

University of Venda and to determine whether its usage is appropriate or inappropriate in their academic writing.

3.4 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The word “population” is used to refer to the entire group of entities to whom the findings of a study apply (Babbie, 1992:141). A population of a study is the entire group of persons or set of objects and events the researcher is interested in gaining information and drawing conclusions about (Burns, 2000:150).

The universal population of this study comprised hundred and twenty (120) third-year level university students from Language Practice, Media Studies, and Education. However, not all students in these fields of study were sampled for this study; the target population were student educators, studying English; from them, 15 students were sampled as participants for this study to obtain in-depth information regarding their register competence and its influential features.

These participants were sampled on the ground that they possessed traits of interest to the study as they are on the verge of being launched into the society to serve as educators in schools where they are expected to present themselves as experts in the English language, hence, their subject mastery and didactics are of significance to the learners in the teaching and learning space.

3.4.1 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Sampling means taking any portion of a population or universe as representative of the whole, (Du Plooy, 2009). Sampling is necessary if one needs to gather information from only a fraction of the population of a group to interact with the phenomenon under study.

Gravetter (2011) explains that in purposive sampling, one of the most common sampling strategies, is when groups and participants are selected according to preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question. Sample sizes, which may or may not be fixed prior to data collection, depend on the resources and time available, as well as the

objectives of the study. Purposive sample sizes are often determined on the basis of theoretical saturation.

For this study, purposive and simple random sampling were used for selecting participants according to the requirements of the study. The study targeted third-year level students of English at a rural university. English essay tasks and interview questions coupled with narrative were the sources of data.

3.5 INSTRUMENTATION AND DATA COLLECTION PROCESSES

Karasik (2004) explains a research instrument as a tool used to collect data. The key instrument for this research was the researcher who acted as the person who wanted to find answers to the research problems. In case study research, according to Knapp (2006), the researcher acts as the key instrument and in this study, the researcher was the planner, data collector, data analyser, and data reporter.

Kumar (2005) elucidates data collection in qualitative research approach as involving the gathering of information for a research project through a variety of techniques. The data for this study was collected through interviews and analysis of English essays that the third-year level students wrote. Semi-structured interviews and student essays were the data collection instruments in this study.

The researcher used document analysis to collect qualitative data. Document analysis refers to any written materials that contain data about the phenomena a researcher wishes to study (Biber, 2009). Essay scripts were used as the instruments to evaluate register competence in English exhibited by third level student educators at a rural-based university.

The interview was used to obtain information on the students' knowledge of register and factors affecting it. Due to the informal nature of unstructured interviews, it becomes relatively easy for researcher to try and develop a friendly rapport with the participants. This leads to gaining insights in extreme detail without much conscious effort.

3.5.1 CREDIBILITY AND CONFORMABILITY OF THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Determining the accuracy of the data, discussing the generalisability of instruments, and advancing the possibilities of replicating a study, have long been considered the scientific evidence of a scholarly study (Mazayev, 2005). This is achieved by establishing the dependability and credibility of the research instrument.. According to Mouton (2008), one must discuss trustworthiness in terms of:

- Measures of item conformability (in this instance, whether displayed inappropriate registers are consistent across constructs).
- Transferability (whether registers vary in their functions and interpretation when the instrument is administered for a second time).

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the degree of congruence between the explanation of the phenomena and the realities of the world” (Murar, 2008:331). Trustworthiness addresses the following questions:

- Do the researchers observe what they think they see?

In this study, validity was ensured by:

- Reviewing the relevant literature on the problem to establish their findings and by discussing the research results with the respondents before administering their presentation.

3.5.2 Pilot Testing

The term “pilot study” is defined as “a small-scale test of the methods and procedures to be used on a large scale” (Mazayev, 2005:26). Mouton (2011) mention that the main purpose of conducting a pilot study is to examine the feasibility of the intended approach in the main study. The researcher conducted a pilot study with a small group of participants to determine the feasibility of the instruments for data collection. These participants were given few questions to gauge the level of competence and existence of some misconceptions and the data obtained from this group of participants enabled the

researcher to improve certain aspects and revise those questions which were quite confusing to the participants.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

Mouton (2002) states that an analysis involves the breaking up of the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends, and relationships. Once all the fieldwork has been completed, the raw data needs to be analysed and interpreted. Braun and Clarke have identified six steps for analysing data - familiarising oneself (the researcher) with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming the themes and sub-themes, then producing a report (Karasik, 2004).

3.6.1 Organising Data

The researcher read through the transcribed data repeatedly to familiarise himself with what the data entailed, paying special attention to the patterns that had occurred.

3.6.2 Generating Initial Codes

In this phase, the researcher started to organise data in a meaningful and systematic way. The researcher was concerned with addressing specific research questions in the data; with this in mind, the researcher coded each segment of the data that was relevant to or captured something interesting about the research questions. The researcher identified the most important themes, recurring ideas, and patterns, which assisted with the integration of the results.

3.6.3 Searching for Themes

Beasley and Marcel (2002) define a “theme” as a pattern that captures something significant or interesting about the data and/or research question. In this case, the researcher examined the codes and some of them clearly fitted into a theme. At the end

of this step, the codes were organised into broader themes that seemed to say something specific about the research question.

3.6.4 Reviewing Themes

At this phase, the researcher reviewed, modified, and developed the preliminary themes that had been identified in Step 3. At this point, the researcher gathered all the data that were relevant to each theme then they were colour coded. After this, the researcher read the data associated with each theme and considered whether the data did really support it or not. If the analysis seemed incomplete, the researcher went back and tried to identify any supporting data.

3.6.5 Defining and Naming Themes

This is the final refinement of the themes, and the aim was to identify the “essence” of what each theme was about (Baker, 2011:92). The following questions were asked: What is the theme saying? If there are subthemes, how do they interact and relate to the main theme? How do the themes relate to each other?

3.6.6 Reporting

After the final themes had been reviewed, the researcher wrote the report based on which themes made meaningful contributions to understanding and answering the research questions.

The analysis of qualitative data, therefore, requires the process of coding (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), while categorising, involves the method used to divide data into parts by the researcher (Babbie, 1992). After coding the data into themes, the researcher utilised critical document analysis as method of data analysis.

- Critical Discourse Analysis

Karasik (2004) maintains that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focuses on language beyond sentences, clauses, or phrases. Contrary to much of traditional linguistics, discourse analysts not only study language use 'beyond the sentence boundary' but also prefer to analyse 'naturally occurring' language use, not invented examples. Scholars working in the tradition of CDA generally argue that (non-linguistic) social practice and linguistic practice complement one another, therefore, they focus on investigating how societal power relations are established and reinforced through language use.

Analysts make use of various registers which help the reader to grasp the essence of literary texts. Critical discourse analysis exploits both formal and informal language in written and spoken language. This study focused on analysing the use of registers by third-year students of English in a rural university in Limpopo, South Africa. A number of analytical procedures were used to analyse the data:

- Identifying the use of register. This was done by a detailed analysis of the output.
- Analysing and classifying sociolinguistic factors that could be hindering the appropriate use of register found in students' essays.
- Establishing a frequency count of inappropriate register uses.

The essays were read and analysed by the researcher so as to establish students' competence with register. The essays were classified into categories, and in a narrative form, the researcher analysed and described the student educators' use of register.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Social research takes place within a social context (Babbie, 1992), and because of that, it is vital that ethical concerns become an integral part of the research process, right from the planning stage, through to implementation (Du Plooy, 2002). Research ethics are general rules or scientific laws that govern the research, throughout its whole process (Du Plooy, 2002). Burns (2000) adds that ethical principles, rules, and conventions distinguish conduct, which is socially and morally acceptable, from that which is socially and morally

unacceptable. This notion, therefore, relates to moral standards that the researcher should consider, in all research methods, at all stages of the study.

The research proposal was accepted and approved by the University of Venda Higher Degrees' Committee. An ethical clearance certificate was issued by the University of Venda Ethical Review Committee. In this study, several measures were taken to ensure that the necessary ethical concerns are addressed to avoid violation of the University rules and the participants' rights as the source of data, as well as the module lecturer whose students' English essay scripts were analysed, hence, consent was obtained from the latter. The researcher accordingly explained the purpose and the designated objectives of the research to the participants and brought it to their attention that there will be no rewards in participating in the research. The researcher assured all the participants of their anonymity and confidentiality throughout the research. Consent was sought before the participants engaged in this study.

Informed Consent

According to Archibald and Katamba (2011), informed consent involves the capacity of individuals to choose, to the best of their ability, whether to participate in the study based on an accurate description about what will happen to them in the process of the research. While this may appear to be straightforward, informed consent cannot occur without three fundamental elements.

This entails information that allows for an understanding of what is involved in the research and any possible risks, comprehension of the information that is presented and a recognition that coercion is not used to control or influence participation. Accordingly, the researcher explained the purpose and the designated objectives of research to the selected participants; it was also brought to their attention that there would be no rewards in the process of conducting the research.

Anonymity

Anonymity can be conceptualised as “the degree to which the identity of a message source is unknown and unspecified, thus, the less knowledge one has about the source, the harder it is to specify who the source is among possible options, the more anonymity exists” (Kumar, 2005). The researcher assured all the participants that their real names would never be included in the research document, rather they were coded as Participants A, B, C , for example.

Confidentiality

The British Psychological Society (2010) notes that subject to the requirements of legislation, including the Data Protection Act, information obtained from and about a participant during an investigation is confidential unless otherwise agreed in advance. Investigators who are put under pressure to disclose confidential information, hence, should draw this point to the attention of those exerting such pressure.

The researcher informed the participants that whatever information was shared during the process of the study, would be treated confidentially; this means that the information would not be discussed outside the study. Participants’ shared information, therefore, were used for study purposes, only.

Voluntary participation

Voluntarily participation means that participation in experiments must be voluntary, so no one should be forced to get involved (Babbie & Mouton, 2009). Burns (2005), point out that participation should be voluntary at all times and no one should be forced against his/her will to participate in a research project. The researcher started by coming to an agreement with the participants, hence, they were not forced to be part of the study and were free to withdraw, if they are not interested.

No Harm to Participants

The participants should be given the assurance that they will be indemnified against physical and emotional harm (Knapp, 2006). The researcher ensured that the research did not bring any form of emotional or physical harm to participants by creating a comfortable environment and avoiding asking participants sensitive questions.

3.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided the overall research plan in detail; thus, the nature of the study and the study population were established. The data collection and analysis instruments employed in this study were identified, and their justifications were appraised. Subjects involved in this study were clearly specified and finally, the data presentation and processing procedures, as well as the ethical considerations were dealt with.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter centred on discussion of research methodology, data collection and research techniques that the researcher employed in this study. The data were collected and analysed in accordance with the research questions posed in the first chapter of this study. The designated objectives were answered qualitatively in relation to the research instruments employed.

The data was collected from the third-year level students at the University of Venda. In the chapter will be presented the statistical responses from the interview questions, and the different types of register used in the student educators' essay scripts. The researcher reviewed the essay scripts and interview questions. Thirty students were sampled as participants to complete the interview questions; however, fifteen participants were afforded an opportunity to write an essay based on the provided topics.

Their essay scripts were analysed and categorised in relation to the register used and sociolinguistic factors which necessitated any inappropriate usage. The interview questions solicited data on the biographical details of the participants and their comprehension of register usage and features contained in each register type. The study sought to answer the following research questions to accomplish its designated objectives:

- What are the variations of English register used in academic writing by the third-year level students studying English, in a rural University?
- Which sociolinguistic factors could be hindering the appropriate use of register in academic writing?
- What strategies could be employed to enhance students' use of register in academic writing?

RETURN RATE OF THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Table 4.1: Return Rate of the Research Instrument.

Instrument used	Administered	Collected	Percentage
Written essays	15	15	100
Interviews	15	15	100

All the essays written by the selected third level student educators in a rural based university were collected, thus attaining a 100% return rate. In accordance with Du Plooy (2009), a return rate of 50% is adequate, 60% is good and 70% and above are exceptionally good, therefore, the return rate was considered excellent, thus, it was possible to obtain the desired information for the data analysis purposes.

4.2 DATA PRESENTATION

This section presented the findings of this study as articulated by the methodology in the preceding chapter. The data reveal that there were fifteen (15) student educators selected as participants for this investigation; these were seven (7) male and eight (8) female students, from different backgrounds, at the University of Venda in Limpopo Province.

4.2.1 Student Educators' Biographical Data

There were fifteen (15) student educators selected as participants for the questionnaires and essay tasks to detect the students' usage of register. There were 7 male and 8 female students at the rural university in Limpopo Province from both urban and rural home backgrounds. This was done to ensure that every sector of the population was represented and further to elicit if there were any significant differences in terms of performance and exposure to facilities for rural and urban students. Questions were distributed to the third level English student educators, which included questions to be answered and a list of essay topics to select.

The student educators responded to the interview questions based on their biographical details and register-related information such that the researcher could perceive their

competence in the usage of different registers on different occasions. The responses provided to the questions are presented in Figure. 4.1:

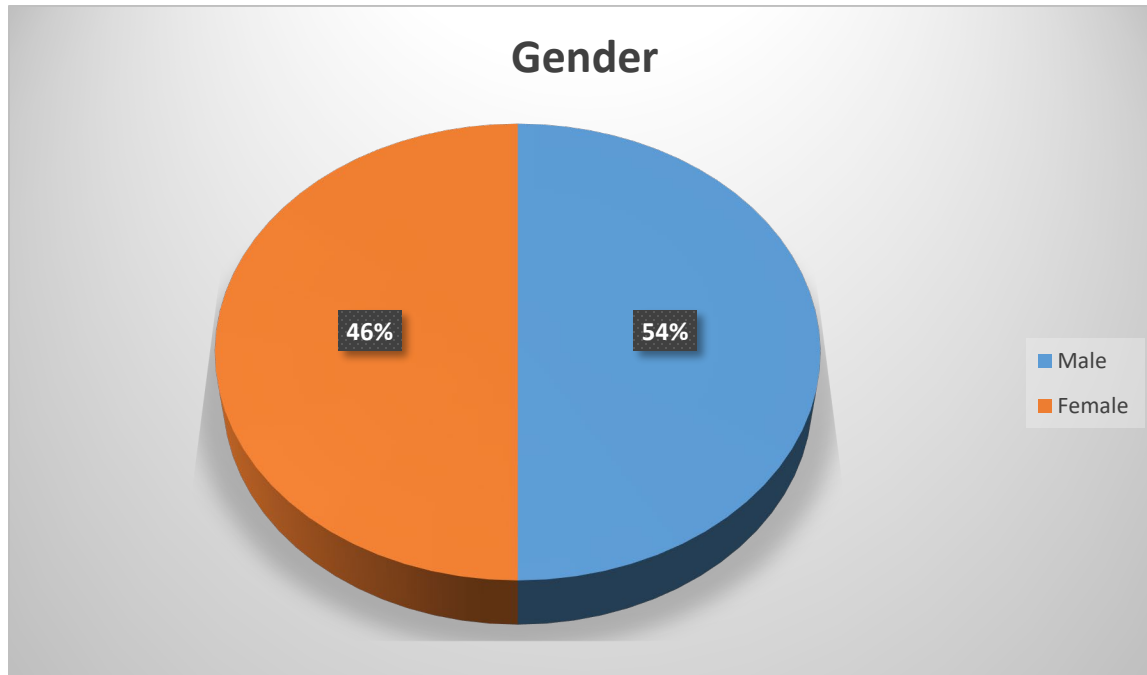


Figure 4.1: The participants by Gender

Male and female students constituted the population of this study, in order to ensure that there is an equal representation of the genders. It is quite imperative to take the issue of gender into cognisance when exploring the competence of the students such that overgeneralisation is minimised otherwise the investigation may provide inaccurate data. In terms of gender, it was indicated that both genders participated.

Primary Languages

The students' home languages were Xitsonga, Tshivenda, Sepedi, and SiSwati. Four of the students were Xitsonga speaking people, six of the students were Tshivenda speakers, three were Sepedi and two were SiSwati speakers. All the students were learning English as a second language, and they were likely to encounter difficulties with

respect to the register usage as the English grammar rules and vocabulary differ with the primary languages of these students.

Table 4.3 Primary Languages

Home language	Xitsonga	Tshivenda	Sepedi	siSwati
Number of participants	4	6	3	2

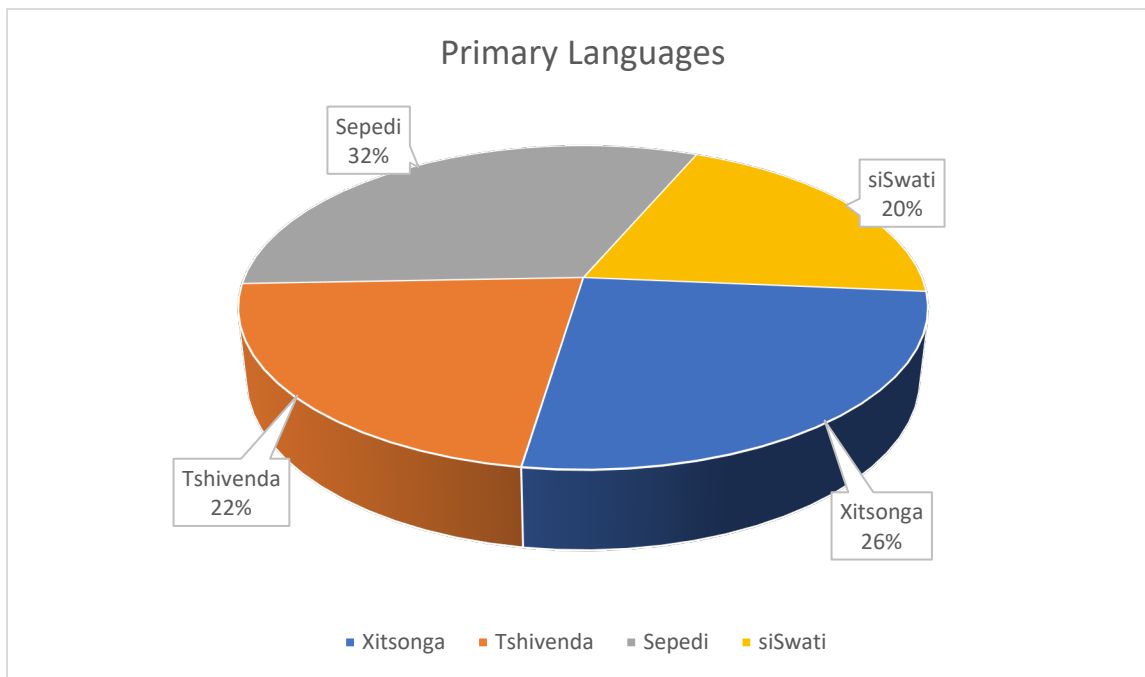


Figure 4.2: Primary Languages

The primary language has an impact on the acquisition and mastery of English language in terms of the similarities and differences between the primary language and target language. In this circumstance, language played a significant role in the list of the features contributing to the language proficiency of non-native students.

4.3 THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF DATA

Table 4.4: Thematic Analysis

Students' number	Features of informal register						
	Contraction	Slangs	Parallelism	Colloquialism	Passive voice	Personal pronoun	Phrasal verbs
Student 1	2	3	4	5	7	1	1
Student 2	3	1	2	3	4	0	0
Student 3	4	2	0	1	3	0	0
Student 4	6	6	2	3	1	1	2
Student 5	3	4	5	4	1	0	1
Student 6	0	2	1	3	0	0	3
Student 7	2	3	4	2	1	0	2
Student 8	4	5	2	1	0	1	1
Student9	3	4	5	6	3	1	0
Student10	2	4	3	2	3	0	0
Student11	5	2	3	4	1	0	1
Student12	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Student13	3	5	2	5	7	2	2
Student14	4	0	0	8	4	1	3

Student15	1	5	4	5	2	1	2
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The researcher gave essay topics (Appendix D) for the students to choose from and 15 students authored essays on topics of their choice. The researchers collected and analysed the data from each student who wrote an essay, to determine and detect their register competence in written discourse. The outcome of the identification is depicted on Table 4.4.

The deviant features of the students' registers in the students' essays were attributed to the overuse of informal types of language. The frequent use of inappropriate registers denotes the incompetence of the students with the other register types and rules for appropriate usage, consequently, this aspect should be addressed meticulously to enhance the sociolect usage.

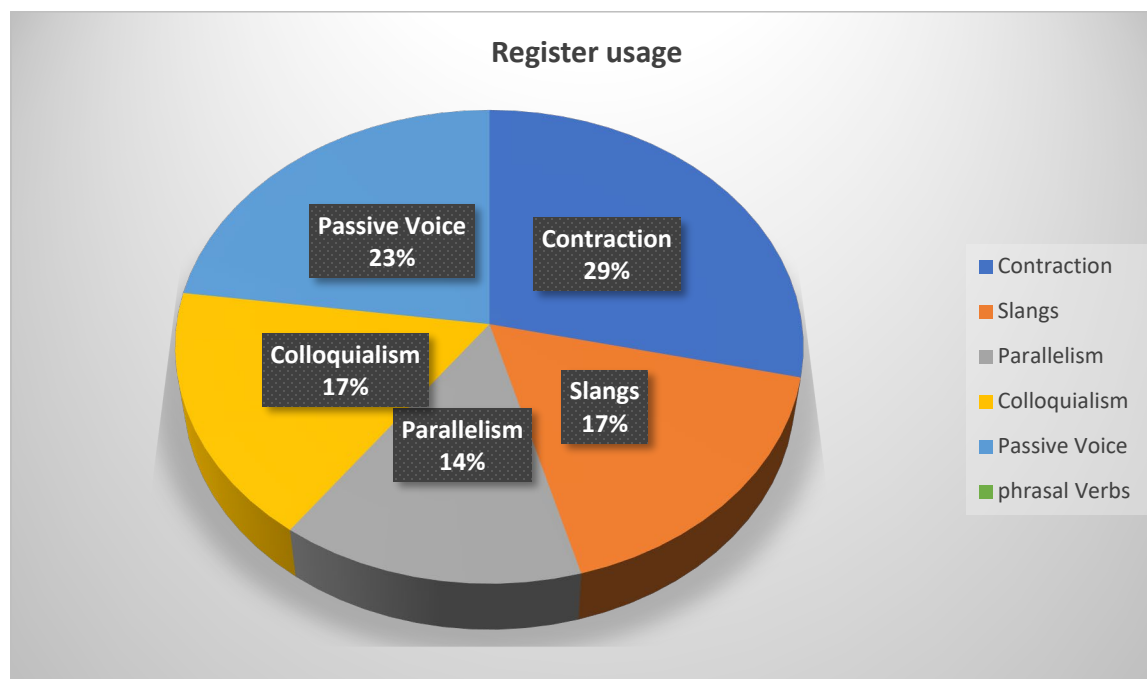


Figure 4.3: Inappropriate Use of Register

In Figure 4.3 titled 'Inappropriate Use of Register', contraction has the highest percent in terms of dominance in the student's written work and this seems to be influenced by their exposure to social media. As this platform tends to compromise the language and this was not realised when writing this piece of work, it can be assumed this was owing to the regular use of this aspect in students' conversation.

The passive voice contributed the second highest percent challenge in the features of student's work. This aspect does not receive much attention in corrective feedback as the teaching around this area relates to notions of acceptable writing style. When lecturers teach this aspect, they do not emphasise its role in formal writing or communication.

All these features displayed in table 4.4 above should be addressed to explain these irregularities when embedded in the register on different occasions. Register consists of five types - formal, informal, consultative, static, and intimacy register - however, formal, and informal registers are mostly used in academic and professional writing; these registers have similar aspects although, they differ in some major respects.

The inappropriateness of informal register in formal writing is not recognised by students, as informal register appeared more often in many students' writings. The students' writings are usually dominated by informal register. This is congruent with Norquist (2017), that the register is a rigid aspect and some language users, like students tend to confuse the appropriate application rules on different occasions.

Table 4.5: The Recapitulation of Selected Register Usage

No.	Error types	Frequency	Percentage of deviant usage
1	Phrasal verbs	8	53%
2	Lack of parallel structure	6	40%
3	Double Negation	9	60%
4	Use of pronouns	5	33%

In table 4.5 titled 'Recapitulation of selected Register usage', the features show the other categories of errors and deviant features contained in the pieces of writing. The percentage of each feature categorised and displayed in the above Table 4.5 illustrates the irregularities found in register usage. The analysis of the data presented, therefore, is the commonly used and mainly confused in spoken and written communication. Furthermore, the formal and informal registers tend to be intertwined on different occasions by the non-native speakers.

4.4 STUDENT EDUCATORS' INTERVIEWS

The fifteen (15) student educators sampled for this study were engaged through narrative enquiry to determine their register competence and the differences in usage of spoken

and written discourses. The responses revealed that the students encounter difficulties with register usage in academic writing as shown in the discussions below.

4.4.1 Analysis of Student Educators' Responses

The findings of this study exhibited that the students have inadequate knowledge of register usage and style. The student educators stated that their challenges with the use of register emanated from the fact that they were not taught academic writing at all the levels of their tertiary education. The essay topics are in Appendix D for clear understanding and reference where possible and required for confirmability and dependability thereof.

4.4.1.1 Student's Knowledge of Register

The question posed to the participants was *'Have you ever heard of register in English language?'* The students were mostly familiar with the common two types of registers namely, formal, and informal. Based on the analysis of students' responses, seven (7) students are familiar with only two classes of register while five (5) students have sound knowledge of three types of register. In addition, three (3) students never had classes on register and elements embedded in each category. This is in concurrence with Weidman's (2015) that register is a critical concern at the institutions of higher learning due to the complexities of the register usage in different situational occasions. . They indicated that they were not exposed to different types of registers in their entire four years of the study. Register seems to be a neglected area in the English language content as the participants were entirely unaware about the features which distinguish the different types.

4.4.1.2 Inspection of Appropriate Register Usage in Different Situations

The researcher posed this question - *'How often do you inspect your register usage in different occasions?'* This study's findings revealed that the students did not know any criteria and feature to be taken into cognisance when using register in spoken and written communication; they claim the spoken and written discourse do not seem to have any features which distinguish them. Consequently, four (4) students indicated that it is quite tricky to determine the register's appropriate use because of inadequate knowledge. Six

(6) students are familiar with some features which distinguish formal and informal variation of register, whereas five (5) students are unable to recognise deviant features of register use in different occasions. The correctness and appropriateness appeared to be a problem because students need to be able to use the language correctly that is, in terms of grammatical rules of the language; in addition, the language ought to be used appropriately in a way that suits the context. One of the main aspects of appropriateness is the level of formality of the language usage.

4.4.1.3 Avoidance of Spoken Language Features in Academic Writing

The researcher posed this question to the participants “What features of register difference do you take into cognisance in academic writing?” The findings of the present study revealed that the students often use register on occasions without observing the rules governing the usage of the register; the situational context of the register is not taken into cognisance. The register is mainly used haphazardly because the students lack proper understanding of register types and appropriate use of the types. A crucial point to highlight about spoken and written language is that there are not two watertight categories. Five (5) students were able to avoid certain inappropriate features while they missed the others because of inadequate mastery of register. Three (3) students find the differences between spoken and written discourse cumbersome and this tends to be detrimental to register competence. Seven (7) students are familiar with contractions, passive voice, and phrasal verbs as deviant features in written work.

Non-observance of variation registers has resulted in their lack of competence in the language. The spoken language features are not acceptable in written language and are considered inappropriate usage because of the dominant use of certain words, on some occasions such as kids, wanna, did not knew nothing.

4.4.1.4 Knowledge of The Register

The researcher posed the question ‘How many registers do you know in the English language?’ The findings of this study indicated the student educators do not know other types of register apart from formal and informal register in English language and the

features embedded in each register. Most of the students are familiar with the two-dominant registers, namely, formal, and informal register, while four (4) of the participants appear to understand the two types of register in the English language; three (3) of the participants seem to have no idea about the concept. Eight (8) student educators state that they might be three categories of register in the English language, although, their usage did not distinguish these different contexts of usage. The language register in English is the scale of formality that one uses when one writes and speaks. There are five basic levels describing the diverse types of register or formality in writing and speaking; they work, therefore, to increase the variety of language in writing and speaking and define formal and informal language. Each level has an appropriate use that is determined by differing situations. It would certainly be inappropriate to use language and vocabulary reserved for speaking when writing in the classroom. The students' knowledge of register usage seems to be insufficient based on their responses.

4.4.1.5 Student's Register Competence

The researcher posed this question to the participants - *Which register do you use in formal communication, whether written or spoken?* The findings that emerged from this question is the fact that these students have inadequate mastery of register usage. The central issue is that registers are applicable in all forms of communication including written and spoken depending on grammar, syntax, and tone. A register may be extremely rigid hence, it is quite challenging to know which register to use for English tasks. The students were not familiar with which register to use in different pieces of writing. Based on their responses, the students mostly know formal and informal register, while there are five distinct registers in the English language.

Most students were unable to differentiate between registers for both spoken and written language due to their inadequate mastery of the rules of usage of different register. In addition, formal and informal seems familiar to them, however, the right selection of content appears to be problematic in different language settings. The students know the theoretical explanations of register difference, although it appears to be difficult for them

to implement it in their usage, based on the students' responses. This is corroborated by the data analysed from the essay scripts.

4.5 Analysis of Register Features in Students' Essay Writing

The findings of this study exhibited that the students encounter difficulties in the register usage with particular reference to their academic writing. It seems to be a major challenge for the students to understand the differences between the two most used registers, namely, formal and informal. An academic piece of writing should have a formal register; this register is designed to place a distance between the writer and the reader. The students' scripts contained the following features which are not acceptable in academic writing:

4.5.1 Passive Voice

The list below indicates inappropriate use of register that is attributive to the passive voice in academic writing.

- The lost bag was **found by the girl** in the white hat.
- The movie was **enjoyed by all**.
- The decorations for the party were **created by his uncle**.
- The phone was left in the car **by the son**.

The findings of the study elucidated that eight (8) of the student educators made use of inappropriate register that can be attributed to the passive voice. The findings of this study collaborate with the study conducted by Butler (2013) who stated that the passive voice ought to be avoided in academic and professional writing. Passive voice occurs when the person or thing performing the action in a sentence is the object rather than the subject. The above-mentioned statements contained the passive voice constructions which de-emphasises the subject.

The passive voice can be avoided in this way, the writer ought to ensure that the subject always begins a sentence, verb follows and end with the object or complement. For instance, '*The lost bag was found by the girl in the white hat*' should be replaced by '*The girl in the white hat found the lost bag*'. In this type of grammatical construction, the subject of the sentence is the person, place, or thing that receives the action – which normally would be the object. These findings are echoed by Chudinov (2007) who asserts the use of active voices in most formal writing; academic writing typically use active voice, where the subject of the sentence is shown as the person or thing performing the action.

Moreover, these students made use of inappropriate registers in their academic essays which was attributed to the passive voice. The students confused the spoken language with written discourse in the sense that the passive voice is permissible in spoken language because it is mostly relaxed in nature. The voice of the language writer ought to be active in all the written work to show the seriousness of the information contained therein.

4.5.2 Contractions

The list below indicates the use of informal register in academic writing that is attributive to contractions. The students committed these errors associated with contractions, in their piece of writing.

- **Can't** be there
- **Haven't** seen him
- **I Won't** give up
- **Isn't** the time to go
- **Couldn't** finish the project.

The study findings indicated that fourteen (14) of student educators made use of inappropriate register attributive to contractions in academic writing. This result is consistent with the findings of Yang and pan (2023) who dissents with the use of contractions in formal writing. Contractions are not usually used in formal writing even

though they are common in spoken English. In formal writing, one should not use contractions, however, contractions can be used if one is quoting someone's exact words in a piece of writing. For instance, formal academic writing should use *cannot* instead of *can't*, *have not* instead of *haven't*, *will not* instead of *won't*, *could not* instead of *couldn't*, and *is not* instead of *isn't*.

Students made the wrong choice of register in their written essays which is attributable to contractions. Social media has been a major cause of concern in the student's work which is validated by Lambani and Nengome (2017), in their discussions on the common errors depicted in student's academic essays which contained contractions among other mistakes. Contractions make written work relaxed, and less serious due to these shortened versions of words used. The contractions are quite acceptable in spoken language but not in the written language due to the conversational tone imposed onto these words.

The students and scholars use these shortened words largely due to the advent of the social media platforms which have compromised the use of the language. Social media language is quite inclusive of every language aspect, however, formal writing does not embrace the elements of social media because of the formality style and tone required in academic writing.

4.5.3 The Use of Personal Pronouns

The use of first person and second person pronouns

The list below indicates informal registers that are attributive to personal pronouns.

- I just do not hate him
- **You** should avoid it
- **We** did it together
- It belongs to **Us**.

The findings of this study showed that eight (8) student educators used the first and second pronouns in their academic work. The findings of this study are validated by

Norquist (2001) in his discussions of the rules in professional writing. In formal writing, first and second pronouns make the texts seem as though the authors are directly addressing the reader, making the writing very personal. The choice of personal pronoun will determine the formality of a piece of one's writing either giving it a first- or third-person perspective, however, academic writing is impersonal as such, the third person perspective is the required style in all essay writing. In addition to that, usually the use of first person or second person is not permissible unless it is a quote, therefore, instances of - *I, You, we, and us* - should be avoided in academic writing. Academic writing recommends the use of third person singular and plural perspective which are inclusive of *she, he, it, they, their, and them*. This is validated by the study of Yule (2014) who elucidated the rules of academic writing with a special focus on personal pronouns in different styles, stressing that academic writing ought to be impersonal. Students 9, 14, and 15 used inappropriate register in their written essay which is attributable to misuse of 1st person and 2nd person pronouns which makes an essay less formal.

4.5.4 Phrasal Verbs

The list below indicates the inappropriate use of registers that are attributive to phrasal verbs.

- University of Venda **turned down** his application
- He **Put up** the cover
- **Cash out** the voucher
- We wanted to **find out** what transpired
- Most people **show up** in the event
- He **makes up** a list.

The findings of this study highlighted that eleven (11) student educators made use of phrasal verbs in their academic writing. This study is consistent with the findings by Al-Marsumi (2017) on inappropriate tone in one's piece of writing. Phrasal verbs are considered colloquial and unacceptable in academic writing because they are casual and

have informal tone, hence, phrasal verbs are not appropriate for formal writing. Academic writing must be clear and informative, moreover, it is necessary to be concise, so it is recommended to replace phrasal verbs with single words that have clear meaning.

Students 12, 15 and 9 made use of inappropriate style in their written essays attributable to phrasal verbs. Moreover, this is due to confusion arising from the misconception on the use of phrasal verbs in academic writing. The findings of this study expanded on the results of a retrospective study by Yang and pan (2023) on the use of phrasal verbs in other pieces of unrestricted writing. These words usually have many meanings in different content and context which make the interpretation of these words' difficult to understand due to complexity and daily attached meanings.

4.5.5 Abbreviations and acronyms

The list below indicates the use of the informal register that is attributive to abbreviations and acronyms.

- The **Flu** is getting worse
- **SABC** is in hot water
- **HIV** is no longer severe
- **UNIVEN** is a good university
- **U.S.A** is my favourite country.

The findings of this study indicated that five (5) student educators used abbreviations and acronyms in their first appearance without their prior detailed description. The findings of this study are comparable with the discussion advanced by Richards (2001) on the use of abbreviations and acronyms in verbal communication. He advises that students - write either abbreviations or acronyms in full the first time. When using acronyms, one must write the entire name out the first time it appears, followed by the acronym; from then on, one can write an acronym or the abbreviation by itself.

The abbreviations and acronyms, therefore, must be used after the introduction because they are not known to the readers. The findings of the current study are congruent with Du Plooy (2009) who espoused that abbreviations and acronyms should be used based on the audiences' experience and common knowledge to ensure that such abbreviated words are understood. For instance - *UNIVEN* (University of Venda), *Flu* (influenzas), *SABC* (South African Broadcasting Corporation), *HIV* (Human immunodeficiency virus), *USA* (United States of America) - must be written in full when they appear for the first time then later acronym could be used throughout the text.

Students 7, 8 and 10 used a wrong register in their written essays attributable to the use of abbreviations and acronyms. These abbreviations and acronyms were used in the student's work without the details of the abbreviated terms and acronyms. The use of abbreviations and acronyms has been a serious challenge as some writers frequently used them without proper explanation and target readers find it difficult to comprehend if the abbreviated words are not common.

4.5.6 Vocabulary

The list below indicates the use of informal register that is attributive to vocabulary.

- **Do** it alone
- **Get** a car now
- **Give** it to him
- **Make** it possible for them.

The findings of this study showed that four (4) student educators used informal vocabulary in their written discourse. The findings of this study concur with the discussions of Pooley (2006) on the appropriate vocabulary for formal writing. The informal vocabulary is acceptable in spoken language as it is casual and relaxed, suitable for conversations. The choice of words is essential in academic writing; the rule is to use formal vocabulary in order to accommodate all the readers of the text. The writers should avoid using very basic sounding vocabulary in academic and professional writing. For instance, *get*, *do*,

keep, make, or have’; instead of these basic sounding vocabularies, the students ought to use these words - *‘obtain’ not ‘get,’ provide’ not ‘give’, ‘include’ not ‘have’, retain/maintain’ not ‘keep’ and ‘create’ / ‘formulate’ not ‘make’*.

Students 8,9 and 15 made use of wrong words in their registers in their written discourse. The findings of some retrospective studies explored the use of vocabulary in both formal and informal contexts; Chudinov (2007) articulated that vocabulary items are not on the same weight in usage. The use of English words has been a major challenge among second language speakers of English in different situations due to the difference in the language structure and grammar of non-native speakers’ language. Vocabulary choices are determined by unique writing situations, such as – formal, informal, academic, or non-academic writing.

The vocabulary in the foreign language such as English is critical and sensitive as the words that are mainly used in everyday communication may not fit in every context and channel. The words might be good and acceptable in one situation and not acceptable in the other due to the standard and non-standard words’ categories.

4.5.7 Colloquialism

The list below indicates the use of inappropriate registers attributive to colloquialism in academic writing.

- **Stuff** like that
- **A lot of** food is wasted
- **Things** are getting worse
- **A bit of** understanding
- **Sort of** love in it
- **Lots of** people do not like it
- **Really** this is great move.

The findings of this study revealed that fifteen(15) student educators made use of informal features attributive to colloquialism in their written work. The findings of this study are comparable to that of Perloff (2018) on the debate advanced against the use of colloquial tone in academic discourse. Colloquial language is not acceptable in academic writing as it reflects an informal tone and is casual. As such, students and writers must avoid using colloquial words and expressions or vague terms, such as - *stuff, lots of, a lot of, really, kind of, thing* - and so forth. All these expressions are acceptable in spoken language and informal writing because these words are casual and considered less serious.

- ✚ *A bit-slightly, fairly, rather, somewhat,*
- ✚ *sort of / kind of – reasonably, relatively,*
- ✚ *somewhat lots of / a lot of – a number, numerous, a significant / considerable number of, really/ very –highly, extremely, exceptionally*

The first options which display colloquial expressions should be avoided in formal writing. The essay writing should exclude these above expressions and words. Students 13, 8 and 7 used wrong registers in their written essays and this is attributable to colloquialism. Findings of previous studies corroborate the current study's findings in relation to the formality scale in formal spoken and written discourse, Young and Jennifer (2012) alluded to colloquial language as a deviant feature in a formal register. The social media platforms have indirectly influenced the use of colloquial language in student's work owing to language having been largely compromised due the emergence of social media platforms. Most of these words are predominantly used in everyday communication and they are confusing to the non-native speakers who are directly and indirectly involved in both formal and informal language, however, are unable to detect where to use which words.

4.5.8 Linking Words

The list below indicates informal registers that are attributive to linking words.

- **So**, the generation is greatly advancing
- **And** the life will get better soon

- **But** not this time
- **Also**, I studied Computer
- **Because** I was angry

The findings of this study indicated that four (4) student educators used linking verbs at the beginning of their sentences. The findings of this study are consistent with Moore (2012) on the challenges with the position of transitional words in a sentence. The linking verbs are not acceptable at the beginning of sentences in academic writing, as such, it is highly recommended that the writers and all those involved in academic or professional writing do not begin sentences with words like - *and, so, but, also* and *because*. Use of linking words does help one's writing to sound scholarly but they must be used accurately.

Linking words aid to maintain the flow and establish clear relationships between ideas. These linking words ought to be avoided at the beginning of sentences in academic and professional writing cases. Furthermore, there are other suitable transition words and phrases to use in formal writing - *additionally, however, in addition, as a result of, and although*. The linking words such as, *so, but also, and so on* are more used in spoken language and informal writing.

Students 1, 4 and 12 created wrong registers in their written work attributable to linking words. These linking words were used at the beginning of sentences which are not acceptable as it is ungrammatical to start a sentence with these kinds of words, Beasley (2002) reported similar observations in their studies which suggest that transactional words are not one size fits all in relation to the style of writing. These transitional words are regularly used in both spoken and written language; however, some are used in inappropriate positions to connect different sentences.

4.5.9 Slang

The list below indicates informal register that is attributive to slang words.

in academic writing.

- **Slang: The kid ripped off a hundred bucks.**
- Non-slang: The child stole a hundred dollars.
- **Slang: The man was nailed for stealing the car.**
- Non-slang: The man was convicted for stealing the car.
- **Slang: I can't handle cramming for tests.**
- Non-slang: I cannot handle studying for tests at the last minute.

The findings of the study revealed that fourteen (14) participants made use of inappropriate registers attributable to using slang in academic writing. The current study is validated by Naftulin (2010) on an investigation of words that can be easily confused with other words. The slang words contained in the students' work include words such as - *dude, ain't, kid, bail, cram, awesome, fire and how come* - the use of such slang expressions is quite unacceptable in academic writing. Slang is localised to a specific area and may cause confusion to readers who live elsewhere; they evolve quickly and may not have the same impact over time.

Slang is considered unprofessional, especially when they are in written discourse. These findings are echoed more recently by Yang and Pan (2023) who profess that slangs may have more than one meaning and can easily be confused with other words in written language, therefore, when writing professional documents, the document must be clear and concise and not disorganised with poor wording.

Students made use of inappropriate registers in their written work attributable to slang. Slangs have more than one meaning and can easily be confused with other words in written language. Second language speakers tend to confuse using slang with being sophisticated, although, these slangs are not regarded as erroneous, however, their use in academic is discouraged.

4.5.10 Lack of Parallel Structure

The table below indicates informal registers that are attributive to lack of parallelism in academic writing.

- We all need good nutrition and **to exercising** on a regular basis
- I like to Jog and **walking**.
- I like both to read books and **watching** movies
- Enjoy going out to a movie as much as I **like to rent a movie and stay home to watch it**
- Many people maintain a healthy diet because they want to look healthy, it **increases their energy**, and because they want to living longer.
- He is smart, honest, and **has an enthusiastic sense** of responsibility.

The findings of this study showed that fifteen (15) participants made use of inappropriate register attributive to lack of parallel structure in their sentences. The findings of this study are in support of the argument by Muhlenfeld (2005) on the unequal function of phrases. There is a state of words or phrases having unequal function in sentences causing unacceptable grammatical construction.

The sentences above indicate the unequal function of words, as such, there is no parallelism in all these sentences. Words, phrases, and clauses joined by a comparative expression (*as much as, more than, less than*) need to have a distinct grammatical construction, all the elements ought to have equal weight and be in the same pattern.

Students 1, 4 and 6 created a wrong register in their written work attributable to lack of parallel structure. Parallelism is a significant element in language usage as this ensures that the words and phrases used in the piece of writing have equal grammatical weight throughout the written work. This study is consistent with the findings of Yule (2014) which suggest that the grammatical construction in all phrases and sentences maintains equal weight and function in the sentence.

This, however, appears to be a serious challenge that needs meticulous attention in the acquisition and proficiency in English language rules and restrictions. The use of words in English language tends to be a major conundrum as English grammatical and syntactic rules have exceptions in the sentence construction and forms of words used in the paragraphs. When the writer is making a comparison, the two items being compared should have a parallel structure. Comparing two items without using parallel structure can lead to confusion about what is being compared.

Comparisons frequently use the words *than* or *as*, and the items on each side of these comparison words should be parallel. The elements before the comparison word (*than*) should be equal to the elements after the comparison word. A writer must use the same grammatical construction to create a parallel structure. This clarifies that one action is being compared with another action.

To correct some instances of faulty parallelism, it may be necessary to add or delete words in a sentence. A correlative conjunction is a paired conjunction that connects two equal parts of a sentence and shows the relationship between them. Common correlative conjunctions include the following: *either...or not only...but also, neither...nor, whether...or, rather...than, both...and*.

Correlative conjunctions should follow the same grammatical structure to create a parallel sentence. **Faulty parallelism:** the writers can neither **wait** for something to happen nor **can we take** evasive action. **Correct parallelism:** the writers can neither **wait** for something to happen nor **take** evasive action. When using a correlative conjunction, the words, phrases, or clauses following each part should be parallel. In the first sentence, the construction of the second part of the sentence does not match the construction of the first part. In the second sentence, omitting needless words and matching verb constructions create a parallel structure. Sometimes, rearranging a sentence corrects faulty parallelism.

4.6 Sociolinguistic Factors Involved in the Misuse of Register

Sociolinguistic factors which result in the inappropriate registers emerged in the students' written work. The sociolinguistic factors encompass social media, subculture associations, exposure to soap operas and other television programmes and language distance. Sociolinguistics is one of many aspects of language learning that has direct influence on the students' proficiency level; under this, there are contextual factors that account for deviance in the creation of registers.

- *Exposure to social media*

In the production and analysis of text, several socio-cultural challenges can arise, since for many students, their main encounters with the target language are limited to the classroom environment. Additionally, for students who have some exposure to English outside of the classroom, this is often limited to a narrow range of experiences such as exposure to social media.

- *Subculture Associations*

The teachers may often find that students frequently write in the style, and utilise the language features, with which they have had the most success in the past. The outcome of this can be teachers receiving letters to the editor that read like an informal email to a friend or, alternatively, a blog post that is overly formal.

A further challenge in teaching writing is that students sometimes revert to the conventions of a text type familiar to them from their first language and culture. Register theory states that there is a difference in language use when one is speaking and writing; these changes occur depending on the situation, purpose, and audience.

4.7 Strategies and Techniques in the Use of Appropriate Register

The purpose of register theory was to denote the rules governing changes in register and to understand contextual factors determine which language features are encompassed. Register is defined as the way an author uses language differently under different circumstances. The variations are determined by factors such as social opportunity, context, purpose, and audience.

The linguistic features and the values of the three dimensions of field, mode and tenor determine the functional variety of a language. These three parameters can be used to specify the context of situation in which language is used. Field of discourse focuses on the entire situation, mode of discourse determines the function of language in particular situation, and tenor refers to the type of role interaction.

These features denote and direct the register usage in any form of communication. The spoken and written communication are distinctive in usage, and it is quite imperative to comprehend their differences as they tend to contain different elements which represent distinctive styles among the five types of registers advocated by Joos (2005). Halliday's register theory elucidated that the usage is essential in determining every form of communication.

4.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, the inappropriate register usage has been noticed as the critical issue in students' written work as the difference between spoken and written appeared to be difficult to understand. Moreover, the sociolinguistic factors contributing to this challenge owing to the students' social media platforms and soap opera language usage which has exacerbated the dominant use of informal register thereof. Consequently, the techniques and strategies have been established to improve the usage and understanding of register features.

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will provide a summary of findings, a conclusion, and recommendations. The main aim of the study was to determine the register competence in student educators' written discourse at the University of Venda, as well as to explore any contributory factors that led to the commission of these errors. Effort was made to identify, describe, and explain possible sociolinguistic factors. For the investigation to accomplish the designated objectives it was essential to review literature on the nature and theories of register and academic literacy approach. Literature review provided the conceptual framework for investigating register competence among the students. Interviews and analysis of essays were used to collect data from these University of Venda students.

The researcher was concerned that students seem to encounter difficulties in their written discourse although English is their major module and a medium of instruction in almost all the modules. There are different registers, namely, formal, casual, frozen, informal register, however, the informal register appeared more often than the other registers. The thorough analysis of register usage identified challenges in the students' written work, such as misuse of - slangs, phrasal verbs, personal pronoun, abbreviations and acronyms, contractions, and parallel constructions.

5.2 REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sought to answer the following research questions such to accomplish its designated objectives:

- What are the variations of English registers used in academic writing by the third-year level students studying English, in a rural University?
- Which sociolinguistic factors could be hindering the appropriate use of registers in academic writing?
- What strategies could be employed to enhance students' use of registers in academic writing?

5.3 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The present study identified different linguistic factors and seen in register used by the third-year level English student educators at a rural University.

The chapters of this study are arranged in this order.

Chapter 1 presented the introduction, background to the study, statement of the problem, aim of the study, objectives, research questions, definitions of terms, explanations of abbreviations as well as the significance, delimitation, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 2 entailed a comprehensive literature review and theoretical framework from various authors that were, relevant to the subject.

Chapter 3 detailed the research methodology, population, sampling, and data collection and analysis procedures used in this research.

Chapter 4 focused on data presentation, data analysis, interpretations, and discussions of the findings.

Chapter 5 discussed the research findings, limitations, recommendations, and conclusion.

5.4 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study indicated that in the register used by the rural university students, there are many miscellaneous errors caused using register in different situations for different purposes. These were noticeable in student essays, wherein most of the features that are permissible in spoken language were also dominant in their written work and in their responses to the interview questions. The results also showed the domains where students mainly encounter difficulties in trying to appropriately use register in academic and professional written discourses.

In addition, students still lack mastery of register construction in response to the different events that necessitate the use of formal language scale and the appropriateness of their

usage according to the different domains based on the mode, field, and tenor. These determine the sociolinguistic factors that affect the use and the users' competence.

5.4.1 The Types of Register Used by Third Level Student Educators

The first objective of the study was to identify the types of register used in English essay by third level student educators specialising in English didactics. It was established that the student educators used mainly three categories of registers and although all the types of register were used, most of these registers were inappropriately used in academic writing. While Informal, consultative, and formal registers mainly dominated in all the pieces of writing produced by the student educators. Students did not understand the features associated with register usage; the usage did not show, for example, any point of difference in both spoken and written discourse produced in their academic work.

5.4.2 The Influence of Sociolinguistic Factors on Students Educators' Use of Register

The second objective of the study sought to identify the different sociolinguistic factors that are quite influential in both appropriate and inappropriate usage of register, within the three parameters of tenor, field, and mode.

The linguistic features (specific expressions, lexico-grammatical and phonological features) and the values of the three dimensions of field, mode and tenor determined the functional varieties of a language. These three parameters can be used to specify the context of situation in which language is used. Field of discourse focuses on the entire situation, mode of discourse determines the function of language in particular situation, and tenor refers to the type of role interaction.

These features direct register usage in any form of communication. The spoken and written communication are distinctive in usage, and it is quite imperative to comprehend their differences as they tend to contain different elements which represent distinctive styles among the five types of register advocated.

5.4.3 Strategies implementation to ensure student educators' appropriate usage.

Third objective of the study sought the strategies that can be implemented to ensure the appropriate use of the different register in many platforms with respect to tenor, field, and mode, thus, ensuring that there is mitigation of the wrong usage of register in all situations and purposes.

The findings of the current study highlighted that the register used appeared to be a critical and sensitive aspect of any language, however, the students' registers were confusing as they were second language speakers of English with inadequate mastery of the language. The register types were mainly not understood by the participating students due to their incomplete mastery of the English language rules and conditions imposed on registers used in different situations.

5.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The study of this nature is of paramount importance and its findings are essential to, for example, the Department of English in the site University, English language educators and those who are directly or indirectly exposed to the language. There are few studies in the literature among the domains, showing the difficulties that students encounter during academic writing. Both native and non-native speakers of English sometimes fail to distinguish the different registers in written and spoken language, due, for example, to students' exposure to the media channels where the use of the informal register is mainly in everyday conversation. This study builds on and contributes to work in academic writing and register usage and addresses the mistakes and misconceptions around the topic. Subsequently, this is a significant area of research because formal and informal varieties of registers are still causing some confusion in research communities and second language use contexts.

Many studies appeared to have neglected this issue of English second-language speakers' exposure to different modes of communication; this continues to cause language endangerment. Several areas need to be addressed, for instance, the use of contractions, colloquial expressions, and slangs, whether these are acceptable in the

written and formal discourses. The discrete varieties of the English language from a geographical perspective are necessitated by the interaction and variation in a multilingual context with respect to standard English. Usage of English worldwide is not undertaken in a sociolinguistic vacuum but in contact with multiple languages in diverse regions throughout the world.

The study highlights aspects that are inappropriately used in academic writing and it emphasised the differences in the use of register in both formal and informal setting. This study, it is anticipated will contribute towards a better understanding of types of register and the appropriate and inappropriate uses of the register in academic writing.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The current study does not claim to be extensive or comprehensive. This study was conducted only on a sample of the third level students in the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education at the University of Venda, who are multilingual and multicultural and were speakers of Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Sepedi and Siswati. The findings of this study, therefore, cannot be generalised to speakers of other languages and students in other faculties in the University or in the rest of South Africa.

The students in the current study were some of the third level student educators who majored in English Didactics and possibility the inappropriate use of informal register in academic writing can be evidenced in other students, from other faculties and levels of study within the university. The current study focused on the register competence only at the expense of other errors that the students may commit during essay writing and spoken discourse.

5.7 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the English standard is mainly unsatisfactory owing to discrete varieties of English from a geographical perspective with respect to the lingua franca in different nations. It can be stated that the register competence is a fundamental aspect required in academic writing, however, register usage has been quite challenging and problematic in student writing, since the pieces of writing mainly submitted for marking and other

purposes tend to contain inappropriate use of register. In this view, English language does not operate in a sociolinguistic vacuum but in contact with multiple languages in diverse regions throughout the world.

Moreover, it has been evident that the notion of register is not mainly understood in both spoken and written discourse, hence, the status, functions and features of English registers are commonly confused in multilingual institutions. This study builds on and contributes to work in academic writing and register usage and addresses some of the mistakes and misconceptions. Subsequently, this is a significant area of research because formal and informal varieties are still causing some confusion in research communities and second language contexts.

Many studies appeared to have neglected this issue and second-language speakers' exposure to different modes of communication continue to cause lack of language competence. Several questions remain to be addressed, for instance, the use of contractions, colloquial and slang, whether they are acceptable in the written and formal discourses.

The discrete varieties of the English language, from a geographical perspective, are necessitated by the interaction and variation in multilingual contexts with respect to standard English, which does not operate in a sociolinguistic vacuum but in contact with multiple languages in diverse regions throughout the world.

Several studies in the literature have examined challenges faced with academic literacy, hence, the use of unsuitable registers continues to be an unresolved problem and there has not been any study to explore this area. Another essential constraint on all the work discussed in this area is the unsatisfactory articulation of sociolinguistic features contributing to the wrong usage of register on certain occasions, as such, this study provided additional insights into this area. Studies on this issue are rarely reported in the literature and there has been very little effort to mitigate this problem which examines the status, functions, and features of English in particular regions of this country.

Mastery of registers appeared to be a serious challenge to the students because of English language usage that changes in different occasions. The students, hence, were unable to differentiate the use of register in both spoken and written language due to their inadequate mastery of the rules and usage of different register.

The students seem not to understand theoretical aspects and the application of the discrete varieties of register differences and their usage based on the students' responses. It is essential, therefore, that register usage should be taken into cognisance in the pedagogical teaching of the English content such that the students have an opportunity to acquire knowledge and master this aspect.

5.8 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study analysed the use of registers and sociolinguistic factors determining their usage by the third level students who are majoring in English as a second language, based on the results, the researcher recommends the following:

5.8.1 The Intervention Measures

Student educators require corrective and intervention measures to help them become competent in the target language before they exit the system to teach L2 learners at schools.

5.8.2 The Consultation of Academic Writing Books

The student educators should consult academic writing books to familiarise themselves with the actual use of the registers and their rules.

5.8.3 The Eradication of Habits

There is a need to alert the lecturers in the Department of English in the University of Venda, to assist the students in eradicating habits which lead to the wrong use of registers in academic writing.

5.8.4 The Remedial Work to Curb the Miscellaneous Errors

Remedial work on the use of registers is recommended to curb the high percentage of the wrong forms of registers.

5.8.5 The Incorporation of the Aspect in English Communication Skills

Academic writing should be given considerable attention in English Communication Skills such that, the students master the appropriate writing style and register usage.

5.8.6 The Emphasis of Differences in Register Usage

The differences in the use of register in both spoken and written language ought to be emphasised in teaching English language. The student educators must be offered more time for English tutorials.

5.8.7 The Infusion of Register into Curriculum Content of the Entry Modules

The curriculum content ought to incorporate register at an early stage of teaching the module, to afford the students an ample time to master the concepts and their appropriate use.

5.9 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should build upon the findings of this study to explore the difficulties and complexities embedded in the academic essay composition.

- Prospective studies must focus on the entire first level student population to understand extrinsic factors negatively affecting competence in registers and implement effective strategies to overcome them.
- The English language registers should be explored among the students who are not directly involved in the daily use of the language.
- Future researchers should construct the same research problem in a new context and location to solicit any differences in the findings.
- Researchers should be addressing limitations of this research with respect to the other domains that are not explored in this study.

- Future studies should reassess and expand the theoretical point of departure outlined in the current study.

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ANNEXURE A: RESPONDENT DECLARATION

I, hereby confirm that my participation in this research project, is from my free will and I was not unduly influenced. The researcher explained to me about the ethical issues, and I also read and understood instructions in Annexure C and D and I also see the value of being kept informed or reminded during the entire research of any consequences.

Signature.....

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

I am Innocent Zitha, a postgraduate student currently enrolled for Master of Arts in English in the Department of English at University of Venda. I am at the stage of data collection in my research entitled - **Register competence in academic writing: A case study of selected third year level English student at a rural university.**

I would like to request that you take about 20 minutes of your time to respond to the questionnaire. Your participation is of paramount important since the researcher has chosen this group to solicit data on the register competence of students.

✚ Have you ever heard of Register?

1. yes	2. no
--------	-------

✚ How many registers do you know in English language?

1. five	2. four	3. three	4. two
---------	---------	----------	--------

✚ How often do you pay attention to your register in academic writing?

Sometimes	Always	Never	Rarely	Uncertain	Unconscious
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✚ Which register do you use in your academic writing?

.....

.....

.....

✚ What features of the register do you consider when writing assignments?

.....

.....

.....
.....

✚ How do you inspect the appropriateness of the register in written work?

.....
.....
.....

✚ What aspects of spoken language do you avoid in academic writing?

.....
.....
.....

APPENDIX C: SUMMARY OF TRANSCRIPTIONS

1. Have you ever heard of register in English language?

Participant 1: No

Participant 2: No

Participant 3: Yes

Participant 4: Yes

Participant 5: Yes

Participant 6: yes

Participant 7: yes

Participant 8: yes

Participant 9: yes

Participant 10: yes

Participant 11: yes

Participant 12: yes

Participant 13: yes

Participant 14: yes

Participant 15: yes

2. How many registers do you know in English language?

Participant 1: two

Participant 2: one

Participant 3: three

Participant 4: two

Participant 5: two

Participant 6: two

Participant 7: two

Participant 8: one

Participant 9: three

Participant 10: three

Participant 11: three

Participant 12: two

Participant 13: one

Participant 14: two

Participant 15: two

3. How often do you care about the register usage?

Participant 1: sometimes

Participant 2: once in a while

Participant 3: always

Participant 4: never

Participant 5: always

Participant 6: sometimes

Participant 7: never

Participant 8: sometimes

Participant 9: once in a while

Participant 10: never

Participant 11: always

Participant 12: sometimes

Participant 13: once in a while

Participant 14: always

Participant 15: never

4. Which register do you use in your academic writing?

Participant 1: Formal

Participant 2: academic register

Participant 3: acceptable format

Participant 4: formal

Participant 5: formal

Participant 6: English language register

Participant 7: formal

Participant 8: formal

Participant 9: formal

Participant 10: formal

Participant 11: acceptable format

Participant 12: accurate register

Participant 13: appropriate register

Participant 14: formal

Participant 15: formal

5. What features do you use to decide the appropriate usage of register in your discourse?

Participant 1: contractions and slangs in academic writing

Participant 2: avoidance on the use of phrasal verbs in written work

Participant 3: I do not use personal pronouns in formal writing.

Participant 4: I do not use idiomatic and ambiguous statements in my writings.

Participant 5: I do not believe that the clichés and idioms should be in formal writing.

Participant 6: I often inspect the length of my paragraph responses in essay.

Participant 7: the use of passive voices

Participant 8: using contractions.

Participant 9: avoid using colloquial language.

Participant 10: use of double negation

Participant 11: use of casual words

Participant 12: use of non-standard vocabulary

Participant 13: presence of incomplete sentences

Participant 14: use of phrasal verbs in a piece of writing

APPENDIX D: ESSAY TOPICS

Every student is expected to choose one topic to write an essay of 150-300 words. Essays will be used to elicit the data for register competence. (The students will be given these essay topics to choose the most interesting topics for themselves among these listed below to demonstrate the register competence in academic writing.)

- 1) The unforgettable experience of my life
- 2) My experience as a first-level student at the University of Venda
- 3) The day that I will never forget.

APPENDIX E: UHDC APPROVAL LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR: ACADEMIC

TO : MR/MS I. ZITHA
SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

FROM: PROF. J.E CRAFFORD
DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR: ACADEMIC

DATE : 26 NOVEMBER 2019

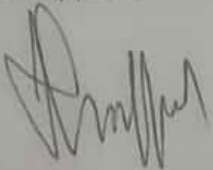
DECISIONS TAKEN BY UHDC OF 26th NOVEMBER 2019

Application for approval of Masters Proposal Report in Human and Social Sciences: I. Zitha (140114323)

Topic: "Register competence in academic writing: A Case study of third level English students at a rural university."

Supervisor	UNIVEN	Dr. M.N Lambani
Co-supervisor	UNIVEN	Mr. V.T Bvuma

UHDC approved Masters proposal



PROF. J.E CRAFFORD
DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR: ACADEMIC

APPENDIX F: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:

Mr I Zitha

STUDENT NO:

14011423

PROJECT TITLE: **Register competence in academic writing: A case study of third level English students at the University of Venda, Limpopo Province.**

PROJECT NO: SHSS/20/ENG/01/2708

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr MN Lambani	University of Venda	Supervisor
Mr VT Bvuma	University of Venda	Co - Supervisor
Mr I Zitha	University of Venda	Investigator - Student

Type: **Masters Research**

Risk: **Minimal risk to humans, animals or environment**

Approval Period: **August 2020 – August 2022**

The Research Ethics Social Sciences Committee (RESSC) hereby approves your project as indicated above.

General Conditions

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following.

- * The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the REC:
 - Annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project
 - Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
 - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- * The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the REC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- * The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date; a new application must be made to the REC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- * In the interest of ethical responsibility, the REC retains the right to:
 - Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project,
 - To ask further questions; Seek additional information; Require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - Any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected.
 - It becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the REC or that information has been false or misrepresented.
 - The required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,
 - New institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary

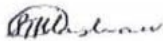
ISSUED BY:

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Date Considered: July 2020

Name of the RESSC Chairperson of the Committee: Prof Takalani Samuel Mashau

Signature:



Director Research and Innovation

Signature: ...



28 August 2020



APPENDIX G: PLAGIARISM REPORT

Register competence in academic writing: A case of third level student educators at the University of Venda, Vhembe District, Limpopo Province.

ORIGINALITY REPORT

20%	20%	0%	%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	files.eric.ed.gov Internet Source	8%
2	mafiadoc.com Internet Source	7%
3	eduj.uowasit.edu.iq Internet Source	5%

APPENDIX G: EDITING CERTIFICATE

PROOF OF EDITING

5 March, 2023

This is to certify that I, Dr P Kaburise, have proofread the dissertation titled - **REGISTER COMPETENCE IN ACADEMIC WRITING: A CASE OF THIRD-LEVEL ENGLISH STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**- by Innocent Zitha (student number: 14011423). I have indicated some amendments which the student has undertaken to effect before the final dissertation is submitted.



Dr P Kaburise (0794927451/ 0637348805; email: phyllis.kaburise@gmail.com)

Dr P Kaburise: BA (Hons) University of Ghana (Legon, Ghana); MEd University of East Anglia (Cambridge/East Anglia, United Kingdom); Cert. Teaching English as a Foreign Language (Cambridge University, United Kingdom); Cert. English Second Language Teaching, (Wellington, New Zealand); PhD University of Pretoria (South Africa).