



An investigation of the specific writing difficulties of tertiary level Business Communication students in Botswana

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DECLARATION

I, Sivaraj Babu Plapparambil Nadaraja Pillai, declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. I also confirm that the work presented is entirely my own and that the research to which I referred from other sources in this thesis was referenced and acknowledged according to the norms and conventions of North-West University, South Africa.

I have adhered to the University's guidelines for the ethical conduct of research (including data collection procedures) and obtained ethical clearance (NWU-00718-21-S7) from the Ethics Committee for Language Matters at the NWU for the study. I also obtained prior permission from the participants and the authority of the college where the investigation was conducted. I kept all the data collected stored in a safe location and maintained the confidentiality of all participants.

Signature

P.N. Sivaraj Babu.

Date

DEDICATION

This study, “An investigation of the specific writing difficulties of tertiary level Business Communication students in Botswana”, is dedicated to ESL lecturers worldwide, especially English lecturers in Botswana who teach business communication courses. I hope that my study will assist them in better supporting the development of their tertiary students' English business writing skills towards becoming more efficient writers of business documents.

PREFACE

The study, “An investigation of the specific writing difficulties of tertiary level business communication students in Botswana”, highlights the specific writing difficulties of tertiary students in Botswana. The results indicate that students experience considerable writing difficulties, specifically in writing business documents. The specific areas of writing difficulties were explored in this study, and suggestions and recommendations were proposed to address such matters productively. Recommendations were also made for future research in the field of business communication.

The thesis consists of five chapters: (1) Introduction, (2) Literature review, (3) Research methodology, (4) Data presentation, analysis and interpretation, and (5) Recommendations and conclusion. The researcher believes that this study could assist ESL lecturers with the provision of appropriate writing support in Business Communication courses at tertiary institutions in Botswana, towards students becoming more efficient business writers.

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ABSTRACT

The writing of professional business documents in English appears to be a challenging endeavour for tertiary students all over the world. Since English writing skills are seen as one of the priority skills required when graduates seek employment, the writing difficulties often experienced by such graduates could affect their chances of securing employment negatively. In this context, the current study investigated the writing ability of tertiary students at a specific tertiary college in Botswana (hereafter referred to as the ABCD) with specific reference to their writing of appropriate business documents. All these students have to complete a Business Communication course in their first year (An Introduction to Business Communication [IBC]), where the writing of business documents is addressed as part of the course.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted as a first step in order to determine the general academic writing difficulties of tertiary students in Africa, as well as the specific writing difficulties of such students in writing professional documents related to a business context. The literature survey further wished to establish whether writing difficulties were limited to tertiary students in Africa or if such difficulties were experienced internationally. Secondly, the researcher wanted to determine empirically whether the IBC students at the ABCD experienced writing difficulties with respect to the writing of business (and general academic) documents both before and after they completed the first year IBC course. Because the Business Communication course needed to prepare the students adequately for the writing of appropriate business documents in the world of work, the study further determined whether students who were busy with their internships (during their 4th year) at various prospective employers in Botswana met the expectations of such employers concerning the writing of professional business documents. Various additional data sets were also collected in order to verify the appropriateness of the IBC course at the ABCD. These included an analysis of the learning outcomes of the IBC course compared with the typical outcomes of other Business Communication courses, an analysis of the final examination papers of the IBC course, relevant information collected from the lecturers who presented the course, as well as observations on how the writing aspect of the course was taught by these lecturers. The results of all these investigations were then used to propose a possible adjustment to the current business writing intervention at the ABCD to address the specific writing difficulties of the IBC students more effectively, as well as to respond more effectively to the expectations of employers.

Key terms: Academic writing of tertiary/university students, academic writing skills, academic writing difficulties, business writing skills, business writing difficulties, professional business documents, written business communication, skills for graduate employability.

OPSOMMING

Om professionele besigheidsdokumente in Engels te skryf, blyk 'n uitdagende taak vir tersiêre studente regoor die wêreld te wees. Aangesien goeie skryfvaardighede in Engels as een van die prioriteitsvaardighede beskou word wanneer graduandi aansoek doen vir werk, kan skryfprobleme wat graduandi ervaar juis hul kans op indiensneming verskraal. Teen hierdie agtergrond ondersoek die huidige studie die skryfvermoë van tersiêre studente aan 'n spesifieke tersiêre kollege in Botswana (verder verwys na as die ABCD), met spesifieke verwysing na hul vermoë om gepaste besigheidsdokumente te skryf. Al die studente moet in hul eerstejaar 'n kursus in besigheidskommunikasie voltooi ('n Inleiding tot Besigheidskommunikasie [IBC]) waar die skryf van besigheidsdokumente 'n spesifieke deel van die kursus uitmaak.

As 'n eerste stap is 'n omvattende literatuuroorsig gedoen om te bepaal watter skryfprobleme tersiêre studente in Afrika oor die algemeen ervaar, maar ook watter spesifieke skryfprobleme hierdie studente het wanneer hulle professionele dokumente vir 'n sakekonteks moet skryf. Die literatuurstudie het verder beoog om vas te stel of die skryfprobleme beperk is tot tersiêre studente in Afrika, en of sodanige probleme ook internasionaal ervaar word. Tweedens wou die navorser empiries bepaal of die IBC-studente aan die ABCD skryfprobleme ervaar het met betrekking tot die skryf van besigheids- (en algemene akademiese) dokumente sowel voor as na voltooiing van die eerstejaar IBC-kursus. Omdat dit belangrik was dat die kursus in besigheidskommunikasie die studente voldoende voorberei vir die skryf van gepaste besigheidsdokumente in die sakewêreld, het die studie verder bepaal of studente (tydens hul vierde jaar) wat toe besig was met hul internskappe by verskeie toekomstige werkgewers in Botswana, aan die verwagtinge voldoen wat sodanige werkgewers stel vir die skryf van professionele besigheidsdokumente. Verskeie addisionele datastelle is ook ingesamel om die geskiktheid van die IBC-kursus aan die ABCD te bepaal. Dit sluit onder andere in 'n analise van die leeruitkomstes van die IBC-kursus en hoe dit met die tipiese uitkomstes van ander besigheidskommunikasiekursusse vergelyk, 'n analise van die finale eksamenopstelle van die IBC-kursus, die insameling van relevante inligting van die dosente wat die kursus aangebied het, sowel as waarnemings wat gemaak is oor hoe die skryfaspek van die kursus deur hierdie dosente aangebied is. Die resultate van al hierdie ondersoeke is gebruik om 'n moontlik aanpassing voor te stel vir die huidige intervensie van besigheidskryfwerk by die ABCD om die spesifieke skryfprobleme van die IBC-studente meer effektief te hanteer, maar ook om meer doeltreffend te reageer op die verwagtinge van werkgewers.

Sleuteltermes: Akademiese skryfwerk van universiteit-/tersiêre studente, akademiese skryfvaardighede, akademiese skryfprobleme, besigheidskryfvaardighede, probleme met besigheidskryfwerk, professionele besigheidsdokumente, geskrewe besigheidskommunikasie, vaardighede vir die indiensneembaarheid van gegradueerdes.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Assessment Instruments
BC	Business Communication
BQA	Botswana Qualifications Authority
CA	Continuous Assessment
CF	Corrective Feedback
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EBC	English for Business Communication
ECLM	Ethics Committee for Language Matters
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Special Purposes
ETP	Education and Training Provider
GLH	Guided Learning Hours
GZU	Great Zimbabwe University
HE	Higher Education
IBC	Introduction to Business Communication
L2	Second Language
L1	First Language
NCQF	National Credit Qualifications Framework
NCW	National Commission on Writing
NDA	Non-Disclosure Agreement
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NWU	North-West University
QF	Qualifications Framework
RQF	Regulated Qualifications Framework
SA	Summative Assessment
UCC	University of Cape Coast

UK United Kingdom

UMat University of Mines and Technology

WBC Written Business Communication

WCF Written Corrective Feedback

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Chen Hsieh *et al.* (2017:21), English is the most influential international language in the world, and increasingly more people have been studying exhaustively in an attempt to master English language skills. Compared to native language learners, there are fewer opportunities for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) learners to practise their language skills (Liu & Chu, 2010:643).

As stated by Rani (2015:1), communicative competence in English plays many roles in an individual's development. It increases employability opportunities, enables international collaboration, provides access to research and information, and facilitates international mobility. The ability to explain one's meaning clearly and concisely through both written and spoken language is one of the top-ranked employability soft skills that graduates require (National Commission on Writing, 2004). Employers expect their employees to draft mails of different kinds conveying respect, interest, motivation, or send orders in an appropriate style and tone, write reports describing an event or a project, write memos in an informal or professional style, write newsletters, press releases, draft minutes and agendas for meetings, draft resumes and cover letters and respond to customer complaint letters.

Pheko and Molefhe's (2017:455-469) investigation addressing the employability challenges in Botswana found that the current education system in the country does not prepare the younger generation adequately for the requirements of the job market. One of the reasons that they pointed out is the graduates' lack of employability skills. The study emphasises that communication skills are among the top employability skills that graduates should possess. An adequate level of writing proficiency in English equips undergraduate students at the tertiary level to succeed in their academic studies as well as to compete successfully for employment opportunities. The same view is shared by Brown (2012:20-29) who notes that employers are interested in employing well-rounded graduates who possess good communication skills, one of the prominent skills among the generic skills.

In Botswana, English is the language employed at the workplace. It is also the official medium of instruction at every level of education (including universities). Because the large majority of students are second-language users of English in Botswana, they experience difficulty writing

adequately in English (Magogwe & Nkateng, 2018:1-6). In the context of tertiary education specifically, Ntereke and Ramoroka (2015:45) comment that undergraduate students at the University of Botswana had challenges in writing academic essays of different genres. According to them, the undergraduate ESL students at the University of Botswana had difficulty in transferring the writing skills they gained from an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course to their different disciplines.

According to Magogwe *et al.* (2015:20-28), students in Botswana also experience the writing problems that tertiary students generally experience. In their study, 'Developing student-writers' self-efficacy beliefs', they point out that the undergraduate students had difficulty in the correct usage of grammar, spelling and punctuation. Students also failed to express ideas coherently and often struggled with the practice of citation and referencing.

Sharing the same view, Ntereke and Ramoroka (2018:81:95) point out that the quality of students' writing has a pronounced effect on their academic success. Investigating the academic writing needs and challenges of postgraduate students in an L2 context at the University of Botswana, Ntereke and Ramoroka (2018:81:95) found that students experienced difficulty with respect to the logical presentation of ideas as well as writing academic essays and professional documents suitable for a specific audience.

Integration of sources in academic writing also seems to be a challenge for tertiary students in Botswana. According to Ramoroka (2014:1-17), undergraduate students in Botswana have difficulties in terms of using appropriate reporting verbs to cite a source to persuade the reader or support an argument in their written documents. Similarly, Ummnakwe and Pitse (2017:31-43) investigated the quality of written essays of students at the University of Botswana and stated that students, for example, encountered substantial difficulties in writing well-structured introductory paragraphs that could arouse a reader's interest.

Magogwe and Nkateng (2018:1-6) share the same view about the undergraduate students of Botswana with reference to their writing skills. They confirm that, in general, first-year students from all faculties and disciplines find essay writing difficult at the University of Botswana. De Beaugrande (2000:331-349), an English communication lecturer at the University of Botswana, specifically pointed out that learners were not adequately prepared for technical courses such as an 'Introduction to Accounting', due to their inadequate exposure to business English.

Apart from the difficulties tertiary students experience with English writing in an educational context, a lack of English proficiency may not only make oral and written communication very

difficult in the workplace but may also tarnish the image of the organisations that employ graduates who still lack proficiency in English (Pilane 2004:89-111). In this context, Pilane (2004:89-111) reports students' difficulties in communicating effectively in written and spoken English at the Botswana Institute of Administration and Commerce (BIAC). Nkateng and Wharton (2015:198) further conducted a case study among Social Work students at the University of Botswana and stated that students experienced difficulties in writing workplace reports as their supervisors expected the students to use language appropriate for effective workplace reports.

The studies discussed above are a clear indication that tertiary students in Botswana experience writing difficulties in English. Specific writing difficulties reported include the correct application of concord rules, using appropriate words to produce the intended effect for a specific audience and purpose (style) and using appropriate punctuation (Magogwe & Nkateng, 2018:1-6; Magogwe *et al.*, 2015:20-28; Ntereke & Ramoroka, 2015:45; and Umunnakwe & Pitse, 2017:31-43). Students further struggle to establish a logical connection between words, sentences and paragraphs (cohesion and coherence) (Magogwe & Nkateng, 2018:1-6; and Magogwe *et al.*, 2015:20-28). In addition, students have difficulty in choosing appropriate reporting verbs when citing sources for their written documents (Magogwe *et al.*, 2015:20-28; Ntereke & Ramoroka, 2015:45; Ramoroka, 2014:1-17; and Umunnakwe & Pitse, 2017:31-43).

Various studies have also been conducted in the rest of Africa on the writing difficulties of tertiary students. For example, a number of studies that focused on the writing problems among the undergraduate students at different universities in Ghana also revealed that students are facing difficulties in writing in English. Mireko-Gyimah (2014:23-43) conducted a study at the University of Mines and Technology (UMaT) in Ghana with the intention to measure proficiency levels of final year undergraduate students in written English and found that they committed different errors when they wrote in English. Adade-Yeboah and Owusu (2016:1-8) investigated the English writing skills of students at two private colleges in Ghana and found that most of the students' writing contained the inappropriate/flawed use of features of a specific method of development when writing essays. In this context, the method of development refers to the techniques for developing ideas in various types of essays, such as narrative, illustrative or descriptive essays. According to Adade-Yeboah and Owusu (2016:1-8), students had further difficulties in expressing the content with mechanical accuracy, which refers to the use of correct spelling and capitalisation for the chosen words and correct punctuation as per the demand of the specific topics/types of essays referred to above. A study by Gborsong *et.al.* (2015) that was conducted at the University of Cape Coast (UCC) in

Ghana identified students' needs with regard to communicative skills. They posited that students needed training to develop grammar and paragraph development skills, as they failed to express their ideas adequately.

Another concern is that although, for example, an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) intervention is in place for students at the University in Ghana, Nartey and Dorgbetor (2014:167-173) found that the failure rate was very high in the EAP programme.

As indicated above, although no studies exist on the context of business writing specifically, tertiary students at universities in Ghana generally experienced writing difficulties such as using the correct spelling of words, using concord rules correctly, choosing appropriate words according to a specific purpose and audience, organising ideas coherently and structuring it logically (Mireku-Gyimah, 2014:23-43; Adade-Yeboah and Owusu, 2016:1-8; Gborsong *et.al.*, (2015); and Nartey and Dorgbetor, 2014:167-173).

The case of undergraduate students in South Africa in terms of writing in English is also not much different from the conditions stated above. Chokwe (2013:377-383) pointed out that various factors contribute to the generally low academic writing ability of first-year university students in South Africa. One such factor is, in many cases, that students are not prepared adequately for the context of tertiary-level writing because this is not the focus for the teaching of writing at school level. Other factors include learners being disadvantaged as a result of attending classes at under-resourced schools and inferior schooling conditions, as well as inadequate reading abilities. According to Chokwe (2013), there is often little connection between what happens with the teaching of writing in secondary schools and what happens in tertiary education. Therefore, the "high school curriculum contributes very little to the tertiary education curriculum, particularly in the teaching of writing" (Chokwe, 2013:381). According to Pineteh (2014:12-22), it is challenging for many students to uphold the standard of academic writing that is required at tertiary institutions, with specific reference to those students studying at South African Universities of Technology. Tanga and Maphosa (2018:1-35) explored the multitude of academic challenges, including problems of writing, in an article titled 'Academic hurdles facing undergraduate students at one South African University'. In this article, Tanga and Maphosa (2018) point out that students find it difficult to quote sources correctly, paraphrase sources of information effectively and choose appropriate words (diction) and style to express their ideas while writing both academic (assignments) and professional texts (letters and emails) suitable for the purpose and audience. The English writing difficulties of Black undergraduate students in South Africa were also exposed by Banda (2017:7-20). According to the researcher, students had challenges in selecting appropriate vocabulary

suitable for their written texts, formulating linguistic and argument structures and distinguishing between the non-formal and formal (academic) styles of English.

Zimbabwe is yet another country that appears to experience similar problems to those outlined above. Gonye *et al.* (2012:71-83) conducted a study among first-year university students at the Great Zimbabwe University (GZU). The study revealed that these students' written papers were riddled with a multiplicity of weaknesses with respect to stylistic concerns (spelling, punctuation and format), as well as grammatical, expressive and rhetorical errors. Therefore, in the African context, the inadequate writing ability of tertiary students in general appears to be a persistent problem at many tertiary institutions.

However, the writing difficulties of tertiary students are not limited to the African context. Similar writing difficulties are also noted by a number of international scholars at universities abroad.

In a study that focused on undergraduate students at the Arts and Science College in India, Arputhamalar and Kannan (2017:90) found that, in general, the writing proficiency of tertiary-level students in India is a matter of concern. Another study involved ten recruiters of MBA graduates as participants. In this study, Sivakiri and Thiyagarajan (2016:234-245) found that a course on written communication that was presented by Anna University in India did not meet the expectations of the organisations that employed these recruiters. This course was offered to the MBA students of all the affiliated colleges of the university in response to students' poor proficiency in Business Correspondence (BC). The main inadequacies displayed in students' written communication were poor construction of sentences, an inability to apply appropriate business vocabulary, low levels of lexical competency and clarity, an inability to construct short and long sentences, poor paragraph construction skills, poor presentation skills, illogical constructions, as well as the inappropriate/incorrect use of grammar, tone and style.

Scholars in the United States of America (USA) further report on the consequences that employers face when they appoint staff with an inadequate writing ability. The report of the National Commission on Writing (NCW) for America's families, schools, and colleges (NCW, 2004) notes that companies in America could be spending up to \$3.1 billion per year to remedy their employees' writing deficiencies. Apart from the above, some intangible costs result from employees' inadequate writing skills. These include: (a) a company's image being tarnished; (b) productivity that is impacted negatively; and (c) when badly written material causes poor business decisions to be made.

Pittenger *et al.* (2006:263) identified a significant deficiency in the writing proficiency of Business Communication students at Ashland University, Ohio. The primary objectives of the Business Communication course focus on improving the students' written skills in the business environment, such as the writing of business letters and memo writing, as well as the writing of resumes, cover letters and individual and group business reports. Despite these objectives, Pittenger *et al.* (2006:263) found that overall performance was inadequate, as students were unable to transfer their basic writing skills to different genres, specifically writing in the business environment. Students experienced difficulty in writing effective topic sentences, structuring sentences logically, choosing appropriate vocabulary, using words efficiently and writing in a style suitable for the purpose and the audience.

Furthermore, Quible and Griffin (2007:32) argue that inadequate writing proficiency among a substantial proportion of students in the USA is "creating a lost generation of business writers". The researchers conducted a quasi-experimental research study at Oklahoma State University on the writing skills of Business Communication students in 2004, 2006 and 2007. As a result of various writing difficulties experienced by students, these researchers recommended a modified sentence-combining technique as an intervention. In this approach, following the identification and correction of errors, students were given explicit explanations regarding the rules governing those errors. Initially, students were provided with a list of errors and exercises which contained grammar, punctuation and writing style errors. In the first stage, students were asked to label and correct the errors. The researcher then analysed the results in the second stage. Thereafter, the instructor explained the rules related to those specific errors. In the final stage, students were given the same sentences for correction, and the researcher recorded the progress. Generally, the results of the study were promising since the number of errors was reduced when compared to the first stage. The question remained, however, whether these students would be able to produce sentences of their own without grammar, punctuation and writing style errors since they were only instructed to correct the specific errors in the given exercises.

Andrews and Higson (2008:411-422) carried out research among fifty participants in the United Kingdom, Australia, Slovenia and Romania. The study sample consisted of thirty business graduates and twenty employers and focused on how individuals experienced the importance of communication skills and other interpersonal competencies in transitioning from the context of education to the job market. The most important finding of this study was that all the employers in the above countries expected high proficiency in writing and presentation skills from their employees. The study confirms the importance of effective written and oral

communication in the workplace and, therefore, also the responsibility of tertiary educational institutions to prepare students adequately for such communicative requirements.

Students' inadequacies in organising ideas, usage of grammar, creating clarity and coherence in the construction of sentences and writing in a suitable style that is appropriate for a specific audience were also pointed out by Lentz (2013:474-490) in her study of the inadequate writing skills of MBA students' workplace writing. The study involved 63 students who either previously had full-time or part-time employment, or who were at the time employed at various institutions such as financial institutions, manufacturing companies and different government institutions. All students were enrolled full-time in an online MBA programme. The participants included students from or living in Asia, Eastern Europe, as well as in the Northeast, Southeast, West Coast, Southern, and Midwestern regions of the United States. The researcher employed a mixed method approach that included a quantitative Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis and qualitative content analyses. Data collection was done by means of conducting interviews with participants. The results of this study indicate that there was a mismatch between what employers expected and employees' actual ability to write business documents.

As is evidenced from the studies discussed above that focus on the African context as well as an international context, the writing difficulties of tertiary students are a matter of concern. In the context of Botswana specifically, studies by De Beaugrande (2000:331-349), Brown (2012:20-29), Magogwe *et al.* (2015:20-28), Magogwe and Nkateng (2018:1-6), Ntereke and Ramoroka (2018:81-95), Pheko and Molefhe (2017:455-469), Pilane (2004:89-111), Ramoroka (2014:1-17), Umunnakwe and Pitse (2017:31-43) reflect the specific writing problems of undergraduate students at the University of Botswana and other tertiary institutions. However, for the context of tertiary education in Botswana, only the study by De Beaugrande (2000:331-349) has reported on the difficulties of tertiary students with respect to the writing of business documents specifically. There is, therefore, a need to investigate formally whether Business Communication students in Botswana are facing challenges in business writing and, if so, what the reasons could be for such challenges, as well as how they could be rectified.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

As discussed above, proficient writing in general, but also more specifically the writing of professional documents for the business environment, is a challenge for tertiary students worldwide. Possible reasons for students' business writing difficulties include, according to Miew Luan, Megala, Sumathy, Thomas Alwa, Toong, and Prakash (2024:637) that: "students

struggle with business writing due to a combination of factors, including the state of having limited vocabulary, insufficient grammatical expertise, lack of practice and motivation”.

Another reason for students' challenges in business writing is their lack of experience in writing in real-world situations. For example, a case study conducted by Nkateng and Kasule (2016:141) at the University of Botswana found that the transition from university writing to workplace writing is difficult because students were not trained in workplace writing.

Attempts have also been made to address students' writing difficulties in this specific context. Scholars such as Arputhamalar and Kannan (2017:84-90), Chand (2014:521), Pittenger *et al.* (2006:263), Sivakiri and Thiyagarajan (2016:245), Andrews and Higson (2008:422), Quible and Griffin (2007:36), Lentz (2013:490) and Nkateng and Wharton (2015:198) emphasise the importance of active intervention and instructional support to promote higher levels of proficiency in student writing. Often, such interventions take the form of some kind of Business Communication (BC) course. Such courses are regularly the only opportunity to develop students' business writing skills. They are often embedded in the business studies curriculum and facilitated as a fundamental module during the first year of study. It is further evident from the literature discussed above concerning employer expectations that the impact of such courses and the instructional support that are in place do not necessarily have the desired effect on the development of adequate business writing skills among the tertiary students.

A substantial body of literature is available internationally on the writing difficulties of students in business-related disciplines. Specific writing errors have been identified by a number of these studies. Arputhamalar and Kannan (2017:84-90), Chand (2014:521), Pittenger *et al.* (2006:257-263), Andrews and Higson (2008:411-422), Quible and Griffin (2007:8-24), Lentz (2013:474-490) and Nkateng and Wharton (2015:182-198) all identified specific errors as typical of students' inadequate writing ability within a business writing context specifically. These errors could be categorised broadly as: (1) sentence-level (mechanical) errors; and (2) structural level errors. Sentence-level errors constitute punctuation, grammar and writing style errors. Structural errors include inadequacies in organisation, content and choice of words. Failure to identify the purpose and the audience when writing is another reason for poor written communication. Three significant issues emerged from the studies mentioned above regarding specific efforts made to address low levels of student writing ability. These issues focus on: (1) strategies to promote proficiency in the use of correct grammar among Business Communication students; (2) an identification of the significant skills needed in Business Communication writing; and (3) effective instructional approaches that could be used to promote writing skills.

At the ABCD (the real name of the college is not revealed due to confidentiality reasons), the tertiary institution in Botswana at which this study is conducted, all new first-year students are required to complete a Business Communication course (an Introduction to Business Communication [IBC]) during the first semester of their first year. This is a short course worth 12 credits (120 notional learning hours) with a 4-month duration. Apart from this module, students at the ABCD are not provided with any other formal writing support. Anecdotal evidence from lecturers, assessors and moderators at the ABCD suggests that similar to the wider African and international context, students studying at this institution also display writing difficulties (such as making both structural and sentence level errors) when writing business documents. As noted above, however, the available literature is extremely limited concerning the difficulties that tertiary students in Botswana experience in their writing of business documents. The current study commences from this gap to investigate formally whether the IBC students at the ABCD have specific difficulties with business writing and, if so, whether the current writing intervention that forms part of the IBC course addresses students' writing difficulties satisfactorily to prepare them for meeting the writing expectations of future employers.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions would guide the study:

1. What are the general academic writing difficulties of tertiary students in Africa and the rest of the world, but also, more specifically, the writing difficulties of these students with respect to writing professional documents in a business context?
2. Do the IBC students at the ABCD experience specific writing difficulties with respect to the writing of general academic as well as professional business documents before and after the intervention of the IBC module, and, if so, are such difficulties similar to those experienced by other tertiary-level Business Communication students in Africa and further abroad?
3. Do Business Communication students from the ABCD meet the expectations of employers with respect to the writing of professional business documents?
4. How do the learning outcomes of the syllabus for the IBC module at the ABCD relate to the typical outcomes of other available tertiary courses in Business Communication?

5. Are any changes required to adjust the learning outcomes (and, therefore, content) of the IBC course at the ABCD to address the specific writing difficulties of the students more effectively, as well as respond more effectively to the expectations of employers?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Conduct a survey of the relevant literature to determine the already described general academic writing difficulties of students in Africa and the rest of the world, but also the specific writing difficulties of these students with respect to the writing of professional documents related to the business context.
2. Determine whether the IBC students at the ABCD experience specific writing difficulties with respect to writing general academic and professional business documents before and after the intervention of the IBC module. Furthermore, the study sought to compare these challenges with the broader difficulties experienced in business writing by students in Africa and other parts of the world.
3. Determine whether Business Communication students from the ABCD meet the expectations of employers with respect to writing professional business documents.
4. Analyse the learning outcomes of the IBC course at the ABCD and to firstly compare such outcomes with the typical outcomes of other Business communication courses, but then also with the expectations of employers with respect to the writing of business documents, as well as with the specific writing difficulties of the IBC students.
5. Propose a possible adjustment to the current business writing intervention at the ABCD (if necessary) to address the specific writing difficulties of IBC students more effectively, as well as respond more effectively to the expectations of employers.

1.4.1 Researcher's declaration

The research will be carried out at the ABCD, a private tertiary college in Gaborone, Botswana. The participants in this study are all students and lecturers from the ABCD. The researcher will further sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) with the director of the ABCD to maintain confidentiality and not disclose the real name of the college.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to meet the objectives of this study, the researcher will make use of a mixed-methods research design using both quantitative and qualitative data. According to Johnson *et al.* (2007:133), “mixed method research refers to a research approach in which a researcher or research team combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches for the purpose of understanding and corroboration”. Mixed method research is therefore often used to gain a deeper understanding of what is being investigated, but can also provide additional confirmation of certain aspects of the research. In this study, both qualitative and quantitative data sets will be compared and integrated towards providing answers to the research questions posed above. Therefore, the results of the qualitative data analyses will be used to explain and clarify aspects in the results of the quantitative data analysis and *vice versa*.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As a first step, a detailed literature survey will be conducted to determine the general academic writing difficulties of tertiary students and specific writing difficulties in the writing of business documents in an African context, as well as in the rest of the world. The literature survey will, therefore, focus on answering the first research question of the study.

The empirical part of the study is divided into five different phases. Phase 1 involves a pre-achievement test to be written by the first-year students at the ABCD addressing the second research question of the study. For Phase 2, a post-achievement test for the same group of first-year students, together with the fourth-year students at the same college, will be written. Both achievement tests will address the second research question. Phase 3 consists of two surveys, one that involves the fourth-year students who are on internship at various organisations (the same group of students who took part in the post-achievement test) and another involving employers who facilitate the fourth-year students’ internships. These two surveys should provide an answer to the third research question. Activities in Phase 4 focus on document analysis (designed to address research questions 4 and 5), and Phase 5 constitutes interviews, lesson observations and document analysis (related to research question 5). The specific participants, instruments and research methods of each phase are described below.

1.6.1 Phase 1: Participants, research instruments and research method

This phase of the study aims to determine first-year students’ academic writing ability as well as their ability to write business documents before they commence with the IBC module at the beginning of their first year of studies at the ABCD. The participants who are involved in this

phase are, therefore, the first-year students and the two lecturers of the IBC module. The first-year student enrolment at the ABCD usually includes 60 to 70 students every year. Hence, all first-year students will be part of the study (depending on their willingness to participate). These students pursue different degree qualifications such as BCom in Finance and Banking, BBA in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality, BBA in Logistics and Transport Management and BBA in Entrepreneurship.

As a result of first-year students presumably not having had much previous exposure to writing formal types of business documents at the secondary school level, the research instruments that would be used for this phase of the study for a determination of their writing abilities have to include the production of types of texts that most students would have had some exposure to at secondary school. For this phase, therefore, the research instruments will comprise two written texts that students need to produce as part of a writing test. The two kinds of text they need to write during this test are an essay on a general topic as well as a business letter. The rubric-based assessment of the essay will focus on students' abilities in writing: (1) a purposeful introduction; (2) a comprehensive body; (3) a focused conclusion; and (4) how language was used. For the business letter writing, students will be required to write a scenario-based business letter in an email format. The assessment of the business letter (again according to a specific rubric) will evaluate students' abilities in using (1) the basic format of a letter; (2) the body of the letter, and (3) language use.

As noted above, this pre-achievement assessment will be scheduled to occur at a time when the first-year students' writing ability be assessed, prior to their arrival at the ABCD without having had exposure to tertiary education. The two lecturers responsible for grading the assessments will utilise a comprehensive rubric that has been standardised to ensure a mutual understanding of marks allocation. Furthermore, the researcher will provide the lecturers with copies of the same text for practice marking, which they will review and discuss after marking the text. The lecturers will reach a consensus prior to marking the texts.

1.6.2 Phase 2: Participants, research instruments and research method

Phase 2 of the study focuses on students' ability to write business documents after they have completed the IBC module. This module focuses on business communication and, among others, includes a section on the writing of business documents. Again, students will have to produce two texts, this time two kinds of business documents, to determine whether the IBC module has had any significant impact on their ability to write business documents. The participants for the post-achievement test would therefore again include the two lecturers of the IBC module as well as the same first-year students who participated in the pre-

achievement test. By this time, the participants would have completed the IBC course and will be preparing for their end-of-semester final examinations. An additional group of students, the fourth-year students, will also participate in the writing of the post-achievement test. These students completed their IBC module during their first year and will preparing to go for their internships at various organisations. The students are again registered for degree qualifications such as BCom in Finance and Banking, BBA in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality, BBA in Logistics and Transport Management and BBA in Entrepreneurship.

For the post-achievement test, both student groups will be required to write a formal report on a topic related to the business context, as well as a scenario-based business letter (again in e-mail format). For the assessment of the formal report, the following aspects will be evaluated: (1) the format and content of the report, (2) the construction of meaningful sentences, (3) the use of appropriate vocabulary, (4) functional paragraph use, (5) the use of grammar/mechanics, as well as the (6) style, tone and register of the report. The assessment of the students' business letters will focus on the same aspects as those discussed for the writing of the business letter in Phase-1 discussed above.

The post-achievement test will be conducted after the students have completed the IBC module. The main aim of this assessment is to determine whether the two groups of students' completion of the IBC module had any noticeable impact on the written business documents they produced. It is also important that the fourth-year students would have received substantial exposure to business related studying at a tertiary level, a factor that may enhance their proficiency in producing business documents. Similar to the assessment of the two types of texts in the pre-achievement test, the lecturers will again make use of a standardised rubric in order to mark the students' texts.

1.6.3 Phase 3: Participants, research instruments and research method

After assessing the students' writing abilities both before and after the IBC module intervention, this phase of the study explores the perspectives of workplace mentors and fourth-year internship students regarding the extent to which students from the ABCD meet the requirements of the workplace with regards to the business documents they produce in a professional environment.

The ABCD has standing arrangements with 25 organisations for facilitating internships for their fourth-year students every year. All workplace mentors from the 25 employers/organisations that facilitate such internships for the fourth-year students will take part in this phase of the

study. The same fourth-year students who participated in the post-test and who will be involved in their internships at different organisations will be part of this phase of the study.

Data for this phase of the study were obtained through two questionnaires, one for the workplace mentors and one for the fourth-year students (interns). The mentor questionnaire focused on collecting information about employers' expectations regarding their interns with regards to writing of professional documents related to the business context. Questions will address aspects such as: (1) how often the interns have to produce business-related written documents; (2) what kind of documents the interns have to write; (3) whether the business documents written by the interns meet employers' expectations about their effectiveness; (4) with what aspects/areas of business documents the interns experience most difficulty; (5) how satisfied they are with the writing skills of interns related to producing business documents (and if they were dissatisfied in general, what recommendations they would make to the management of ABCD in this respect).

The questionnaire used for the fourth-year students' survey focused on similar aspects to those in the mentor questionnaire. These include the following aspects: (1) the intervals at which the interns produced business-related documents during their internship, (2) the kinds of documents that they have to produce during their internship, (3) the type(s) of documents they find most difficult to produce, (4) which aspects/areas of the document(s) they find most difficult to produce and (5) whether the IBC module at the College prepared them well enough to write those documents to meet the expectations of their employers (again, in the case where the answer is negative to the last question, students also need to indicate what they think can be done to improve the course).

For the distribution of the questionnaires, the researcher personally distributed the questionnaires to the workplace mentors as well as the internship students. The employers' responses assisted the researcher in determining what was required of the interns in terms of the writing of business documents, as well as what their perceptions are of the quality of the documents produced by the interns. Apart from eliciting much of the same information (e.g. what business documents are they expected to write) as what is requested from the employers, the responses of the interns will indicate the interns' perceptions of whether they thought the IBC module prepared them well enough for the writing demands of the workplace.

1.6.4 Phase 4: Research participants, research instruments and research method

Phase 4 of the study focuses on how the outcomes contained in the syllabus of the IBC module at the ABCD compare with the outcomes of other tertiary Business Communication courses.

The researcher will, therefore, make use of a comparative matrix for this analysis that will include the outcomes of various Business Communication courses in order to determine what constitutes the typical outcomes for such courses. This analysis should assist the researcher in identifying possible additional/different outcomes that could enhance the effectiveness of the IBC module at the ABCD. Eventually, the results of the analysis will also be compared to the results of the first three phases of the study, that aim to establish the specific writing difficulties of students as well as the expectations of employers.

1.6.5 Phase 5: Research participants, research instruments and research method

Phase 5 of the study aims to collect information on a number of additional aspects that may provide valuable information on the writing intervention at the College. These include the perceptions of the two lecturers about the students' writing ability, as well as what they think about the adequacy of the IBC module towards preparing the students for the writing of business documents. For this component of the study, the researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews with the two IBC lecturers of the ABCD. Interview questions will focus on (1) the adequacy of the learning outcomes of the IBC module, (2) teaching methods lecturers use for the teaching of writing, (3) the specific Guided Learning Hours (GLH) provided for the module, (4) evaluation methods/criteria, (5) assessment instruments, and (6) lecturers' perceptions about their students' specific writing challenges.

The second focus addressed concerns the instructional practices that have taken place during lectures that focus on the development of the students' writing abilities. The researcher will, therefore, conduct lesson observations in one class lesson for each lecturer, specifically focusing on the teaching of writing. The observations of the researcher will focus on: (1) the content of the lesson plan, (2) the purpose of the lesson, (3) organisation of the teaching resources/materials with reference to the objectives of the lesson, (4) pedagogical strategies to meet the objectives such as error correction, instruction, explanation, feedback and evaluation, (5) the language of instruction and (6) the activities in which learners engage.

For the third aspect, the researcher will evaluate three past examination papers of the IBC module (the papers from 2017 to 2019) in order to determine whether these papers assess the actual ability of students to write appropriate business documents.

The final aspect of this phase will evaluate the adequacy of the textbook utilised for teaching the IBC module. The various themes in this textbook will be compared with those of other Business Communication textbooks or study guides to identify similarities and differences, as

well as to ascertain whether any important themes are omitted from the textbook used for the IBC module at the ABCD.

1.7 DATA ANALYSIS

All the different data sets collected in the five phases of this study will be used towards answering the research questions posed earlier in this Chapter. The specific methods of analysis for each data set are discussed comprehensively in Chapter 3, followed by the presentation of the data and the findings based on the analyses in Chapter 4.

In general, however, the data collected from the two texts written in the pre-test will be analysed according to a specific set of criteria that includes, among others, aspects such as the structure/format of the texts, the logical organisation and clarity of ideas and the language use on correctness and appropriateness for the texts. The two texts of the post-test will be analysed using similar criteria that would enable the researcher to compare the results for both sets of texts towards determining whether there is any difference in the performance of the students after having completed the IBC module.

The data obtained from the two questionnaires will also be compared with the outcomes of the two achievement tests to examine whether workplace mentors' perceptions regarding the adequacy of business documents produced by interns differ from the findings of the test data. The findings of the survey analyses would further be utilised to provide information on whether the IBC module at the College focuses on the priority written documents that interns are required to produce in the workplace.

The analyses of two of the additional data sets outlined in Table 4.53 involve a comparison of the learning outcomes of the IBC module with the learning outcomes of other Business Communication courses, as well as examining the themes contained in the textbook used for the IBC module and those of other Business Communication courses. The findings of these analyses will then be compared with the findings of the two questionnaires to evaluate the adequacy of the IBC module in addressing the priority business documents required in the workplace. Furthermore, the analyses of the other two additional data sets (i.e. the data collected from the lesson observations and the previous examination papers) will provide information on the adequacy of the IBC module, both regarding the teaching of the writing component as well as the appropriateness of the assessments, for example, whether the final examination accurately reflects the students' abilities.

In essence, therefore, the findings based on the analyses of all data sets collected for this study should contribute towards a determination of whether the current IBC module at the

ABCD adequately prepares students for the writing of appropriate business documents in the workplace.

1.8 CHAPTER DIVISION

With regard to the remainder of this study, the chapters concentrate on the following areas. Chapter 2 examines the relevant literature concerning students' writing difficulties across the world, including Botswana, the broader African context and other regions, addressing the challenges associated with academic writing, and the specific demands of composing professional business documents.

Chapter 3 offers a comprehensive discussion of the research methodology applied in the study, with particular reference to the data collection conducted in five distinct phases. This includes a discussion of the participants for each phase, the research instruments used for data collection, the process followed during data collection, as well as how the different data sets were analysed.

Chapter 4 includes the presentation of the data analyses as well as the findings based on these analyses for each of the five phases. Additionally, it presents a comparison of various datasets, all focused on providing answers to the research questions posed earlier in Chapter 1.

Chapter 5 concludes the study by demonstrating how each of the research questions has been addressed by the findings presented in Chapter 4. Most importantly, this Chapter also contains recommendations towards how the business writing intervention at the ABCD could be revised or augmented to provide more appropriate support to students towards their production of appropriate business documents.

1.9 ENVISAGED ETHICAL ISSUES

According to Armiger (1997:333), "... informed consent means that a person knowingly, voluntarily and intelligently, and in a clear and manifest way, gives his consent ..." to participate in a study. The participants in this study will be provided with all relevant information about the research (in a printed consent form), and they will not be coerced into giving consent. A permission letter from the North-West University (NWU) requesting the ABCD to allow the researcher to carry out the study will be sought. The research will be conducted at the ABCD, a private tertiary college in Gaborone. The students and lecturers who will participate in the study will all be from the ABCD. Participants will be informed that their participation or lack of participation in the study, will not influence their academic standing at the College. All

participants, including students, lecturers and workplace mentors, will be assured that they may withdraw from the study at any point in time without incurring any form of sanction. The data provided by students, lecturers and employers will be reported anonymously in the thesis, as well as in all other outputs, such as, academic conference papers or academic journal articles. Additionally, for the sake of confidentiality, the name of the College will not be disclosed throughout the study or in the resulting academic reports mentioned above.

The researcher will seek and obtain permission from the management of the ABCD to conduct interviews with the IBC lecturers, administer the pre- and post-achievement tests, and distribute the survey to fourth-year students. Prior consent will also be requested from the management of the ABCD and the IBC lecturers to observe their lessons. Permission will further be obtained from the employers to collect information from the workplace mentors regarding the writing performance of their interns.

Furthermore, ethical clearance for the study will be obtained from the NWU Ethics Committee for Language Matters (ECLM) and once obtained, will be provided to the management of the ABCD.

The information collected from participants will be treated confidentially and will be used anonymously. The electronically collected data will be secured by means of a password that will only be accessible to the researcher. The gathered written data will be stored anonymously and will be placed on a personal Google Drive protected by a password.

1.10 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The potential contribution of the study is twofold. Firstly, the results could be beneficial to the ABCD, specifically concerning the first formal identification and classification of students' writing difficulties, the collection of information about employer expectations and satisfaction concerning the business documents produced by the students of the ABCD and the possible adjustment of the IBC course based on the various data sets collected for the study. This could further lead to students becoming more efficient writers of business documents and, in turn, to more satisfied employers. The second contribution relates to the wider academic and business community that should be able to make use of this study's approach and findings in conceptualising their own investigations into the functionality of interventions to support the writing of business documents.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

A substantial body of literature is available that investigates the writing skills of tertiary-level students across the world.

The available literature that focuses on this issue in a tertiary academic context in Botswana specifically underlines the fact that students experience various difficulties with writing. Furthermore, students undertaking internship placements in various companies seem to experience difficulties in preparing appropriate business-related documents, as well as internship reports. This literature review examines the specific writing problems of tertiary students in Botswana as well as in the broader context of Africa and the rest of the world, focusing on both the general tertiary academic context and the business writing context. It also explores the business writing and employability skills of undergraduate students in Botswana, other countries in Africa, and the rest of the world.

2.2 Business writing and employability skills

Writing in the business context can be described as all forms of written texts used for communication, both inside organisations as well as with external audiences (Hollis-Turner & Scholtz, 2010:246). According to Hollis-Turner and Scholtz (2010:246): "Written business communication includes correspondence associated with enquiries, offers, orders, deliveries, acknowledgements, payments, complaints, credit applications, insurance or commercial correspondence, also extends to reports, proposals, memoranda, minutes, CVs, contracts, agreements, recommendations, summaries and abstracts". Distinguishing between academic and business writing, Vasquez (2013:97) asserted that; "Business writing may need to convince others, but the context and style are unlike those of an argumentative essay. A resume and a letter of presentation have to persuade a potential employer to offer an interview. A report has to convince employees to follow certain procedures in order to correct errors or problems in the company. A letter may try to motivate a customer to purchase a product or service". Business writing therefore needs to be tailored to elicit very specific reactions from the targeted audience.

As alluded to above, business writing is characterised by the fact that the target audience (reader) should always be considered in the appropriate selection of words, phrases, registers and forms of address (Maican, 2010:110). Writing in this context is therefore not merely an

exercise in demonstrating knowledge of a particular topic. In a business context, writing has a specific goal to achieve, which could involve, for example, influencing the attitude of the receiver or achieving a specific objective for the sender. The style and tone of business writing vary depending on the desired objectives, the status of the sender, the receiver and the situation. An important aim of tertiary education is to equip students with knowledge and experiences that would prepare them for real-life challenges, including communicating appropriately in written form within the business environment. However, tertiary students worldwide experience difficulty in writing business documents (Maican, 2010:110). This difficulty largely arises from their limited familiarity with the peculiarities and conventions of business writing. As already alluded to above, students often fail to understand that business writing differs from general writing in terms of the use of appropriate words and phrases suitable for the target audience. For example, students need to make use of an appropriate (often formal) 'register' and 'tone', depending on the specific audience and objectives. What is therefore especially important in business writing is that it is not only about 'what' is communicated but also 'how' it is communicated. According to Maican (2010:110), people often form their first impression of an organisation through various forms of business communication, such as emails, information provided in company brochures and content available on company websites. Therefore, effective business writing has a significant influence on the perspective of various stakeholders (Maican, 2010:110). Another reason that Maican (2010:110) identifies for students' poor business writing performance is their insufficient knowledge about the stages involved in the writing process, particularly from initial to final drafts. Therefore, training should be provided to learners in all stages of the writing process, including pre-writing, drafting, revising and editing. Insufficient language proficiency is also a cause of poor writing skills among tertiary students (Maican, 2010:110). An optimal command of the language could, for example, empower learners to choose appropriate words to reflect their intended ideas.

Andrews and Higson (2008:411-422) conducted a study that involved four European countries, i.e., the UK, Austria, Slovenia and Romania. The fifty participants who took part in the study included thirty business graduates and twenty employers. As its main objective, the study set out to identify the most important individual and business-related skills and competencies that employers of business graduates required. The study further aimed to establish whether business programmes in higher education responded adequately to the needs of the European labour market. The researcher employed semi-structured interviews to collect data. The graduate interview questions focused on gathering data regarding the graduates' insights into current employment conditions, including their expectations of employers, their perceptions of higher education (what they thought the objectives of higher

education were), and the experiences they gained from work-based learning and other work experiences. The questions also focused on the graduates' possession of competencies and skills focused on the business context as well as how useful they thought communication and interpersonal skills are in this context. The questions for the employer interview concentrated on similar issues to those of the graduate interviews. For example, questions focused on how graduates are recruited, as well as employers' expectations about essential graduate competencies required in the business context. These included, among others, their communication skills and interpersonal competencies. Employers' perceptions about the connection between higher education and business organisations, specifically their expectations that higher education should prepare graduates to meet organisational demands regarding relevant skills and competencies, were also elicited. Three major themes emerged from the research, each addressing distinct aspects of graduate employability. These include business-specific competencies, including hard business-related knowledge and skills, as well as soft business-related skills, such as interpersonal competencies, work experience, and learning acquired through work-based activities. A very significant finding of Andrews and Higson's study, which is directly relevant to the current research, is that the most important generic competency required of graduates is the development of advanced written communication skills (Andrews & Higson, 2008:411-422). Shanampoodi, (2016:44) also asserted that, in India, one factor that plays a pivotal role, especially in the service industry, is the competency of English, particularly, the spoken and written skills in facilitating the employability of graduates into both the private and public sectors.

If tertiary institutions aim to adequately prepare their business graduates for the workplace, students must receive support not only in academic writing, including adherence to the conventions of this context, but also in producing appropriate business documents. Writing support in this case often takes the form of a business communication course including a focus on business writing. Furthermore, competent business writing is already required during internships, which typically last 3 to 6 months and are often mandatory in many of the undergraduate business programmes. That is, usually during the final year of a degree programme, students are attached to organisations relevant to their field of study to gain industrial or workplace experience. At the ABCD, for example, students undertake their internship during the second semester of their fourth (final) year. During this period, students are expected to apply in the workplace the knowledge and skills that they have gained during their studies. Successful interns may subsequently be offered employment by the host organisations, depending on both their performance and the availability of vacancies. Therefore, the performance of undergraduate students in the workplace during their internship is crucial for possible future employment.

The effectiveness of undergraduate students' writing in the workplace is, however, debatable (Hollis-Turner & Scholtz, 2010:245). An important concern in this regard is that there are important differences between how business writing skills are applied in the workplace and in academic contexts. A major disparity that was pointed out by Hollis-Turner and Scholtz (2010:245) is the 'rate (or degree) of acceptance'. The rate of acceptance refers to the level exhibited by academic lecturers and workplace supervisors regarding students' or employees' writing deficiencies. For example, in the academic context, complete accuracy is not mandatory, as a passing mark of 50% is typically sufficient for tests or projects. That is, students' written work is accepted, and they can progress to the next level with 50% knowledge and skills achieved for written tests or projects during their academic journey. Moreover, students will often get a second or third opportunity to 'pass' if they have not achieved 50% the first time. They would therefore have an opportunity to take the written assessment multiple times and succeed.

Additionally, in the academic context, students are usually required to write business documents based on the requirements of specific subjects, following certain instructions and guidelines. In this setting, the target audience is their lecturers, and students are attempting to demonstrate their knowledge and skills for a specific subject by producing a business document in response to a question and its accompanying guidelines. At the same time, lecturers expect to see evidence of students being able to produce appropriate business letters, memoranda, reports or any other business document that adhere to the correct format and conventions. Assessment in this context is primarily based on how well the content aligns with the provided instructions and guidelines.

In the workplace context, however, employees are expected to present the content to the target audience to achieve a desired outcome. For example, their writing skills should be sufficient to enable them to draft a business letter that persuades a customer to place an order or write a report for a stakeholder seeking approval to initiate a new project. In the academic context, though, business writing is primarily focused on learning the formats and conventions of various business writing genres as part of subject knowledge. The assessment is therefore also focused on the evaluation of students' knowledge and skills in writing about a chosen topic using the correct format and genre characteristics of specific business documents. In the workplace, however, employees (and student interns) are expected to write to specific clients about something to satisfy their expectations or meet the desired objectives. Hence, as previously alluded to, the workplace demands a focus on both 'what' is written but also 'how' a document is written. Simply put, the purpose and the audience of business writing are different to those of academic writing. For academic writing, the focus is on students

demonstrating that they have mastered particular course material. In the case of business writing, however, the purpose is to achieve practical business goals. In the context of academic writing, the audience (reader) is the lecturer, who assesses and grades the writing, while in business writing, the audiences are more diverse, comprising both known and unknown.

In academic writing, the course content is generally known to both the writer and the receiver, but in business writing, in many cases, the reader is often unfamiliar with the content. In such instances, the writer must endeavour to arouse interest in the audience to facilitate the reading of the entire text and thereby elicit the intended response. To effectively achieve this purpose, the writer should possess a comprehensive understanding of the specific nature of business writing, including the tone, style, format and choice of words appropriate for the content of the documents. Therefore, recognising the difference in the writing of business documents in the academic and workplace contexts concerning its audiences and purposes, is of paramount importance for students. According to Hollis-Turner and Scholtz (2010:245), unless students are prepared to navigate the contextual disparities between business writing and academic writing, they will likely continue to encounter challenges in mastering business writing. In their transition from being students to novice employees, students should learn to transfer the knowledge and skills that they gained in business writing for the academic context and adapt it to the workplace context, suitable for the purpose and the audience in real-life situations. The inability to transfer and adapt writing skills acquired in the academic context to the workplace context is the biggest challenge novice employees encounter (Hollis-Turner & Scholtz, 2010:245).

One of the main requirements of business writing is that the writer must provide information that is accurate and reliable to colleagues and clients. Errors in business communication can have serious consequences, where, for example, an incorrect business document may result in the loss of productive hours, as such documents have to be reviewed and corrected. Moreover, since the writer acts as a representative of a particular organisation, poor writing can adversely affect the organisation's image and reputation. In this context, Greavu (2019:60) states that: "Bad writing can affect individuals and companies alike. It can cause confusion and misunderstanding, waste important resources of time and money, and erode credibility and trust".

According to Greavu (2019:61), "A business document can be problematic both at a macro level (poor planning, fuzzy progression and linkage between parts, faulty construction of paragraphs and sections) and at a micro-level (use of jargon and abstract words, wordiness, faulty or contorted grammar, inappropriate tone)". Although some criticism has been directed

at the prescriptive nature of Strunk and White's (2000:1-71) general guidelines for effective writing, a number of the basic conditions they propose for effective writing hold for most writing contexts. For example, according to them (Strunk & White, 2000:17), "A sentence should not contain any unnecessary words, and a paragraph should not have unnecessary sentences for the same reason that a drawing should not have any unnecessary lines and a machine any unnecessary parts". These conditions also relate to the specific nature of business documents. The language used in business documents should be direct, accurate and concise in nature. Unnecessary sentences and excessive use of adjectives and adverbs can make the documents unnecessarily long and divert the attention of the readers. This will also waste the reader's valuable time.

Pheko and Molefhe (2017:455-469) argue that addressing the importance of students' writing skills as part of the essential employability skills are required from graduates when they wish to enter the workplace. For this study, the researchers adopted a definition of employability that was provided by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES, 2010) and Yorke (2005). In this definition, 'employability' refers to: "the graduate's potential to gain the skills required to succeed in a graduate-level job placement" (Pheko & Molefhe, 2017:456). The researchers further compiled a list of employability skills utilising the studies of prominent scholars who studied "... the qualities, characteristics, skills and knowledge that constitute employability, both in general and specifically for graduates" (Pheko & Molefhe, 2017:456). Their analyses of these studies indicate that researchers such as Kay and Greenhill (2011:41-65) also emphasised the fact that specific skills are highly valued by employers, which included skills in problem-solving, writing and mathematical ability as well as specific attitudes (i.e. a positive attitude to do one's best at work and be accountable for his/her actions). Lowden *et al.* (2011:1-42) also identified certain priority employment skills such as graduates' skills in teamwork, communication, leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving and managerial abilities. Nair *et al.* (2009:131) asserted that "communication, decision-making, problem-solving, leadership, emotional intelligence and social ethics" are the skills important for employability. Similarly, Martin *et al.* (2008:1-65) identified 14 employability skills most of which are similar to those stated above. Pheko and Molefhe (2017:460) subsequently compiled a fundamental list of employability skills, organised according to their relative priority and importance. This arranged priority list contains the following skills: communication, literacy, commitment, team building, timekeeping, problem-solving, general information technology, personal presentation, customer care, business awareness and entrepreneurial aptitude.

In a context where students are actively preparing to become employable, it is crucial for them to begin developing employability skills prior to entering the workforce. Throughout the duration of their studies, students should cultivate an awareness of the key employability competencies required of them and proactively work to acquire and refine these skills before transitioning into the world of business. The empirical part of the Pheko and Molefhe (2017) study was therefore primarily concerned with examining students' awareness of employability skills. The study was carried out among 83 undergraduate students at the University of Botswana, and the data were collected by through online interviews. During the interviews, students were asked to: (1) identify and justify five characteristics they believed employers expect from them as university graduates; (2) indicate whether they considered themselves to possess employability skills; and (3) suggest measures that could enhance their future employability. The purpose of the first question was to test students' awareness of employability skills (i.e. what the prospective employers required of them). The second question was a self-assessment. That is, the question assessed whether they thought they possessed the identified employability skills. The third question focused on the actions students would take to develop the skills they did not possess regarding the identified employability skills, in order to become more employable. The results of this survey indicate that students were not aware of the most important employability skills, including communication, specifically, writing skills, that are crucial for entering the world of work. The participants had considerable difficulty in identifying the characteristics that they thought were priority for employers when they considered the employability of graduates. Similarly, their responses to question two indicated that the majority of respondents had little confidence in whether they possessed the required employability skills. In their answers to the third question, the majority of respondents indicated that in order for them to become more employable, both employers and universities should advise them about priority employability skills as well as provide opportunities for voluntary work, internships, and part-time employment before their graduation.

Importantly, Pheko and Molefhe (2017) further emphasise that if university students lack awareness of these important employability skills, it is unlikely that they will proactively engage in developing these skills (including key employability soft skills such as communication skills and writing skills) themselves. The graduates' (novice employees') possession of essential employability skills upon entering the labour market will benefit employers as it reduces the training cost for them. It is essential that educational institutions recognise and prioritise the development of these skills. Therefore, what may be required in this instance is a sustained partnership between the curriculum developers of tertiary institutions and the consultants of industry. Specifically, the developers of the curriculum should conduct 'skills needs surveys'

in consultation with relevant industry stakeholders and align the learning outcomes of their courses to emphasise the development of key employability skills. The learning outcomes should equip graduates with the specific skills and knowledge required to meet industry demands, thereby providing undergraduate students with opportunities to develop employability skills throughout their studies.

In the study by Sivakiri and Thiyagarajan (2016:234-245) that was already mentioned in Chapter 1 (Section 1.1), these authors further note that, as a result of the global economy, communication skills in English are seen to be a priority asset of an organisation in the business environment. Therefore, an individual needs well-developed language skills, particularly in written communication, since almost all activities in organisations contain some form of business writing. In other words, in addition to the knowledge of a specific discipline, employability is also determined by soft skills such as communication skills (with a specific emphasis on written communication in English). The most prominent results of this study indicated that a large majority of their participants (80% of the participants who took part in the study) believed that communication skills were important employability skills that every prospective graduate should possess. With respect to students' language skills, writing and speaking skills were perceived as skills of high importance.

As further support for the importance of proficient writing as an essential employability skill, Lentz (2013:474-490) noted that students who are highly proficient writers are likely to contribute greater value to their employers and convey a more professional image than their peers with weaker writing skills. As previously noted, one of the primary reasons employers expect prospective employees to possess strong writing skills is that poor writing can be costly. In this regard, Quible and Griffin (2007:32-36) reported that, in 2004, the National Commission on Writing (NCW) published the findings of a study which made use of the cost data from 64 large American corporations that formed part of the Business Roundtable (together, these corporations employed nearly 8 million people). According to the report of the NCW (2004), American firms spent up to \$3.1 billion annually to improve employees' writing skills. The negative consequences of ineffective writing are also highlighted by Quible and Griffin (2007:32-36). According to them, deficiencies in employees' writing skills have both tangible and intangible costs. The tangible cost refers to the training cost that each organisation has to incur to prepare the novice employees to work efficiently. The intangible cost that occurs in every organisation relates to image degradation for employers and employees as well as a negative impact on productivity since the employee has to spend more time drafting a document than what is expected. Hence, much of the time of an employee is wasted in the preparation of a document that otherwise could be utilised for some other activities, and finally,

an incorrect decision may be made because of poorly or ineffectively written documents. It is therefore not surprising that employers would prefer to appoint employees who write well.

In summary, the ability to produce effective business documents is one of the key employability skills that employers around the world require from graduates. As noted earlier in this chapter, the primary purpose of business writing is to communicate effectively with internal and external audiences through a range of media in order to achieve specific organisational goals. Business writing adheres to a distinct style, format and set of conventions which differ from general, even academic writing in terms of its audience and purpose. The realisation of this fact contributes towards successful business writing. Unfortunately, various studies have pointed out that many undergraduate students lack the skill of writing efficient business documents. This may be a result of students not being aware of the importance of business writing skills or because of the lack of training to prepare them to be efficient business writers. A lack of business writing skills is one of the reasons why graduates are losing employment opportunities, and from the side of the employers, they encounter both tangible and intangible losses when they employ novice employees who are not efficient in writing business documents. Therefore, exploring the challenges faced by undergraduate students with respect to writing effective business documents, as well as supporting students to become more efficient writers of business documents, has become a significant issue at present.

The following section, therefore, explores salient issues with regard to the types of developmental interventions that have been employed in the past towards the development of learners' language skills. For this study specifically, the main focus is on the development of language ability in English, as already mentioned in Chapter 1.

2.3 General English versus English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses

English language interventions designed to develop learners' English language abilities have taken various forms in the past. Donesch-Jezo (2012:1) notes, however, that: "In this present age of rapidly developing international scientific collaboration and business, courses of foreign language for specialist purposes are becoming more and more popular. These courses are offered within the framework of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), an approach that assumes that the language teaching must be tailored to the specific linguistic and communicative needs of the particular learners, with special attention being paid to the context in which they use, or will use, the English language". The primary reason for emphasising ESP is that general English courses are not immediately applicable to individuals who need to communicate in their respective professions (Pilane, 2004:89-111). The argument is, therefore, that English language courses may be more effective in developing the learners'

language proficiency when they are explicitly aimed at preparing learners to communicate in their respective professions.

Most general English language teaching (ELT) courses, however, mainly focus on developing the four language skills, specifically the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Burns & Siegel, 2017). Such courses also often emphasise the development of the interpersonal communication skills of language learners. As far as undergraduate students at tertiary institutions are concerned, the general nature of the skills in English that is addressed by ELT courses may not be the most productive option for the development of students' English abilities in a context where they require support with the language demands of their studies, as well as with preparation towards meeting the communicative demands in their professions on completion of their studies. Therefore, the development of students' English ability should be focused on their specific fields of study to, firstly, enable them to use such skills optimally for the academic language requirements of their studies, but also, to prepare them for the language requirements in a workplace context (Donesch-Jezo 2012:1; Pilane 2004:89-111; and Hyland 2006:1). It is, thus, not surprising that approaches such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where English courses focus on how the language is used for specific purposes in specific contexts, have become more prominent in recent times. An application of the basic tenets of the ESP approach has understandably given rise to a myriad of different developmental English courses for specific purposes. For example, "English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has evolved from a relatively fringe branch of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the early 1980s" (Hyland, 2006:1). Similarly, courses such as English for Business Communication (EBC) or an Introduction to Business Communication (IBC), English for Legal Professionals (ELP) and English for Science and Technology (EST) focus on the development of English ability in these respective fields. Such courses are unique with respect to their learning outcomes and objectives, which are focused on the requirements of specific disciplinary contexts.

2.4 English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Business Communication (EBC)

As noted above, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has emerged as a subfield within the broader field of English for Specific Purposes (Hyland, 2006:1-16). EAP courses focus on those specific language skills that are required by students towards the successful completion of their studies in higher education. Consequently, the learning outcomes of EAP courses should enable learners to master these skills as they relate to the tertiary academic context, with particular emphasis on producing written academic documents, such as general essays and assignments, for the successful completion of their academic programmes.

Related to the specific context of business studies, English for Business Communication (EBC) also emerged from the field of ESP and exclusively focuses on developing the communication skills of undergraduate students in this field. Such courses usually place strong emphasis on developing the ability of undergraduate students to write (among others) business-related documents that would be expected in the workplace. At the same time, however, there is often a need to strengthen students' basic English writing proficiency, particularly in contexts where students use English as a second language, and the schooling system has not adequately prepared them for the English demands of tertiary education. The basic English language knowledge and skills required for effective writing at a tertiary institution include the accurate use of grammar, the logical and coherent organising and structuring of content, the correct punctuation and spelling of words, as well as selecting appropriate words to express the intended meaning. When the development of these basic English abilities is integrated into, for example, an EBC course, students would be developing such abilities in the context of disciplinary writing that is focused on the specific written documents that are produced in the discipline. However, when these basic abilities are addressed in a more general EAP course, the assumption is often that such abilities would be transferable to more specific workplace writing as well. Whether students are able to transfer these abilities to more specific kinds of documents, however, is debatable, as evidenced by the study reported below.

Ramoroka and Ntereke (2016:1-11) conducted a study involving undergraduate ESL students at the University of Botswana with regard to whether the writing skills that students developed by means of an EAP course were transferable to content courses. The participants in the study were students enrolled in the Advanced Writing Skills course. This course is offered as a general academic writing course at the undergraduate level, and it can be completed by any student from the second year to the final year. Assessment for the course is mainly focused on written academic essays and projects submitted by the students, as well as their reflective writing. Data was collected from 23 students who had completed the course by means of a questionnaire. In addition, six students took part in follow-up interviews to further inform the data collected with the questionnaires. It was found that for those students who saw similarities and connections between the writing task in the writing course and their specific disciplines, transfer was facilitated. However, for those who did not identify similarities, transfer was repressed.

Ramoroka and Ntereke (2014:1-11) argue that although students reported some degree of writing-skills within an EAP environment, it would be relatively infrequent, and the process appeared to have been constrained by several factors. For example, the transfer of skills was

influenced by task similarities and inhibited by task differences. That is, specific writing skills that the students had developed in the EAP course could be transferred to other disciplines, such as business and commerce or science, if the tasks had similarities. Since the transferability of the abilities acquired in an EAP course seems to be contingent on specific conditions, it may therefore be more appropriate to develop these abilities through an ESP course specifically tailored to a particular disciplinary context, such as the field of business, and to develop these skills within that context specifically, for example, the EBC course discussed earlier in this section. The fact that, for example, a general letter and a business letter or a general report and a business report differ in significant ways supports the notion that a developmental course focusing on the specific documents produced in a specific discipline may be more beneficial in supporting students to produce such documents appropriately.

The next section focuses on a discussion of studies that have investigated the specific writing problems of tertiary students in Botswana, both in a general academic context as well as in the context of business writing.

2.5 Specific writing problems of tertiary students in Botswana regarding the academic and business context

Writing difficulties that undergraduate students in Botswana experience are a serious concern, as pointed out by the small body of available literature that focuses on this issue. For example, Chimbganda (2011:1-21), Magogwe and Nkateng (2018:1-6), Ntereke and Ramoroka (2018:81-95) and Umunnakwe and Pitse (2017:31-43) highlight the inadequate English writing skills of students in the tertiary academic context. Only one study, that by De Beaugrande (2000:334-349), specifically mentions students' inadequate writing skills in the business context.

Most colleges and universities in Botswana provide some form of English writing support aimed at enhancing the writing skills of undergraduate students. These courses are typically integrated into the curricula of the specific degree programmes offered at such institutions. For example, the course "English Language Skills" is included in the Bachelor of Commerce in Hospitality Management offered by the Management College of Southern Africa (MANCOSA), and the course "Business Communication" is included in the BBA in Business Management programme offered by the Gaborone Institute of Professional Studies (GIPS). Similarly, the ABCD, Gaborone University College of Law and Professional Studies (GUC), Botswana Open University (BOU) and the BA ISAGO University include the course "Introduction to Business Communication" in their programmes. The course "Communication

Skills” is included in the Bachelor of Science in Food Science and Technology offered by the Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and “Communication and Study Skills” is included in the BA in Sports Journalism programme at the Limkokwing University of Creative Technology. The course “Communication and Technical Writing” is embedded in the BCom in Digital Marketing offered by New Era College. The ABCD made it compulsory for its learners to enrol for the Introduction to Business Communication (IBC) course referred to above, in the first year of study, before proceeding to the second semester of their programmes.

Through these English communication courses, universities and tertiary colleges in Botswana attempt to enhance the oral and written communication skills of their students. However, it is evident from the following studies that the writing difficulties of tertiary students in Botswana are a persistent problem for which a lasting solution should be found.

Magogwe *et al.* (2015:20-28) conducted a study at the University of Botswana to investigate the problems related to the writing skills of tertiary students. The primary objectives were to assess students’ skills in writing as well as to rate the relationship between the performance of the students and their self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy beliefs refer to a learner’s confidence in their ability to write effectively. The beliefs were measured using questionnaires and subsequently compared with their actual writing performance. The study participants were third-and fourth-year students enrolled in an advanced, semester-long writing course offered by the Communication and Study Skills Unit at the University of Botswana. The researchers employed convenience sampling, with a total of 46 students and one lecturer who taught the course participating in the study. Students came from a variety of disciplines, including Humanities, Health Sciences, Education and Social Sciences. The primary mode of assessment used in the course was mainly through written academic assignments. The writing task that was assessed for the study required students to write an academic essay of between 1200 and 1500 words. The assessment was focused on students’ ability to write a well-organised essay with a clear structure, which included an introduction with a clear statement of intent. The researchers also assessed the ability to integrate sources, write coherently using transitions and use appropriate words in relation to the subject and the target audience.

The results of the study indicated that, in general, students had difficulties in expressing their ideas clearly and coherently. The researchers further noticed that they had difficulty in citing sources when they attempted to position their arguments, as well as with using the correct spelling and punctuation and constructing sentences logically. It was also found that there was no noteworthy relation between the students’ self-efficacy ratings and their performance in writing. Self-efficacy beliefs, that is, the confidence of a person in his/her own knowledge and

skills that he/she can perform a particular task well, have the potential to enhance his/her performance compared to a person who lacks confidence in his/her own knowledge and skills. Self-efficacy beliefs could therefore motivate people to use the knowledge and skills that they have about something to the best of their ability. However, a person's belief that he/she can write well does not necessarily increase his/her ability to write well. It is therefore not surprising that the study by Magogwe *et al.* (2015:20-28) found no telling relation between students' self-efficacy ratings and their actual performance in writing. It is noteworthy that although the students generally believed that they could write well, they displayed specific difficulties in writing effective documents. In the end, only the actual written texts students produce will provide tangible evidence of their actual writing abilities.

Chimbganda (2011:1-21) conducted a study that involved first-year students from Humanities at the University of Botswana, aiming to assess their abilities in various literacy skills, with a particular emphasis on their ability to produce written documents in academic contexts. The study was motivated by frequent complaints from lecturers regarding the limited academic literacy skills of students, particularly those for whom English is an additional language. The participants consisted of thirty first-year ESL Humanities students, conveniently selected using non-probability sampling. According to the researcher, Humanities students were chosen because they engage in more writing activities than students in other faculties. The students were in the second semester of their first year and had been taught an English writing course called Communication and Literacy Skills (CLS). For data collection, the researcher made use of a Likert-type questionnaire to collect information that focused on the students' academic literacy abilities, as well as a textual analysis of final examination essays written by the students. The questionnaire provided data on students': (1) personal information; 2) perceived English language competence; and 3) perceived strengths and weaknesses in using English. The personal information section of the questionnaire detailed how often the students spoke English at the university campus, their reasons for learning English, the grade they received in English in their final secondary school examination, the aspects of English they did not enjoy, what rating they gave themselves on their ability to use English and aspects of English they needed to improve at university. Section B of the questionnaire focused on students' rating of their own abilities to speak, read and write, their use of vocabulary, grammar and style, the cohesion of ideas at the paragraph level and organisation of ideas. Section C in the questionnaire focused on eliciting further information focusing on students' major strengths and weaknesses in using English and their suggestions to the university for assistance so that they can improve their use of English. The textual analysis was conducted by analysing students' end-of-semester essays. Three essay topics were provided, and students could choose one of the following topics on which to write: (1) 'Analyse the causes and effects of

domestic violence in your country and suggest what should be done to deal with the problem'; (2) 'Young people have more problems than adults. Do you agree with this claim?' and (3) 'If you were the president of your country, what changes would you introduce and why? Chimbganda (2011:1-21) evaluated the essays by focusing on several key aspects, including: (1) students' language proficiency, (2) sociolinguistic competency (that included sensitivity to variety), (3) register, that is, the level of formality (i.e. formal or informal), (4) organisational competency that involves rhetorical organisation and cohesion and (5) grammatical competence including students' use of concord, syntax and vocabulary.

Findings from the survey indicated that students generally rated their English proficiency as "average" or "below average." More specifically, "seventeen out of thirty students (fifty-seven per cent) believed that they performed 'average' or 'below average', while forty three percent (13 students) thought they were 'good' or 'very good' in relation to the ability to use English" (Chimbganda, 2011:13). Similarly, students' ratings on literacy skills, specifically, writing skills, their ability to use grammar, skills in summarising, usage of appropriate vocabulary and style and ability to organise ideas were all rated 'average' or 'below average'. The analysis of students' essays indicated that students encountered difficulties in organising their ideas, maintaining grammatical correctness and selecting appropriate vocabulary to convey their ideas. Consequently, Chimbganda (2011:1-21) asserted that, although students may have had some ideas about what to write, they failed to express them clearly and correctly.

In another ESL context, Ntereke and Ramoroka (2018:81-95) conducted a study involving postgraduate students at the University of Botswana. The objective of the study was to examine students' academic writing needs and challenges, as well as strategies to address them. The researchers primarily employed qualitative methods to collect data. A survey was conducted among 54 post-graduate students, including both master's and doctoral candidates. The students were asked to report on their academic needs and challenges in producing comprehensive and acceptable academic documents. Additionally, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 5 supervisors and two focus group interviews with students at the same postgraduate levels. The purpose of the interviews and focus groups was to gather suggestions and perspectives from both supervisors and students regarding their writing challenges as well as to solicit recommendations on the potential development of an academic writing course designed to enhance students' writing skills.

The researchers found that both students and supervisors expressed similar concerns and concluded that even at the postgraduate level, students at the University of Botswana seemed to face considerable writing difficulties and that there was an urgent need for an academic writing program to enhance their writing skills. Additionally, the researchers highlighted the

specific writing challenges of the post-graduate students, arranged in priority order as perceived from the results of the surveys and interviews. The reported challenges included the difficulty in using appropriate vocabulary to express their ideas effectively, the inability to use proper connectives to present coherent arguments, difficulty in writing comprehensive literature reviews and project reports, as well as in the writing of critical appreciations of research articles, reflective papers and annotated bibliographies. The findings of Ntereke and Ramoroka (2018:81-95) challenge the assumption that postgraduate students can write dissertations/theses without guidance and instruction in writing. These findings further suggest that support provided to undergraduate students at the University of Botswana to improve their writing skills, may not be adequate to ensure that they are proficient academic writers when they embark on postgraduate studies.

In another study conducted at the University of Botswana, Umunnakwe and Pitse (2017:31-43) examined the quality of students' written essays. The study focused on how an academic essay should be structured, specifically how an introduction should be written with regard to what should be included in the introduction to express a clear idea of what the essay will cover. The purpose of the study was, therefore, to examine whether first-year students at the university were able to produce well-structured essays, with particular emphasis on the compilation of introductory paragraphs. According to Umunnakwe and Pitse (2017:31-43) introductory paragraphs should typically contain essential elements such as, a statement of the thesis as well as, supporting ideas that signpost what the essay is about. These researchers argue that although the precise structure of introductory paragraphs varies according to different genres and essay types, good introductions generally accomplish the same function since they act as "road maps" for essays. Introductions usually follow a similar basic pattern that includes a statement of the thesis, setting the tone and the direction of the argument, communicating the stance, and providing an overview of the intended content. Therefore, in the context of writing academic essays, students' ability to draft appropriate and functional introductory paragraphs for their essays is very significant.

The data that Umunnakwe and Pitse (2017:31-43) collected and analysed for their study comprised essays written by students during regular class sessions. The researchers examined 100 first-year students' essays randomly selected from the second-semester examination of the course 'Writing in English'. For the assessment of the introductory paragraph specifically, the researchers developed a rubric that focused on four key areas: (1) whether the topic of the essay was well introduced; (2) whether the introductory sentence captured the reader's attention; (3) whether the introductory paragraph contained a thesis

statement; and (4) whether the introductory paragraph adequately outlined the main ideas to be addressed, providing a coherent overview of the essay.

In general, they found that students experienced difficulty constructing sentences that could arouse readers' interest and maintain it throughout the essay. More specifically, the results revealed that most of the students (82%) wrote essays in which the introductory paragraph did not contain the thesis statements, overviews or plans of development. This finding clearly indicates that most undergraduate students faced challenges in writing well-structured introductory paragraphs capable of capturing and sustaining the reader's interest.

In another study, Ramoroka (2014:1-7) found that students experienced difficulties in citing sources appropriately. Specifically, undergraduate students struggled to clearly distinguish between their own voice and the voices of the authors they cited. The researcher employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research methods, including frequency counts and text analysis. The data set that was used for the study included a corpus of undergraduate student writing (i.e. 40 essays collected from students at the University of Botswana). Participants were selected from two departments: the Department of Media Studies (Faculty of Humanities) and the Department of Education (Faculty of Education). Convenience sampling was used in the study, and students were required to write an academic essay of approximately 1200-1500 words.

The results of the study indicated that, overall, students struggled to use reporting verbs effectively when citing sources to position their own voice. According to the researcher, the students essentially acted as mere 'traffic cops', passing information to their readers, exactly as it was presented to them. They did not engage in filtering or synthesising ideas, resulting in texts that were often unauthentic and unsupported. A borrowed statement or a sentence from a source becomes authentic and supportive only when it is appropriately positioned and accompanied by relevant explanations that reinforce the argument. Furthermore, the writer should use suitable reporting verbs to integrate the borrowed statement with their own voice, thereby creating a natural flow. The researchers emphasised the critical importance of students' ability to cite sources correctly and effectively in support of their arguments.

Ramoroka's (2014:1-7) study highlights the difficulties students face in positioning their arguments convincingly through the use of supporting evidence from other scholars on a given topic. Students, therefore, should be able to cite different sources and incorporate different authors' views, either through direct or indirect quotations to substantiate their own arguments. Amata (2025:414) also indicates that citing sources properly improves the credibility and trustworthiness of arguments. When writers reference reputable and authoritative materials,

they add validity to their work and indicate to readers that their arguments are based on established knowledge. At the same time, copying or adapting someone's work without proper referencing leads to plagiarism or academic theft. Therefore, students have to achieve the skills in proper referencing in order to enhance the credibility of statements. However, it could lead to plagiarism if not done properly. Furthermore, the logical organisation of content may be affected negatively if the writer's voice and the voice of the source author are not appropriately integrated.

Consequently, the practice of citation is a fundamental element in academic writing for undergraduate students. In this context, Mansourizadeh and Ahmad (2011:152-161) assert that proficiency in citation skills distinguishes an expert writer from a novice. That is, an expert writer uses citations to support and justifying their arguments or claims. Conversely, a novice writer, due to limited skills often fails to connect his or her voice with that of the source author. Writers employ different techniques to create such integration, most commonly through the use of the appropriate reporting verbs. Scollon *et al.* (1998: 227-250) further illustrate that the writer's voice and the voice of the source author are differentiated by the writer making use of direct and indirect quotations, signalled by the appropriate use of reporting verbs. While novice writers tend to use citations in isolation, expert writers often synthesise multiple sources in their writing.

Undergraduate students in Botswana also face challenges in writing documents specifically for the business context. Compared to the small number of studies addressing the above-mentioned issue, addressing the writing difficulties of students in the context of general academic writing, the number of studies addressing the writing difficulties of students in the context of business writing is even lower. Only one rather dated study could be located that focused on the writing ability of tertiary students in Botswana in the context of business writing. The findings of this study are discussed below.

De Beaugrande (2000:331-349), a lecturer at the University of Botswana, shared his experience with respect to the writing skills of students who were pursuing a course titled 'English Communication Skills for Students in Business' that is offered under the Department of English at the University of Botswana. He noted that the learners had no prior training in Business English and were admitted largely unprepared into technical courses that formed part of the business genre. Furthermore, the undergraduate students were unable to use Business English in the appropriate register and tone that would be acceptable for writing in this context. Although only the findings of this one study could be reported here, which focused on the specific context of business writing of tertiary students, it provides some evidence that

tertiary-level students in Botswana have difficulty writing appropriate documents in the business context.

The paucity of research on the writing ability of tertiary students in the business context in Botswana underscores the necessity to investigate pertinent issues such as: (1) the specific writing skills that are required of tertiary students for a business context that would satisfy the expectations of employers; (2) the specific difficulties of undergraduate students in Botswana with respect to writing in a business context; (3) whether the required skills are embedded in the curriculums of available writing support courses such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or Business Communication courses; and (4) whether current writing support courses enable learners to meet the expectations of employers.

2.6 Writing difficulties of tertiary students in other African countries with regard to the academic and business context

2.6.1 Students in Ghana

Specific writing difficulties have also been reported for tertiary students in the rest of Africa with respect to writing academic and business documents. In Ghana, for example, it appears as if users of English experience difficulty with both written and spoken English (Gyasi 1990:24-26). In order to address students' inadequate levels of English proficiency, some tertiary institutions in Ghana have introduced English communication skills courses in order to support them with their studies (Mireko-Gyimah, 2014:23-46). For example, the University of Mines and Technology (UMaT), the Christian Service University College (CSUC) and Ghana Baptist University College all present this kind of support course for their students. Yet, it seems as if the situation with regard to students' inadequate levels of proficiency in English at universities in Ghana remains largely unchanged. In this regard, Mireko-Gyimah (2014:23-46) pointed out a specific case at the University of Mines and Technology in Ghana (UMaT). Since students have successfully completed the Communication Skills in English course offered by the University in order to 'correct' their English, as well as having passed their other first-year subjects also taught in English, one would expect the students to commit a minimum number of errors in English in their first year. One would further expect that they should use relatively faultless English in the subsequent years of study. However, an assessment of the level of English proficiency of final year undergraduate students in written English indicated that these students still displayed serious challenges in writing in English.

The main finding of Mireko-Gyimah's (2014:23-46) study showed the disparity between the assessment and the level of acceptance of the writing efficiency of undergraduate students in

academic and workplace contexts, respectively. As stated previously, the pass mark for a test or assignment in the academic context is usually 50%. Therefore, although students may pass the assessments in the academic context, there is a specific portion of the work (which is substantial if the student passed with 50%) that students either do not know or cannot do, which is then carried over to the next level of study. In other words, many of the students' writing difficulties and specific errors that they committed in the test/assignment were tolerated and therefore carried over to their next level of study. It is therefore not surprising that Mireko-Gyimah's study still found considerable errors in the writing of final year students.

Mireko-Gyimah's (2014:23-46) study also focused on how the students viewed their lecturers' teaching practice. For this part of the study, the data he collected consisted of anonymous comments from the students on their lecturers' teaching performance elicited by means of a questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed to all UMaT students to assess course lecturers' teaching performance at the end of each semester as part of normal practice at the University. Each questionnaire contained twenty closed-ended questions focused on four main issues, including: 'course presentation'; 'mode of delivery'; 'the lecturer's assistance in class'; and 'method and practice of teaching'. The questions were rated according to a five-point Likert scale that included 'Excellent' (5), 'Very good' (4), 'Good' (3), 'Satisfactory' (2) and 'Very poor' (1). The questionnaire also contained a blank part where students could write down any other comments they had regarding their courses and lecturers. Mireko-Gyimah (2014:23-46) used 716 comments, which were analysed to determine the types of English writing problems displayed by the students at the UMaT. Out of 716 comments, 216 faulty comments were detected, and they were grouped into nine error types for which the frequency of occurrence was calculated. These categories of errors were respectively: (1) incorrect register that included incorrect tone of language and wrong choice of vocabulary; (2) awkward expression; (3) ambiguity; (4) wrong punctuation and capitalisation; (5) wrong concord, that is, subject-verb disagreement; (6) wrong preposition usage; (7) wrong tense usage; (8) wrong adjective, adverb and pronoun usage; and (9) incorrect usage of articles. According to Mireko-Gyimah (2014:23-46), the most frequently occurring errors were the errors related to incorrect register (wrong tone of language and vocabulary misuse) and the least were incorrect concord (subject-verb disagreement). The researcher also identified some specific errors, such as wrong collocation, false concord, incorrect spelling, wrong insertion and omission of articles, misuse of prepositions and other common errors arising from the influence of the mother tongue. The specific errors noticed by the researcher in the comments of the students confirmed the fact that even having attended and passed an English course aimed at improving their English proficiency at the University, writing difficulties persisted even in the writing of final year students.

An investigation by Adade-Yeboah and Owusu (2016:1-9) at two private colleges in Ghana also found that most of the students' writing contained inappropriate/incorrect sentences. The researchers mentioned that students who were studying at the business departments of private universities in Ghana either already had important managerial appointments in the business world or had aspirations towards obtaining managerial positions in the world of commerce when they completed their studies. Hence, the writing proficiency of these students is vital since they must write various forms of business correspondence in their workplaces sooner or later. The data for their study were collected from 30 participants at two private universities, Christian Service University College and Ghana Baptist University College. The participants were given classroom-based and take-home essay questions that included a variety of essay types such as narrative, cause and effect, descriptive, comparison and contrast, and argumentative essays. The essays were analysed based on the following variables: context, organisation, expression, and mechanical accuracy. The main finding of this study was that students experienced difficulty in writing sentences with mechanical/grammatical accuracy, including their usage of conjunctions, grammar and punctuation. They also had challenges in writing dialogues or spoken words of the characters in a narrative with appropriate voice and tone, and placing them in a suitable context, organising the content of essays logically and creating suspense (the skills to arouse curiosity in the readers).

What is interesting to note in the context of Ghana is that in the majority of the studies reported on above, students have completed some kind of English proficiency/writing course. The fact that these researchers found that students still experienced considerable difficulties with English writing after having completed such courses points to the limitations of these courses in adequately developing the English writing ability of students. According to the evidence presented in the mentioned studies, these courses therefore did not prepare students adequately with respect to many of the writing skills/abilities necessary to write appropriate texts, such as logically organising ideas, expressing written content with mechanical/grammatical accuracy, selecting appropriate words suitable for the purpose and so on. Furthermore, even though such courses may be addressing some pertinent issues in the development of writing ability, it appears as if students find it difficult to develop their writing ability optimally by completing such courses. While assessing the results of an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course at the University of Ghana, Nartey and Dorgbetor (2014:168) noted that the student failure rate was very high in the EAP programme. This is a further indication that although support courses may be available, students may, for various reasons, find such courses inaccessible with regard to the development of their ability to use English.

2.6.2 Students in South Africa

The case of tertiary students in South Africa is similarly characterised by significant writing difficulties in English. These students also appear to experience difficulty in both academic and business writing. In general, students experience challenges with proper referencing, paraphrasing, the application of words suitable for a specific purpose, adopting an appropriate style of writing and structuring texts coherently, as can be seen in the studies discussed below.

Tanga and Maphosa (2018:1-15) conducted a study at a university in South Africa (whose name was withheld for purposes of confidentiality), focusing on peer academic support programmes. The participants included peer facilitators, programme coordinators and first-year undergraduate students who had been receiving assistance from the support programmes. Purposive sampling was employed and the study utilised a qualitative research design. The sample consisted of thirty-one participants, including ten undergraduate students for a focus group discussion, as well as seven programme coordinators and fourteen peer facilitators for in-depth interviews. They were all purposively selected from the same university. The results of the study indicate that the academic challenges faced by students included writing, referencing and the use of computer applications. With respect to writing challenges specifically, Tanga and Maphosa (2018:1-15) noticed that all the students reported that writing was a serious problem for them, especially at university level. Students reported that they found it especially difficult to express themselves effectively in academic language when completing assignments, tests and examinations. They also indicated that they had difficulty in properly referencing sources, especially in their attempts to use sources to support their ideas.

Pineteh (2014:12-22) conducted a study at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) among undergraduate students with the aim of investigating their academic writing abilities. Qualitative research methods were used for data collection from lecturers and students. One-on-one interviews were conducted with twenty second-year students in the Faculty of Informatics and Design, and the objectives of these interviews were to identify the academic writing difficulties of undergraduate students, the reason/s for such difficulties and the possible strategies to address the writing challenges. The participants included twelve male and eight female students from two departments, namely Information Technology (IT) and Town and Regional Planning. In addition, interviews were also conducted with communication lecturers: one from the Department of Accounting, two lecturers from the IT Department and one from the Department of Town and Regional Planning. The comments of the lecturers regarding their experiences as academic writing instructors, the challenges encountered by the students and the implications for their academic development were

recorded by the researcher. The data was perceptual in nature; in other words, it reflected the respondents' opinions, thoughts and their appreciations of student writing at the university. The analysis of the students' comments revealed that they experienced serious difficulties in writing academic documents, particularly in organising their ideas and presenting them logically. The lecturers' comments further highlighted concerns regarding the accuracy and correctness of student writing, noting that it was riddled with all types of errors that ranged from spelling mistakes to poor sentence construction. Students also experienced difficulty with creating coherence and cohesion in their writing and with logical argumentation.

Archer (2008:248-264) conducted a study at the University of Cape Town (UCT), with the aim of determining the effectiveness of Writing Centre interventions on undergraduate students' English writing skills. The Writing Centre at UCT offers a consultative service to undergraduate students to support the development of their writing skills. The Centre facilitates an initial 20-hour training course for student consultants and provides ongoing training throughout the year. The writing support offered by the Centre occurs mainly on an 'ad hoc' (as necessary) basis. Students, therefore, visit the Writing Centre according to their writing needs, usually when engaged in some form of writing activity. Students at any level of study may therefore register at the Centre and receive assistance from consultants on various aspects of their written work. Most commonly, students bring initial drafts of their essays or written assignments, which then form the basis of the consultation. Some students also visit the Centre prior to commencing writing in order to analyse the task and discuss the requirements of the document. In this way, some students visit the Centre for single, once-off consultations, while others maintain an ongoing relationship with the Centre throughout their degree programmes. Students' attendance is, therefore, voluntary, and they utilise the facilities and services of the Centre according to their needs. The focus of the training is to provide students with opportunities for writing practice, during which their written texts are assessed, and they are provided with developmental feedback.

For Archer's (2008:248-264) study, forty students, representing 15% of the total number of students who attended consultations in the Writing Centre during that semester, were selected. The participants represented different faculties, including the Humanities, Sciences, Commerce, Engineering and the Built Environment. In order to gather data for the study, the forty students were interviewed about their writing experiences. Data collection further included the comments of consultants working at the Centre, marks for essays and examinations and student comments on their perceptions of the effect of the Writing Centre on their writing. Finally, the researcher critically compared the marked assignments with previous drafts according to established criteria. Three undergraduate students assisted with

the interviews in order to encourage participants to express their views more freely in a peer-to-peer context. All the information collected was used to compile personal profiles for each student. Archer (2008:248-264) further developed a template for assessing students' progress with their written texts. The assessment of students' essays was based on three different criteria: (1) organisation, (2) voice and register and (3) language use. Each criterion, therefore, focused on different skills/abilities of the students' writing. For instance, the first criterion, 'organisation', focused on students' ability in structuring sentences and paragraphs, the application of devices for establishing coherence and cohesion and the positioning of arguments with supporting evidence. The second criterion, 'voice and register,' refers to appropriate ways of representing ideas and arguments to connect with the reader. Lastly, the third criterion, 'language use', refers to the mechanics of the text, vocabulary, punctuation, use of sentences, tenses, articles, pronouns and prepositions.

The detailed assessment of the essays showed that the majority of the students scored three out of ten in the first category: organisation. The researcher noted that there was no proper introduction or conclusion in the essays. Furthermore, the overall structuring and organisation of ideas was inadequate. In the case of the second category, voice and register, the students scored two out of ten, primarily due to insufficient referencing skills. The essays were also overly reliant on generalisations. Students frequently cited the opinions and comments of other authors, rather than articulating their own ideas, resulting, in a limited presence of the writer's voice, that is, the students' own perspective on the particular subject. Additionally, students struggled to establish appropriate relationships with the reader due to the improper use of voice and register. In the third category, language use, students scored three out of ten, reflecting students' inability to correctly use grammar, diction and punctuation in a consistent manner. In summary, Archer's (2008:248-264) study revealed that students experienced difficulties writing meaningful introductions and conclusions for their essays, properly referencing sources, effectively expressing their own ideas while integrating support from external sources and applying correct grammar, specifically in the use of tenses, articles, prepositions and pronouns, as well as choosing appropriate vocabulary to convey their ideas clearly.

Schulze and Lemmer (2017:54-66) assert that the ability to write according to the conventions of disciplinary academic writing is essential to be successful at university. They further argue that meeting the demands of appropriate academic writing poses a challenge for the growing number of English Second Language (ESL) students worldwide, from undergraduate to postgraduate level, who pursue their study in English. These researchers conducted a qualitative, exploratory and descriptive study at six South African universities to examine the

initiatives implemented by these institutions to support the development of academic writing skills among postgraduate students, specifically those who were engaged in dissertation/thesis writing. Out of 23 public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), six institutions were purposively selected for the investigation. These institutions included the University of Cape Town (UCT), University of Stellenbosch (US), University of Pretoria (UP), University of the Western Cape (UWC), Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) and the University of South Africa (UNISA). Six participants, one from each institution, including a chair of the master's and doctoral committee and the director of postgraduate and doctoral students, were selected for the study. In addition, two language experts with substantial experience as editors were also included. Data were gathered through interviews, email communication and scrutiny of institutional websites.

The collected data were analysed by identifying major themes and coding them as follows: the lack of student writing skills in general; the use of incorrect grammar; an inability to present ideas logically; ineffective paraphrasing; and finally, citation and referencing mistakes. The findings of the study revealed that postgraduate students continued to encounter considerable difficulties with academic writing. These challenges included using correct grammar, organising sentences and paragraphs coherently, using appropriate words for expressing ideas effectively, difficulty in paraphrasing and using citations correctly.

In the context of business writing specifically, Hollis-Turner and Scholtz (2010:239-245) conducted a study at three higher education institutions and six workplace sites in South Africa, with the aim of determining whether business communication courses adequately prepare students for the business communicative demands of the workplace. That is, they sought to determine whether students who were trained to write business documents in an academic context would be able to produce business documents at their workplaces that were satisfactory to their clients. The researchers undertook a comparative study using data collected from written documents produced at the above-mentioned higher education institutions and workplace sites. They also conducted surveys with 371 first- and second-year students across the three universities, followed by interviews with academic staff members, senior employees from the workplace sites, and novice employees who had completed the theoretical component of their business studies programmes and were engaged in experiential training at various companies. The employers were given 'Personal Skills Assessment' forms which included questions on the business writing competencies of the students. This was meant to provide feedback on the performance of novice employees at the end of their period of internship. The researchers collected data from 68 employers of students who had completed their training period.

The results from the higher education component of the study highlighted that students experienced difficulties in writing adequate and appropriate business documents for the workplace context. According to the students, they were not provided with sufficient opportunities to practise writing a range of different business document types. This view was supported by one of the academics, who noted in an interview that it was challenging to cover every possible form of business communication and to provide students with authentic workplace contexts during the Business Communication course. A contributing factor may be that the time allocated for presenting the Business Communication course was not sufficient to address business writing comprehensively. Overall, the study clearly indicated that despite completing the Business Communication course, students continued experiencing difficulties in writing adequate business documents.

The component of the study that focused on the workplace sites also failed to yield promising results. The employers reported that the written documents produced by the novice employees were not adequate in terms of accuracy. Unfortunately, this part of Hollis-Turner and Scholtz's (2010:239-245) investigation did not identify the specific areas of students' writing difficulties. For example, this did not determine whether students struggled with aspects of language usage, such as the correct usage of grammar, punctuation or concord rules, or with aspects like employing appropriate words, tone, register or style or in organising the content of the written documents logically and coherently.

The South African studies included here generally indicate that, again, despite various kinds of interventions aimed at supporting students with tertiary level academic writing, students still seemed to experience difficulties with various aspects of academic writing that impacted their academic performance at university.

2.6.3 Students in Zimbabwe

Gonye *et al.* (2012:71-83) conducted a study at the Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), in which they reported that lecturers involved in the 'Communication Skills' course were concerned about students' generally weak academic writing performance. The purpose of this study was to analyse undergraduate students' writing performance, focusing specifically on their grammatical, rhetorical and organisational skills. The study was conducted over two semesters and included a large sample of five hundred and fifty students from four faculties and fifteen of their lecturers. The lecturers were selected randomly, and the students were selected purposively from the faculties of Arts, Education, Sciences and Commerce. Students were all registered for the Communication Skills course during their first year. The data collected included written essays as well as data gathered using questionnaires and

interviews. The researcher firstly analysed one thousand one hundred essays written by the five hundred and fifty students, and secondly, assignments from the same students who were taking the Communication Skills course. As noted above, the analysis focused on the grammatical, rhetorical and organisational aspects of the student's writing, including their use of tenses, parts of speech, the clarity of their writing and their skills in citing sources. The same students completed a questionnaire that solicited information on the extent to which they planned their essays, whether they consulted dictionaries for spelling and word meanings, the degree to which felt confident in their own ability to express their ideas in writing and whether they discussed their writing with others. As a second stage of the research, fifteen lecturers who taught courses to first-year undergraduate students were interviewed to determine their perceptions of the students' academic writing. The interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed by the researchers.

The analysis of the students' essays indicated that students' performance in academic writing was, in general, very poor. The specific difficulties experienced by students were categorised as spelling errors, misuse of parts of speech, incorrect use of concord, incorrect punctuation usage, a failure to cite sources appropriately, incorrect use of prepositions, incorrect use of tense, illogical presentation of ideas and weak paragraphing. The results of the interviews with the fifteen lecturers also showed that students had serious difficulties with appropriate academic writing. Lecturers therefore confirmed in the interviews that the students struggled to use correct spelling, tenses, citations and referencing as well as in positioning their ideas orderly and logically.

2.6.4 Students in Ethiopia

A recent investigation by Taye and Mengesha (2024:1-13), with the objectives of identifying and analysing common English writing challenges among regular undergraduate students at Mizan Tepi University, Ethiopia, found that students had low proficiency in writing. Using stratified random sampling techniques, the researchers selected 680 students from a total of 6795 students who enrolled in the 2023/2024 academic year. The researchers employed tests, questionnaires and interviews as data collection methods. The test required the students to write an essay of 200-250 words, and the marking of the texts focused on elements of composition, such as content, organisation, grammar, diction and mechanics. The purpose of the survey was to obtain information about students' experiences in writing and the common problems that they encountered. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with English language instructors with the purpose of eliciting information on students' writing problems and teaching approaches. Students' English proficiency was classified into five distinct levels: Outstanding, Good, Average, Low, and Very Low. According to Taye and Mengesha (2024:5)

“no student demonstrated outstanding proficiency (0%), 120 (17.64%) showed good proficiency, 500 (73.52%) fell into the average band, 50 (7.35%) displayed low proficiency, and 10 (1.47%) had very low proficiency”. Their most significant challenges included the usage of correct grammar, organisation of ideas and choosing appropriate words to express their thoughts.

2.7 Writing difficulties of tertiary students in the rest of the world in an academic and business context

Tertiary students in other parts of the world also seem to experience difficulty with general academic writing in English, as well as writing for a business context. In India, for example, there is a serious concern with regard to graduates who are seeking employment opportunities and the challenges they experience with writing in English. Since the majority of employers prefer candidates who have exceptional communication skills, specifically in writing business documents, these graduates are facing difficulties entering employment. The issue is highlighted by Arputhamalar and Kannan (2017:84-90) in a study that focused on undergraduate students at the Alpha Arts and Science College (AASC) in Chennai, India. The College offers programmes in Science, Information Technology, Commerce and Arts. The researchers investigated one hundred second-year Bachelor in Computer Application (BCA) students at the AASC. The objectives of the study were: (1) to understand the perceptions of the students about their English language and formal writing skills, specifically in the area of writing business letters, reports, memoranda and e-mails; and (2) to test their actual writing skills.

The study consisted of two parts. Part 1 was administered by a questionnaire, and Part 2 was a diagnostic test on business letter writing. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Section 1 requested information regarding the general particulars of the students, Section 2 focused on their language skills, and Section 3 elicited their perceptions of their formal writing skills.

The diagnostic test on business letter writing was aimed at testing the second objective of the study, that is, the students' actual writing skills. The test was focused on students' abilities in providing relevant content for the letter, language use, structure, vocabulary, organisation, format, appropriate usage of register and positive impact on the readers. The question for the business letter writing was scenario-based, that is, the students were asked to write a letter to the production manager of a company accepting a job offer but requesting a change in the date of joining due to a previous commitment. Based on the above criteria, students' results were classified into different 'bands' depending on their performance. For instance, Band 5

(excellent) was awarded if all the criteria were assessed to be at the highest level. Similarly, Bands 4 – 0 were awarded based on student performance, with the lowest level being Band 0 (in cases where the letter did not achieve the purpose of the task at all; the work was irrelevant and could not be considered for analysis).

The findings of the analysis of the questionnaires (which focused on students' perceptions about their English language and formal writing skills) and the findings of the analysis of the business letter, which was aimed at testing the students' actual writing skills, were contradictory in some respects. For instance, 15 percent of the respondents of the questionnaire ranked their own writing skills as 'excellent', and 55 percent graded themselves as 'good'. However, the analysis of their actual writing (the business letter) showed that there was not a single student who was graded as 'Excellent' (Band 5), and 88 percent of the students had considerable difficulties in writing appropriate business letters. That is, there were only 12 per cent of the students who fell in the 'Good' category (Band 4) regarding their business letter writing skills. Those students who committed several grammatical errors but had a 'reasonable' format (38 percent) were rated as 'Average' (Band 3) for the writing task. Thirty-two percent of the students scored 'Below average' (Band 2). The letters of 11 percent of the students were listed under the category of 'Poor' (Band 1), and the remaining 7 percent of students scored the lowest grade (Band 0), which meant that their letters could not be considered for analysis. As an overall assessment, students did not include enough content points. Student letters further showed 'poor' style and tone, and they made numerous grammatical errors regarding the correct use of verbs, tenses, articles and prepositions, which obstructed clear communication. As a result of all these difficulties, the letters could not create a positive or desired impact on the reader. According to Arputhamalar and Kannan (2017:84-90), most student letters, therefore, did not achieve the purpose of the task.

In another study conducted in the Indian context, Ramya Devi (2016:165-173) found that students were unable to express themselves accurately in written English even after having studied English for 12-15 years, encompassing both the secondary and tertiary levels of education. The researcher attributed this problem to the method used to teach English, particularly teaching writing skills in a large classroom. The size of the classroom is part of the pedagogical context that varies according to teacher and the nature of the topic being taught. A potentially ideal classroom, in terms of size for the teaching of writing, would be one in which the teacher is able to provide the learners with practical learning experiences in writing, monitor and provide feedback, correct and return assignments, maintain discipline and have all the students attend during class time. In the literature that focuses on the teaching of writing skills, two approaches, i.e. the product and process approach, have been prominent in

discussions about the effectiveness of writing support provided to students. According to Nunan (1989:36), the process approach focuses on engaging the activity of writing as a process. Such a process includes the initial generation of ideas, the writing of different drafts of a document, with each successive draft being refined (also with feedback provided on such drafts) until the final draft is produced and submitted for assessment. An important criticism of this approach has, however, been that too much emphasis is placed on the process of writing, neglecting to some extent the final product (cf. Butler & Butler, 2022). The process approach to writing has therefore mainly been a reaction to the overemphasis of the product approach on the final product of writing, while neglecting the process used to arrive at an acceptable final product. In effect, then, a combination of these two approaches may be considered the most productive option for the teaching of writing. As Ramya Devi (2016:165-173) observes: "A teacher can impart writing skills to his learners by using both the product and process approach". It is, however, important to note that the process approach to writing is often difficult to implement in a large classroom where the student-to-teacher ratio is too high to make it practically possible. The study by Ramya Devi (2016) therefore found that students' failure to express their ideas in correct English was due in part to the lack of opportunities to practise their writing and receive individual feedback on their written texts. As alluded to above, the unreasonable teacher-to-student ratios in classrooms limited such opportunities for writing practice. Because of the large number of students in a classroom, the lecturer could not monitor his/her students work and provide them with individual feedback to improve their written texts.

The writing difficulties encountered by students in India are largely similar to those that students in African countries such as Botswana, Ghana, Zimbabwe and South Africa experienced. Poor construction of sentences, the inability to use appropriate vocabulary, failure to construct comprehensive and logical sentences and difficulties in using correct grammar, tone and style are some of the major writing challenges of students in India.

Xie (2020:123-135) conducted a study at a public university in China that offered a Business English course. The purpose of the course was to improve learners' business writing skills. The university adopted a case study approach to the teaching of Business English. That is, they taught Business English using specific scenarios or cases and making generalised conclusions. Students were provided with several cases of different types of written communication that included specific issues or problems. Students were expected to analyse the cases, identify the problems and provide alternative solutions with or without the help of their respective lecturers. The logic behind the case study approach is that students tend to learn more effectively from examples or cases than from theories or principles. The study,

therefore, investigated whether the case study method of teaching Business English at the university was effective in enabling the graduates to improve their business writing skills. The researcher administered both pre-and post-surveys among 127 undergraduate students who were enrolled in the Business English course. The pre-survey was conducted in September during the first session of the Business English course, while the post-survey in December during the last session of the course. The survey questions mainly focused on the effectiveness of the case study method of teaching in enabling the learners to prepare themselves for writing workplace-related documents.

The survey results indicated that most students acknowledged experiencing challenges in writing business documents, despite the implementation of the case study method for teaching the Business English courses. Xie (2020:123-135) found that over two-thirds of the participants stated that they had difficulties in writing effective business documents. The participants commented that they experienced challenges in writing comprehensive ideas in their written documents. They also reported having difficulties in using appropriate professional vocabulary suitable for the workplace context and presenting their ideas in an appropriate tone and register.

Scott (2015:75-97) further argued that the influence of a native language will result in communication breakdown when students express their ideas in a foreign language. This occurs when writers apply the text conventions and discourse patterns of their native languages to a foreign language that follows different structural and discourse patterns. Every language has some unique text conventions and discourse patterns that are closely related to the culture of the people who use the language. Thus, the language and the culture of the people are inseparably interconnected. This cultural association will be reflected in their native or first language (L1), which might be different from that of their second language (L2). In this context, when the learners transfer this sociolinguistic factor directly into English (the L2), they make errors. This is a result of the difference in structural and discourse patterns between the L1 and the L2. For example, the structural patterns of one of the regional languages in India, 'Malayalam', are entirely different from those of the second language, English. In 'Malayalam', the basic structure of a sentence follows the order of 'Subject', 'Object, and 'Verb' (SOV), which is different from the word order of a basic English sentence, which is 'Subject', 'Verb' and 'Object' (SVO). For example, in 'Malayalam', students would write 'Rama Ravana killed'. Here, 'Rama' is the subject, 'Ravana' is the object, and the verb is 'killed'. As Scott (2015:75-97) asserted, if this cultural association influences the usage of the second language (English), there will be a communication breakdown, and the sentences will be incorrect. As a result of the influence of the structural patterns of the first language, 'Malayalam', sentence patterns in

the second language, English, may be influenced, and users may write the same concept erroneously as “Rama Ravana killed”.

Ramos (2020:49-66) conducted a study at three private universities in the Philippines within the context of remote teaching. The purpose of the study was to investigate the common writing problems of university students and their attitudes toward assessing their own written work and receiving feedback on their writing performance. The participants of the study were students of three major universities located in Metro Manila, Philippines. There were sixty-two students who participated from University A, sixty-three from University B and seventeen from University C. Participants were pursuing different courses such as Tourism, Communication and Arts at these three universities.

The major data collection instruments were questionnaires that were circulated among the students to determine their writing attitudes, as well as a five-paragraph essay question. The question paper contained four different essay questions, focusing on four different topics. The students had to choose one of these topics for the writing of the essay. Essay topics focused on issues such as ‘the preventive measures taken by the Philippine Government to mitigate COVID-19 cases in the country’, ‘the learning modules used by Philippine schools to conduct remote teaching’, ‘the influence of celebrities on the youth’ and ‘the use of social media platforms by teachers and students for educational and professional purposes. A seven-point rubric with general instructions for each score was used to assess the learners’ writing performance. The lowest score was ‘one’ with a description of ‘needs further improvement’ or ‘having more than 25 writing errors. That is, if the student committed 25 or more writing errors, he/she was awarded a score of 1. Similarly, a student who had committed no writing errors would be considered ‘outstanding’ and he/she was awarded a score of 7. A student was awarded a score of 6 if he/she had committed ‘one’ to ‘five’ writing errors and would be considered ‘satisfactory’. Thus, the scores were scaled down to ‘five’, ‘four’, ‘three’ and ‘two’ depending on the number of errors that students had committed. The writing errors were further classified as (1) wrong application of grammar rules, (2) wrong word choice, (3) wrong use of punctuation, (4) wrong sentence or paragraph construction, (5) incohesive writing and (6) wrong adherence to the topic. For further clarification, the researcher classified all errors into two categories: (1) surface errors that focused on grammar and syntax, and (2) global errors mainly focusing on the structure and organisation of ideas. In addition to administering the writing task, the researchers interviewed two students per university via Google Meet. The findings of the study indicate that the students committed both surface and global errors in their written texts. Based on the overall results, most of the surface problems manifested in their written outputs were related to the incorrect use of verbs, followed by those related to

nouns and prepositions. Students had difficulty using the correct tense of the verbs as well as with the appropriate use of prepositions. There was a clear indication that students were unaware of concord rules and the plural forms of most of the auxiliary verbs. As for nouns, students committed errors in pluralising mass nouns. Students also committed global errors, such as a lack of clarity and explanation of content, presenting vague ideas and not writing cohesively.

Another study by Jimenez *et al.* (2024) was conducted with students at a tertiary college in the Philippines. The enquiry utilised a qualitative approach, employing a semi-structured interview with 15 purposively sampled students who enrolled in the 2022-2023 academic year. The results showed that students reported experiencing difficulties with grammar and language usage, specifically regarding subject-verb agreement, verb tenses and punctuation. They also reported challenges in organising and structuring information logically and coherently, and in using the appropriate words to convey their thoughts accurately.

Pittenger *et al.* (2006:257-263) conducted a study at Ashland University, Ohio, to investigate whether the Business Communication (BC) course resulted in any improvements in the writing skills of undergraduate students at the university. The BC course was introduced into the curricula of all the business programmes at the University, aiming at improving the students' written and oral communication skills in the business environment (Pittenger *et al.*, 2006:257-263).

The investigation of Pittenger *et al.* (2006) involved pre- and post-measurement tests at the beginning and end of the BC course. These assessments took the form of students who were required to write essays at the start of the course and at its completion. From a total of fifty-eight students who enrolled for the BC course, fifty-five students wrote the pre-test. For the test, students were provided with a list of essay questions. They could choose any essay question from the list and submit their responses online. The post-test was conducted at the end of the semester after the completion of the BC course. The testing process was similar to that of the pre-test. Fifty-two students wrote the post-test. The test results were ranked as 'excellent', 'satisfactory', 'lower portion,' or 'unsatisfactory/poor' according to the performance of the students. In addition to the ranking, students were provided with written comments on the strengths and weaknesses of their essays, along with an example of a well-written essay. The results of the pre-and post-tests indicated that over 60% of the students scored at the level of 'unsatisfactory'/ 'poor' for their essays. Students showed difficulty in transferring fundamental writing skills to different genres, especially in a business environment. They also had challenges in writing topic sentences that related to the nature and purpose of a document, using appropriate vocabulary, writing in a tone and style that was appropriate for

the target audience, organising and structuring ideas logically and applying correct grammar rules.

Lentz (2013:474 490) carried out a study among 63 MBA students at a regional university in the USA. These 63 students were engaged in an elective writing course as part of their MBA programme. The data was collected from their workplace writing tasks as part of the elective writing course at the University. Students further conducted a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of their workplace writing. They reflected on their strengths by making use of the positive comments or rewards that they received from their colleagues or supervisors. Similarly, they assessed their weaknesses by judging the negative comments they received from their supervisors and comparing those with the positive comments received by their colleagues for the same assignments. Students identified their opportunities by looking at the chances for improving their writing skills, resources that were available within and outside their organisation and support from other employees who wrote effectively and could help them to overcome their weaknesses. The researcher used these reflections as the basis for the analysis of the study and found that the students had challenges in writing acceptable business documents. More specifically, they had particular difficulties in organising and structuring the content and writing grammatically correct sentences.

Most of the studies discussed in this literature review identified specific writing problems experienced by tertiary students. The table below presents a summary of the types of writing problems that were identified by these studies.

2.8 Summary of specific writing difficulties of tertiary students

Table 2.1: Specific writing difficulties by country

Country	Writing difficulties of tertiary students
Botswana	<u>Students struggle to:</u> • construct meaningful sentences; • express ideas clearly and coherently; • cite sources appropriately; • position arguments convincingly and logically; • use correct spelling of words; • write grammatically correct sentences; • use punctuation correctly; • use articles and conjunctions correctly; • use proper reporting verbs; • write an appropriate introduction and conclusion for a text; • draft literature reviews and project reports; and • apply appropriate tone and register.
Rest of Africa Ghana	• construct grammatically correct sentences, including concord rules; • use appropriate tone and register; • apply prepositions, conjunctions and articles correctly; • select appropriate vocabulary and spell the words correctly; and • arrange sentences in a coherent and logical order.
South Africa	• cite and reference sources; • paraphrase content; • adopt appropriate style and register; • organise ideas coherently; • choose appropriate words; • use grammar correctly; • spell words correctly; • write an appropriate introduction and conclusion for essays; and • use appropriate register and tone.

Country	Writing difficulties of tertiary students
Zimbabwe	• use correct spelling; • apply correct tense and concord rules; • use correct punctuation. • cite sources correctly; • use appropriate prepositions; • present ideas logically; and • paraphrase the contents of a document.
Ethiopia	• use correct grammar; • organise ideas logically; and • choose appropriate words to express thoughts.
The rest of the world India	• use correct grammar; • adopt business vocabulary; • construct coherent sentences; and • adopt an appropriate tone and style.
China	• produce business documents; • choose professional vocabulary; and • adopt an appropriate tone and register.
Austria	• write meaningful sentences.
Saudi Arabia	• produce concise and meaningful sentences; • apply concord rules correctly; and • use appropriate pronouns.
Philippines	• apply correct grammar (including concord rules); • choose appropriate words; • use correct verb tenses and punctuation; • structure sentences and paragraphs logically; • organise paragraphs logically; and • produce sentences with clarity and cohesion.
USA	• write adequate topic sentences for essays; • use appropriate vocabulary; • use the correct tone, register and style; • organise and structure sentences and paragraphs; and • apply correct grammar.

Country	Writing difficulties of tertiary students
UK	• write business documents with the correct tone, style and register; and • organise the content of texts logically.

2.9 Conclusion

As is evident from the studies discussed in this review of the literature, writing in English for tertiary-level students appears to be a matter of concern all over the world. Since writing difficulties affect students' academic and professional performance, it is of paramount importance that effective writing support be provided that would assist students in improving their writing ability.

A relatively small number of studies have been conducted in Botswana that investigate the writing challenges of undergraduate ESL students. These studies have focused on students who were pursuing EAP courses at various universities and colleges. Notably, the literature survey reflected that, except for the dated investigation of De Beaugrande (2000), no systematic and empirical studies have investigated the writing difficulties of Business Communication students in Botswana. Therefore, there is a need to investigate whether Business Communication students in Botswana are experiencing difficulties with business writing and, if so, to identify possible reasons for such difficulties and propose appropriate solutions that may address them adequately.

It should be clear at this point that excellent communication skills, both oral and written, are regarded as essential for employment seekers. For tertiary students, the development of these skills should start when they enrol for undergraduate studies. The reality is that when students enter institutions of higher learning (tertiary institutions), they become job candidates for prospective employers. They should be acutely aware of what future employers may require of them and start the preparation to complement their formal education with their own parallel individual self-development plans (Pheko & Molefhe, 2017:455-469). Employers prefer to appoint competent employees who have the ability to minimise the organisation's training costs and maximise their productivity (Andrews & Higson, 2008:411-422). Therefore, it is crucial to consider whether tertiary education providers in Botswana are adequately preparing the graduates for the demands of the world of work. In this vein, Siphambe (2003:480-495) points out that training institutions in Botswana run the risk of training graduates who may not be acceptable for the labour market. A substantial responsibility has been given to institutions

of higher learning with regard to being critical stakeholders who identify and develop employable graduates. They are therefore expected to transform their curricula and pedagogies so that these may prepare learners to apply their knowledge and skills in industry which, in turn, would increase graduate employability. Since writing skills are considered one of the priority employment soft skills that graduates need to have mastered, there is a specific need to investigate whether tertiary students in Botswana possess adequate writing skills to produce appropriate documents in a business context.

The following chapter provides a comprehensive discussion of the research methodology that was employed in order to answer the specific research questions of this study (cf. Chapter 1).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the rationale for the research methods used to collect data in order to answer the research questions that were introduced in Chapter 1. It further provides a comprehensive description of the data collection methods used in the five phases of the study, focusing on the specific order of the data collection, the participants in each phase, the different instruments used to collect data, as well as the methods used for data analysis.

3.1 Research design

This study makes use of both a quantitative and qualitative research design. In this regard, Aliaga and Gunderson (2002) note that quantitative research methods are used when a phenomenon is explained through the use of numerical data that is analysed by means of mathematical techniques (e.g. statistical procedures). According to Sullivan (1998:59), qualitative research methods on the other hand would be useful when the potential answer to a question needs explanations rather than a straightforward 'yes/no' answer. As a result, the researcher has to employ different methods of data collection, such as interviews and case studies and often makes use of open-ended questions to provide answers for the intended research questions.

In the present study, the researcher had to first quantify and categorise the specific writing difficulties of the Introduction to Business Communication (IBC) students at the ABCD and, thereafter, collect the opinions, suggestions and recommendations of their IBC lecturers as well as workplace supervisors to meet the objectives of the study. The researcher therefore adopted a mixed-method research design by making use of both qualitative and quantitative data. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) and Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri (2021:25) state that in mixed methods research, qualitative and quantitative elements are combined in order to, on the one hand, broaden and deepen understanding and, on the other, confirm certain aspects of the research. That is, qualitative data (collected from, e.g., interviews and focus groups) can provide depth in the research inquiry as the researcher can gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon from narratives. The quantitative approach of data collection can provide measurable data about different aspects of a phenomenon. According to Tashakkori and Creswell (2007:3): "... in mixed-methods research, the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study". Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989:255-274) and McLeod (2024) further note that mixed-methods design allows for greater

validity and completeness, as findings are corroborated using both quantitative and qualitative data. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007:270) argue that a mixed-method design is often used in research where the research questions require a broader range of research instruments in order to address such questions comprehensively. Such questions cannot, therefore, be answered satisfactorily by using either quantitative or qualitative methods on their own to meet the aims and objectives of a study.

The empirical component of this study was carried out in five stages to ensure that all research objectives were fulfilled. The research was undertaken at the ABCD, and the participants comprised of students enrolled in the 'Introduction to Business Communication' (IBC) module across various degree programmes, as well as their lecturers and their workplace mentors. The first objective of the study was addressed through the literature review, which investigated the specific writing problems of tertiary-level students. The second objective aimed to determine the writing difficulties of students at the ABCD with respect to writing professional documents related to the business context. Firstly, a pre-test was designed to address this objective. However, because the researcher did not know what kind of exposure students had had to business writing at the secondary school level, it was necessary to assess their general academic writing ability, as well as their business writing ability, before they commenced the IBC course. Secondly, the researcher had to establish whether the IBC students' abilities in writing business documents had improved as a result of their exposure to the IBC course. A post-test was therefore designed in order to assess students' writing ability upon completion of the course. For comparative purposes, the post-test was administered to the same group of students who had completed the pre-test. Following the completion of the pre-and post-tests, the researcher conducted surveys among the fourth-year students and their workplace supervisors during their internship. The purpose of the surveys was to address the third objective of the study, which was to determine whether students from the ABCD met the expectations of employers when they wrote professional business documents in the context of their internships. In addition to the survey, the researcher undertook a comparative study of the learning outcomes of the IBC course with the available learning outcomes of IBC or equivalent courses offered at other tertiary institutions, which addressed the fourth objective of the study. This analysis was conducted to determine whether it was necessary to revise the learning outcomes of the IBC course at the ABCD in relation to the learning outcomes of IBC courses of other institutions. The study also examined whether the learning outcomes of the IBC course at ABCD corresponded with the expectations of the employers in terms of writing business documents, as well as whether they are addressing the specific writing difficulties of these students. This was determined through an analysis of the results of the employer survey mentioned above, with particular emphasis on the results of questions 2 and 3 (see Tables

4.43 & 4.44). In this context, question 2 sought information from employers regarding the types of business documents as well as the frequency at which such documents had to be produced by the interns during their internship. The responses to these questions provided valuable information about the specific writing skills and knowledge required of the interns. Consequently, if the survey results showed that students were required to produce, for instance, business letters, business reports and daily reports more frequently than other kinds of documents, these could be considered priority documents that interns should be able to produce competently in order to meet the employer expectations. Once the required skills and knowledge had been identified, the researcher compared these with the syllabus of the IBC to determine whether the learning outcomes of the syllabus were sufficient to prepare students to produce the above-mentioned business documents effectively, ensuring alignment with employer expectations. The third question in the employer survey, which elicited information regarding the quality and effectiveness of the various types of business documents produced by interns, revealed some of the writing difficulties encountered by students in producing such documents.

Finally, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the IBC lecturers and carried out classroom observations of their lectures, focussing specifically on the teaching of writing skills. All of these data sets were collected with the explicit purpose of proposing possible adjustments to the current business writing intervention at ABCD, in order to address the specific writing difficulties of students and, thereby meet employer expectations, namely, the receipt of appropriate and satisfactory business documents from prospective employees (addressing the fifth objective of the study). As previously mentioned, the investigation was conducted in five distinct phases, discussed below.

3.1.1 Phase 1

3.1.1.1 Purpose

Phase 1 of the investigation addressed the first two objectives of the study. Firstly, the researcher wished to find out whether the students at the ABCD experienced writing difficulties that were similar to the writing difficulties experienced by other tertiary students in Africa, as well as in other parts of the world. The literature survey, therefore, included studies from various African countries as well as studies from other regions of the world. The results of the literature survey provided some insight into the specific writing challenges of tertiary students worldwide.

Secondly, this Phase of the study aimed to determine whether students at the ABCD had difficulties in writing documents related to a general as well as a business context before they started with the IBC course, a course which is intended, among others, to improve the writing ability of first-year students at the institution. Therefore, to meet the second objective of the study, the researcher administered a pre-achievement assessment in the form of a written test during Phase 1. The test was conducted in the first week of the first semester, that is, before the students started with the IBC course.

Later in the study, the findings of the literature survey were compared to the results of the pre-achievement test in Phase 1. The purpose of this comparative analysis was to determine whether students at the ABCD experienced similar writing challenges to those of other tertiary students (both in Africa and countries further abroad), or if the writing difficulties of the students at the ABCD were in some way unique to this context.

3.1.1.2 Methods/procedures

Since the specific writing difficulties of the students at the ABCD needed to be identified and categorised, the researcher employed two different test questions for the pre-test (see Annexures 1 & 3). As noted above, these two questions differed in that each addressed a distinct aspect of writing ability. The first question was designed to determine students' general academic writing difficulties (given that the extent of students' prior exposure to business writing at the secondary school level was uncertain), while the second assessed writing specifically within the business context. Separate marking rubrics were employed for each question, enabling the identification and classification of the specific writing difficulties demonstrated by the students.

The test was conducted under the supervision of the two IBC lecturers, who also participated in marking the tests. Furthermore, the lecturers and the researcher engaged in a standardisation session regarding how the tests would be assessed. Such standardisation is necessary when more than one marker is involved in evaluating the same test written by multiple students. This activity established a shared understanding of the marking procedures and the allocation of marks for each question/criterion, with reference to the marking guide or rubric provided. The standardisation process assured fair judgment and consistency in the assessment. Marking commenced once the lecturers had reached an agreement through the 'dummy' marking of some randomly selected scripts.

3.1.1.3 Participants

The participants in Phase 1 of the study were: (1) the first-year, first-semester students at the ABCD; and (2) the two lecturers who taught the IBC course.

The average first-year student population at ABCD is usually 60 to 70 students per year. Consequently, all the first-year students were included as participants in the study. Participation was voluntary, and students retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage. All students were fully informed about the study and its purpose, and the researcher obtained their consent to participate. In 2021, the year of data collection, there were a total of 55 students registered at ABCD, across various degree programmes, including BCom in Finance and Banking, BBA in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality, BBA in Logistics and Transport Management and BBA in Entrepreneurship. Although the first semester was scheduled to start in July/August (the usual starting period), it only began towards the end of September due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As noted above, the researcher informed all 55 students about the study and obtained their consent for participation in the study. All 55 students opted to participate in the pre-achievement test, which was conducted on the 8th of October 2021, within the second week of the semester and prior to the commencement of the IBC course.

3.1.1.4 Research instrument

As noted above, the research instrument used in this phase of the study was a pre-achievement test comprising two questions, one relating to essay writing and the other that focused on the composition of a business letter. The first question required students to write a general essay, with a word limitation set at 800 words. Since the purpose of the essay question was to assess students' general academic writing difficulties, the topic selected was broad and non-specialised. The topic of the essay was: *"There has been an increase in crime in our society. Why do you think this is so? Write an essay exploring three factors which might account for more crime"*. The question was assessed out of 60 marks, and the students were allocated 1 hour and 30 minutes to complete the task. An extra 15 minutes were provided, comprising 5 minutes for reading and 10 minutes for revising the text.

The second question addressed the writing of a business letter, with the objective of identifying students' specific writing difficulties within a business context. The question was scenario-based requiring students to imagine themselves as the Senior Accounts Clerk for a reputed company, and to write a letter to a specific client in accordance with their manager's instructions. The scenario, instructions from the manager, and general guidelines for participants were all provided in the question paper. This question was also assessed out of

60 marks, and students were allocated 1 hour and 30 minutes to complete the task. As with the first question, an additional 15 minutes was provided for reading and revising their work.

3.1.1.5 Scoring of pre-test 1, essay writing

The assessment rubric for the essay question contained four sections: (1) introduction; (2) the body of the essay; (3) conclusion; and (4) language use. The 60 marks were allocated across the four sections. Three assessment categories, i.e. 'Poor', 'Average' and 'Good', were used to measure each section based on the performance of the students.

3.1.1.5.1 Introduction

This section assessed the introductory part of the essay. A total of 10 marks was allocated to the section, which focused on the 'Title', 'Statement of the problem' and the 'Solution'. With regard to the three grading categories mentioned above, students were awarded 0-3 marks and placed in the category 'Poor' if their essays lacked a title, stated the problem with minimal evidence or unclearly, or provided no evidence of proposed solutions. A student was awarded 4-7 marks and graded as 'Average' if he/she stated the title, stated the problem, albeit unconvincingly and provided solutions, but these were insufficient. The student was awarded 8-10 marks and graded 'Good' if the title of the essay was appropriate, the problem was stated well, and the solutions were appropriate and adequate.

3.1.1.5.2 Body of the essay

This section was allocated 25 marks, which were further categorised as: (a) unity, order and construction of coherent sentences (20 marks); and (b) functional division of paragraphs (5 marks).

a. Unity, order and construction of coherent sentences

The assessment of this section (out of a total of 20 marks) focused on students' ability in creating and maintaining unity, order and coherence in the body of their essays. That includes students' abilities in organising and integrating ideas into meaningful sentences and positioning them in the order of occurrence to support the main theme of the essay. The marks allocation and grading were therefore based on the number of instances of poor or no integration of ideas for which marks were deducted from the total of 20 marks. Accordingly, if there was no evidence of poor integration, the student would be awarded 20 marks. If there was only 1 instance of poor integration, 2 marks were deducted, and the student was awarded 18 marks. Marks were similarly deducted, based on the number of instances of poor

integration. With regard to the grading category, the student received a grade of 'Poor' if he/she scored 1-6 marks, 'Average' for a score of 7-14 and 'Good' if the score ranged from 15-20.

b. Functional division of paragraphs

This section primarily assessed the logical division of content into paragraphs. Students were rated according to the same grading categories as above. A student was rated 'Poor' (0-1 mark) if the content of the essay was not divided into logical paragraphs or was poorly structured. A grade of 'Average' (2-3 marks) was awarded for an attempt to arrange the content into logical paragraphs, and 'Good' (4-5 marks) was awarded for arranging the content of the essay into appropriate paragraphs.

3.1.1.5.3 Conclusion

With regard to the concluding section of the essay, students were awarded 0-1 mark if there was no attempt or a poor attempt to reiterate the most important points discussed. If a student attempted to restate the main points but did so incompletely or unclearly, 2-3 marks were awarded. Where a student clearly emphasised the key points in a concise, non-repetitive manner, 4-5 marks were awarded. The marks awarded corresponded to the grading categories of 'Poor', 'Average' or 'Good'.

3.1.1.5.4 Language use

The assessment of students' use of language was further divided into two sub-sections: (1) 'style', 'register' and tone. A writer's style refers to the manner in which language is deployed, including the choice of words to establish an appropriate level of formality (register), the construction of sentences and the tone conveyed, all of which should be suitable for the purpose of writing and the intended audience; and (2) 'grammatical accuracy'. Each sub-section was allocated 10 marks, yielding a total of 20 marks for this section. In both sub-sections, the assessment strategy involved counting the number of errors, including the use of inappropriate words, tone and grammatical inaccuracies.

a. Style, register and tone

Business documents are produced with the aim of achieving specific objectives. Such documents may serve an instructional, informational or persuasive purpose. Specifically, they may be written to provide instructions to guide readers in performing a particular task, to convey information about a product, service or business-related matter, or to persuade readers to make decisions in favour of a company's products or services. Therefore,

components such as 'style', 'register' and 'tone' are of paramount importance in business communication. These elements reflect how the writer's purpose, context and attitude towards the subject matter are aligned with the target audience and are particularly important when writing on behalf of an organisation. An appropriate style, which includes the use of a specific register, whether it is formal or informal, is created through the selection of suitable words and their effective organisation within the text. In considering the intended audience, the writer should be aware of whom they are addressing. Therefore, factors like the age and social status of recipients, as well as the relationship between the writer and the receiver, and the situation in which the communication takes place are important issues to keep in mind for business writers. Meanwhile, the tone reflects the writer's attitude about the subject that they convey to their audience through a written text. The intention may, therefore, be that the writer wishes to create similar feelings and emotions when the reader decodes the text. This is very similar to a situation where a speaker changes his/her tone of voice to express his/her attitude or feelings. In written communication, an appropriate tone, whether, positive, negative, or neutral, is created through the careful choice and placement of words within sentences.

Hence, this section assessed students' ability to employ an appropriate style, register and tone in their writing. A student who made no errors that compromised the style, register and tone was awarded 10 marks. One mark was deducted for each error. Student scoring 7-10 marks, were graded 'Good', those scoring 3-6 marks were graded 'Average', and those scoring 0-2 marks, were graded 'Poor'.

b. Grammar/mechanics

The assessment of grammar and mechanics focused on grammatical accuracy, the appropriate use punctuation, and the correct spelling of words. Errors were counted, and students were again awarded the grades of 'Poor', 'Average' and 'Good' based on their performance. A maximum of 10 marks was allocated to this section: four marks for grammatical accuracy, three marks for punctuation, and three marks for spelling.

Grammatical errors were counted and assessed in the following way: Five or fewer errors were ignored, and marks and grades were awarded in the following way: 4 marks were awarded for up to 5 errors, 3 marks for 6, 2 marks for 7, 1 mark for 8 and no marks for 9 or more errors. In the case of grades, students were given a grade of 'Good' for achieving 4 marks, 'Average' for 2-3 marks and the grade of 'Poor' for 0-1 mark.

Similar to the grammar errors above, a maximum of 5 punctuation errors was ignored. Students were therefore given three marks for up to 5 punctuation errors, 2 marks for 6, 1

mark for 7 and no marks for 8 or more errors. Students who received 3 marks were graded 'Good', 2 marks as 'Average', and 0-1 as 'Poor'.

Marking and grading of spelling errors were carried out using the same method as for punctuation, stated above, since both sections carried equal marks.

3.1.1.5.5 Capturing of the data, pre-test 1, essay writing

The data collected from the essay writing assessment were entered into an Excel sheet (see the analytical table attached as Annexure 2). The information was recorded in 4 columns. For example, Criterion 1 (column 1) contained the marks for the introduction of the essay. The mark allocation for this section (out of 10) was recorded in column 2. Column 3 contained the grade, either "Poor", "Average" or "Good" (the range was 1-3), was placed in brackets after the grade. Column 4 contained the numerical identifier assigned to each student, as students were represented by numbers in order to comply with ethical requirements.

The marks awarded to each student were recorded individually and were assigned a specific colour code. For example, if Student no. 1 received 2 marks for the introduction, this was recorded under their student number and coded red, representing the grade "Poor". Similarly, yellow and green were used to represent the grades "Average" and "Good", respectively. For the purpose of data analysis, the colour-coded entries were counted, enabling the researcher to calculate the percentage distribution of grades. For example, if 30 out of 40 students attained the grade "Poor", it was calculated that 75% of the students performed at a "Poor" level in writing an effective introduction for an essay. All other criteria were treated in a similar manner using the same procedure.

3.1.1.6 Scoring of pre-test 2, business letter

The business letter was also assessed out of 60 marks. It comprised 3 sections, namely: (1) format, (2) body of the letter, and (3) language use. Students were awarded marks for each section and were again graded according to the categories of 'Good', 'Average' and 'Poor' depending on their performance.

3.1.1.6.1 Format

The assessment of this section focused on the address, subject heading, salutation and closure of a letter. A total of 10 marks was allocated for this section, of which 2 marks were assigned to the address, 3 marks to the subject heading, 2 marks to the salutation and the remaining 3 marks to the closure.

a. Address

Students were not awarded any marks if the address was omitted. Those who did not state the address or provided a partial address received 0-0.5 marks. One mark was awarded to student who stated the address but did not provide it in full, while 1.5 -2 marks were awarded to those who presented the address clearly and completely.

b. Subject heading

If the students omitted the subject heading, they did not receive any marks for this category. Those who stated a subject heading but did not provide one that was appropriate for the overall purpose of the letter were given 1-1.5 marks, depending on the extent to which it aligned with the content of the letter. Students who provided a suitable heading were awarded 2-3 marks.

c. Salutation

Similarly, students were awarded 0-0.5 marks if the salutation was omitted or incomplete. One mark was awarded when the salutation was stated but not appropriate. Students were graded 'Good' and awarded two marks for an appropriate salutation.

d. Closure

The student was given no marks if the complimentary close was not included, 1-1.5 marks if the student included a complimentary close in the letter, which was incomplete or inappropriate and 2-3 marks for stating it clearly and appropriately.

3.1.1.6.2 Body of the letter

Thirty marks were allocated to this section, which comprised the introduction, body/content paragraphs and summary/conclusion. The marks were distributed across three components: 1) stating the purpose of the letter in the introductory part (introduction); 2) the appropriateness of the content and its logical arrangement (clarity and coherence); and 3) the concluding part (summary) of the letter. The introduction is the part of the letter in which the writer introduces the topic/theme. The body should provide elaboration and further explanation in a clear and logically structured manner, such that no uncertainty remains in the mind of the reader. The summary is the section where the writer re-emphasises the main issue that was introduced at the beginning of the letter.

a. Introduction

This section was allocated a maximum of five marks. If a student wrote an introduction, but it was not clear enough to catch the reader's attention or was too abrupt, 0-2 marks were awarded. Students scored 3-4 marks for an attempt to write the introduction clearly, and a maximum of five marks was awarded for a clear and purposeful introduction.

b. Body/content

Ten marks were allocated for the main body/content of the letter. If there was an attempt to elaborate on the topic stated in the introduction, but little clarity or supporting details, 0-3 marks were awarded, depending on the substantiveness of the content and supporting pieces of evidence. If the topic was elaborated on in more detail but the supporting information was not adequate, the student was given 4-7 marks. If the content was stated clearly and in detail with adequate supporting information, the student was awarded 8-10 marks.

c. Unity, order and construction of coherent sentences

This section assessed the students' ability to link sentences with appropriate conjunctions or connectors to ensure a logical flow and coherence, as well as arranging the content into functional paragraphs. A student was awarded 0-3 marks if they failed to connect ideas or used inappropriate connectors, and the content was presented in dysfunctional paragraphs. Four to seven marks were awarded for an attempt to state the arguments with suitable supporting evidence and arranging them in order of importance. Finally, 8-10 marks were awarded for well-organised content with supporting evidence and for the use of purposeful, coherent paragraphs.

D. Summary/conclusion

The concluding part of the letter was assessed out of five marks. 0-2 marks were awarded if the letter ended abruptly or an inappropriate complimentary close was used. 3-4 marks were awarded for restating the purpose of the letter, albeit not in a suitable way. Finally, a maximum of 5 marks was awarded to the students who re-stated the purpose clearly and used an appropriate complimentary close that corresponded with the salutation of the letter.

3.1.1.6.3 Language use

This section included the following subsections: (1) style, register and tone; and (2) grammatical accuracy. Each subsection was allocated 10 marks, with a total of 20 marks for the whole section. The assessment methods for these subsections were similar to those used in the language use section for essay writing (see Sections 3.1.1.5.4.a & 3.1.1.5.4.b).

a. Style, register and tone

The assessment of this section was based on the writer's ability to employ a professional, convincing and persuasive style and tone in drafting the content of the letter. In other words, the language used by the students was professional, that is, clear, concise, direct, and formal, without any colloquial expressions, and convincing the readers to take immediate action.

If the writer of the letter used appropriate words to create a suitable style, register and tone, he/she scored a maximum of 10 marks and was graded 'Good'. The student was awarded 0-9 marks depending on the number of errors that negatively influenced the style, register and tone of the letter. The assessor deducted 1 mark for each error, and the student was graded 'Poor' (1-3 marks), 'Average' (4-6 marks) and 'Good' (7-10 marks) accordingly.

b. Grammar/mechanics

A similar method of assessment to that of essay writing for the 'Grammar' section (see Section 3.1.1.5.4.b) was also applied here, and the students were awarded marks and grades accordingly.

3.1.1.6.4 Capturing of the data, pre-test -2, business letter writing

The data capturing for the business letter was conducted in the same manner as that of the essay writing results (see Annexure 4). The comparative results of both the essay and business letter writing tests were recorded in a separate Excel sheet in the form of a pre-test comparison matrix (see Annexure 17). In this matrix, all the sections corresponding to the essay marking criteria were listed in the first column of the spreadsheet, with the details of each section placed in the second column. For example, section 1, 'Introduction', was placed in column 2. All subdivisions of the introductory part of the essay, such as 'Title' (T), 'Statement of the problem' (SOP), and 'Solution' (SOL), were placed in the rows below the section 'Introduction'.

The third column of the Excel sheet represented the total marks for each criterion under Section 1. The data for the three grades 'Poor', 'Average' and 'Good' was entered into the subsequent columns, with provision for calculating the percentage of students in each category. The total number of students who wrote the essay was indicated at the top sheet. Once setup was done, the researcher extracted information from the individual score sheets for both the essay and business writing tests, recording the number of students in each category and their corresponding percentages in the pre-test comparison matrix.

For example, the total number of students who wrote the essay were 55 and the score sheets therefore provided information regarding the number of students (out of 55) who were awarded the grades 'Poor', 'Average' and 'Good' for the introductory part of the essay along with the percentage distribution of each grade. This process was repeated for all sections and subsections of the essay. A similar procedure was followed for the business letter. The researcher then compared the results of both the essay and business letter, analysing student performance on similar criteria across both tests. This analysis enabled the researcher to identify students' specific writing difficulties, regardless of whether they were writing general or business documents.

3.1.2 Phase 2

3.1.2.1 Purpose

The objective of Phase 2 was to determine whether the students continued experiencing specific writing difficulties in composing business documents after completing the IBC course at the institution. It also focused on a comparison of students' writing difficulties regarding business writing and general writing. In order to address this objective, the researcher conducted a post-achievement test on 15 December 2021, that is, after the students had completed the IBC course. The normal duration of the IBC course is four months. But as mentioned earlier, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 July/August semester started in the first week of October and had to be completed in December 2021. Nevertheless, students were provided with additional lectures in order to comply with the required notional learning hours (NLH) for the IBC module.

3.1.2.2 Methods/procedure

In Phase 2 of the investigation, the post-achievement test consisted of two questions. The first question focused on report writing, requiring students to produce a report with an 800-word limit. The second question required students to write a business letter of no more than 500 words. The results of the post-tests were then compared with those of the pre-achievement test to determine whether students' writing difficulties had changed following their exposure to the IBC course.

3.1.2.3 Participants

The participants in Phase 2 of the study were: (1) the first-year, first-semester students; (2) the lecturers who taught the IBC course; and (3) the fourth-year, first-semester students.

Out of the 55 first-year students who participated in the pre-achievement test, 54 students participated in the post-achievement test. At the time of data collection, there were 50 fourth-year students at the ABCD, enrolled in various degree programmes, including the BCom in Finance and Banking, BBA in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality, BBA in Logistics and Transport Management and BBA in Entrepreneurship. These students were preparing for their internships at different organisations to gain workplace experience and had completed the IBC course during their first year of study. All the fourth-year students were informed about their role in the study, and their consent to participate was obtained. Ultimately, all 50 fourth-year students participated in the study, which was conducted on 15 December 2021, exactly a week before their final examinations. The test was administered under the supervision of the two IBC lecturers. The same standardised marking strategy employed during Phase 1 (see Phase 1, Section 3.1.1.2 Methods /procedures) was used for Phase 2.

3.1.2.4 Research instrument

As noted earlier, the research instrument for Phase 2 of the study consisted of two questions: one on formal report writing and the other, on business letter writing. Since the objective was to examine students' writing difficulties in the context of business communication after completing a course specifically focused on business writing, both questions were based on business-related topics. The first question on formal report writing was assessed out of 80 marks. Students were given 1 hour and 30 minutes, with an additional 15 minutes (5 minutes for reading and 10 minutes for revision). The topic for the report required students to compile a report based on their attendance at a meeting, where they represented their class. During the meeting, the Student Welfare Officer from the Department of Tertiary Education Financing (DTEF), Botswana, addressed issues such as student absenteeism and drug abuse. Following the meeting, the Student Support Officer (SSO) requested that the students prepare a short report summarising the discussion (see Annexure 5 for the specific writing instructions that students received).

The second question (see Annexure 7) focused on business letter writing. This was a scenario-based task in which students had to imagine themselves as the Administrative Assistant (AA) to the Managing Director (MD) of a certain company selling high-quality domestic electric appliances. Since the MD was out of the office, he left a message instructing the AA to draft a letter of complaint to the Marketing Manager of a company called SA. Students were required to write the letter in e-mail format, using the address of the Marketing Manager as provided on a visiting card that was attached to the MD's message. The task was assessed out of 60 marks, identical to the letter writing test in Phase 1, and students were

given 1 hour and 30 minutes to complete the task. An additional 15 minutes was provided to read and revise the text.

3.1.2.5 Scoring of post-test 1, formal report writing

The assessment rubric for the formal report writing question evaluated the students' abilities in the following areas: (1) Format and content, (2) construction of meaningful sentences; (3) appropriate vocabulary; (4) functional paragraphs; (5) grammar and mechanics; and (6) style, tone and register of the report. As noted earlier, the report was assessed out of 80 marks, which were distributed across the six areas mentioned above. Students were awarded one of three grading levels, i.e., 'Poor', 'Average' and 'Good', based on their performance in each section.

3.1.2.5.1 Format and content

This section evaluated students' skills in writing the report in the appropriate format. It was assessed out of 50 marks, distributed across seven subsections: Title, Purpose of the report, Introduction, Procedures/findings, Matters discussed, Conclusion and Recommendations. As with the other sections, students were awarded one of three grading levels – Poor, Average or Good, based on their performance in each subsection.

a. Title

For the title of the report, a total of 3 marks were awarded to the students. If no title was provided or was irrelevant, students scored 0-1 mark and were graded as 'Poor'. The students were awarded a grade of 'Average' (1-2 marks) for stating the title, when it was not appropriate, or not suitable with respect to the purpose of the content. A maximum of 3 marks and a grade of 'Good' were awarded for providing an appropriate and meaningful title.

b. Purpose

This section was assessed out of 7 marks. Students were graded as 'Poor' (0-3 marks) if they did not state the purpose of the report or if it was stated incompletely. Four to five marks were awarded, with a grade of 'Average' if the purpose was stated clearly and there was an attempt to express it appropriately. Students were graded 'Good' and awarded 6-7 marks if the purpose was stated clearly and completely.

c. Introduction

The introduction of the report was assessed out of 5 marks. For this part, 0-1 mark was awarded if the introduction was not stated or not stated clearly (and a corresponding grade of

'Poor' awarded in this instance). Students received a grade of 'Average' (2-3 marks) for an attempt to state the introduction clearly and a maximum of 5 marks were awarded (with a grade of 'Good') if the introduction was stated clearly.

d. Procedures/findings

The procedure/findings section of the report was assessed out of 10 marks. Students were awarded 0-3 marks and graded as 'Poor' if the procedures/ findings of the report were not stated in detail or not in a convincing way. If there was an attempt to state the procedures clearly and convincingly, students were awarded 4-7 marks and were graded as 'Average'. If a student stated the procedures/findings clearly and convincingly, the student was given 8-10 marks and graded as 'Good'.

e. Discussion of important matters

This section of the report was assessed out of 10 marks. What the assessors expected of students was a thorough discussion on the matters and supporting them with evidential details. Therefore, if a student discussed the matters poorly, it was rated as 'Poor' and marks between 0 and 3 were awarded. Similarly, the grade 'Average' (and a mark between 4 and 7) was given for an attempt to state the matters clearly and in detail, and 8-10 marks (and a grade of 'Good') were awarded if there was a detailed discussion and for having stated them clearly.

f. Conclusion

If the concluding part of the report was written according to expectations (that is, the student having stated it logically and clearly by including the important points again), the student was given a maximum of 7 marks and graded as 'Good'. If there was no conclusion or only a poor attempt to conclude the report, 0-3 marks were awarded (with a grade of 'Poor') and if there was an average attempt to conclude the report logically, 4-5 marks (and a grade of 'Average') were awarded to the student.

g. Recommendations

A maximum of eight (8) marks was allocated to this section. If the report contained no recommendations or the recommendations were stated unconvincingly, the student was awarded 0-3. For an average attempt at providing recommendations, four to six (4-6) marks (and the grade of 'Average') were awarded. If the report included viable, feasible recommendations, seven to eight (7-8) marks were allocated, and the student was graded as 'Good'.

3.1.2.5.2 Construction of meaningful sentences

This section assessed students' skills in integrating their ideas logically and presenting them convincingly. A maximum of four (4) marks was allocated to this section. If there was no evidence of idea integration or the ideas were poorly integrated, 0-1 was awarded, and the grade assigned was 'Poor'. Two to three (2-3) marks (and a grade of 'Average') were awarded for an attempt to integrate ideas but was done in an unconvincing manner. A maximum of four (4) marks (with a grade of 'Good') were awarded to a student for the logical and convincing integration of ideas.

3.1.2.5.3 Appropriate vocabulary

This section examined students' ability to choose appropriate words to express their thoughts precisely and clearly in the report. Therefore, the students' skills in selecting exact words that did not mislead/create misunderstandings for the reader were assessed for this aspect (see Section 4.2.1.1.3, Phase 2 in Chapter 4). If students used appropriate words, they were given 4 marks and graded as 'Good'. For each misleading/inappropriate expression that created confusion or a lack of clarity, 1 mark was deducted. Consequently, students were therefore graded as 'Poor' or 'Average' based on the number of errors they made. For example, if there were 4 or more instances of incorrect usage, the student received no marks; 1 mark was awarded for three incorrect expressions, and so on.

3.1.2.5.4 Functional paragraphs

This section assessed the organisation of the report's content, specifically whether it was divided into coherent and logical paragraphs. A maximum of four (4) marks was allocated to this section. Zero to one (0-1) mark was awarded and the attempt graded as 'Poor' if the content was not divided into paragraphs or it was divided inappropriately. Two to three (2-3) marks and a grade of 'Average' were awarded if there was an attempt to divide the content appropriately and a maximum of four (4) marks and a grade of 'Good' was awarded if the content was divided into logical paragraphs.

3.1.2.5.5 Grammar

Section 5 assessed the correct use of grammar, punctuation and spelling in the students' writing. The errors were counted, and the students were again awarded the grades of 'Poor', 'Average' and 'Good' based on their performance. A maximum of ten marks was allocated to this section. Grammatical errors were counted and assessed in the same way as those of Phase 1 (see Section 3.1.1.5.4.b) in the essay writing test.

3.1.2.5.6 Style, register and tone

This section accounted for a total of eight (8) marks. The method of assessment used for 'style, register and tone' in Phase 1, essay writing (see Section 3.1.1.5.4.a) was also applied here. Specifically, the presence of informal or inappropriate words, as well as their unsuitable arrangement within sentences, was identified. In cases where the assessors found 6 to 7 inappropriate words that negatively affected the formal tone of the report, the student was awarded only 1-2 marks. For more than 7 instances of inappropriate use, the student scored no marks. For all these scores, students were graded as 'Poor'. In cases where there were 3 to 5 inappropriate words, a student received 3-5 marks and was awarded a rating of "Average". If the language and the words that were used created a formal tone (with only one or two instances of inappropriate use), the student received full marks (8) and was graded as 'Good'.

If the assessors identified seven or more inappropriate words that negatively affected the formal tone of the report, the student was awarded no marks and assigned a grade of 'Poor'. If the language and the word choice maintained a formal tone, the student received full marks (8) and was assigned a grade of 'Good'. For each erroneous word, 1 mark was deducted. If the student received between 1-2 marks, he/she was awarded the grade 'Poor'.

3.1.2.5.7 Capturing of the data, post-test 1, report writing

The results of the report writing assessment were compiled in an Excel sheet for further analysis, following a template similar to that used for the essay writing assessment (see Annexure 6). The marks and grades achieved by each student for each criterion were recorded in the Excel sheet. Since the students wrote the post-test report after participating in the IBC course, their performance before the course (pre-test) and after having attended the course (post-test) was compared to evaluate the effectiveness of the IBC course in supporting students to write appropriate business documents.

3.1.2.6 Scoring of post-test 2, business letter writing

The method of assessment of the business letter in the post-achievement test was the same as that of the pre-test (please refer to Sections 3.1.1.6 – 3.1.1.6.4 for an explanation of the data analysis for this section).

As noted, before, a comparison between the test results of the pre-and post-tests enabled the researcher to determine the impact of the IBC course in terms of students' efficiency in writing appropriate business documents.

3.1.3 Phase 3

3.1.3.1 Purpose

Phase 3 consisted of two surveys, one that involved the fourth-year students who were engaged in internships at various organisations and the other involving employers and workplace mentors who facilitated these internships. These two surveys provided information on whether the interns from ABCD met the expectations of employers, with respect to writing professional documents in relation to the business context. The survey for workplace mentors was designed to determine the expectations of the employers, as well as establish whether the students met such expectations. The survey for the fourth-year students/interns was also aimed at determining whether, from their perspective, the IBC students met the expectations of the employers in terms of producing appropriate business documents.

3.1.3.2 Methods/procedures

In this phase, the expectations of the workplace mentors and the writing challenges of the interns in producing business documents were identified, classified and quantified. The researcher employed a qualitative data collection method in this phase, specifically, through the two surveys described above. The questionnaires were personally distributed by the researcher to the workplace mentors and their respective interns.

3.1.3.3 Participants

As mentioned above, the participants in this phase of the study comprised fourth-year internship students and their workplace mentors or supervisors. The ABCD maintains contact with more than twenty-five companies or employers that offer internship opportunities to students each year, depending on availability. These companies include accounting firms, hotels and restaurants, logistics and transport companies, water utilities, electric and hardware suppliers and departments of the Ministry of Education. All 49 fourth-year students who participated in the post-achievement assessment described above were engaged in internships at different companies. All these students had completed the IBC course during the first year of their studies. Out of the 49 students, 46 students participated in the survey.

Prior to the survey, the researcher informed all the workplace mentors or supervisors at the aforementioned companies and their interns about the purpose of the survey and their potential roles in it. Written consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study. The survey was conducted on 15 February 2022, the second month of the students' internships.

3.1.3.4 Research instruments

As mentioned above, the researcher employed two research instruments in Phase 3: (1) the workplace mentor questionnaire and (2) the intern questionnaire (see Annexures 9 &10).

3.1.3.5 Workplace mentor questionnaire

The workplace mentor questionnaire consisted of five questions. The first question addressed the frequency with which the interns produced business-related documents during their internship, aiming to determine how often their interns were required to engage in business writing tasks. In response to the question, mentors selected one of five options: 'not at all' (if the interns did not write any business documents during their internship); 'once a week'; 'twice or more a week'; 'once a day'; and 'twice or more a day'.

The second question sought information regarding the types of business-related documents interns were required to produce during their internship. The question included a list of typical business-related documents: (1) business letters; (2) business reports; (3) weekly internship reports; (4) reports on meetings with clients; (5) e-mail messages; and (6) an option for any other kinds of business documents. Mentors were able to select one or more document types and were also required to indicate the frequency of production using the same five options provided in Question 1.

The third question was related to the effectiveness of the types of documents interns produced during their internship. The mentors were requested to rate the interns' performance on the types of business documents they had to produce. The question contained the same list of business-related documents as listed above for Question 2. Again, the mentors needed to choose between five options. If, for example, the document that the interns produced did not meet their standards or expectations in terms of effectiveness, they could choose the option 'not effective at all'. The other available options were: (2) 'slightly effective', (3) 'fairly effective', (4) 'effective' and (5) 'very effective'.

Question 4 addressed the areas of difficulty that interns experienced when producing professional documents. Specifically, mentors were asked to identify the areas they believed posed challenges for their interns in professional writing. A list of typical components of standard professional documents was provided for reference. The list contained the following items: (1) appropriate use of punctuation; (2) correct usage of grammar; (3) choice of appropriate words; (4) organisation of ideas; (5) usage of the appropriate format for the specific documents; and (6) appropriate use of tone/style. If the mentors observed that their interns experienced no difficulty in any of the listed areas, they could choose the option 'not

at all'. Conversely, if they perceived challenges in some of the areas, they could indicate the severity using the options: 'slightly difficult', 'fairly difficult', 'difficult' and 'very difficult' in relation for each specific area. For example, selecting 'difficult' or 'very difficult' for punctuation would indicate that the mentor believed the intern had significant difficulty using punctuation appropriately.

The fifth question combined both close-ended and open-ended questions. The first part focused on mentors' perceptions of the quality and effectiveness of the written documents produced by their interns during the internship. Mentors were asked to rate these documents using the following scale: (1) 'Very poor'; (2) 'Below average'; (3) 'Average'; (4) 'Above average'; and (5) 'Excellent'. The second part of the question was contingent upon the mentors' rating in the first part. Specifically, if they rated their interns as 'Very poor', 'Below average' or 'Average', they were asked to provide recommendations to the management of the ABCD regarding potential strategies for improving students' writing skills to produce more appropriate business-related documents.

3.1.3.5.1 Capturing of the data - workplace mentor questionnaire

The data collected from the workplace mentor questionnaire were recorded in an Excel sheet (see Annexure 11). All the questions and their details and subdivisions were listed in the first column. Response options such as 'Not at all' or 'Once a week' were entered into the second column. The participants or workplace mentors were represented by numbers such as 'E1', E2 and were arranged in the subsequent columns. If participant 'E1' chose a specific option, for instance, 'Once a week' for a particular question, it was entered into the subsequent column as '1'. The same procedure was used for all other participants. For example, for the question, 'On average, how often do your interns have to produce written business-related documents during their internship?', if 3 out of 22 workplace mentors commented 'Once a week', its percentage (14%) was calculated and recorded in the percentage (%) column. The Excel sheet thus facilitated easy access to the data, allowing immediate observation that, out of twenty-two workplace mentors, only 14% agreed that their interns had produced business-related documents at an interval of one document a week. Similarly, options for each question, the number of instances, percentages, etc., were captured in the spreadsheet. Once this was done, the researcher calculated and entered the total number of similar responses for each question.

3.1.3.5.2 Scoring of workplace mentor questionnaire

As mentioned above, the five questions in the workplace mentor questionnaire addressed the following areas: how often interns produced business-related documents (Q 1); the kinds of

documents they had to produce and how often they produced them (Q 2); the types of documents that their interns produced effectively or found challenging (Q 3); the specific areas with which the interns had difficulties in writing the documents effectively (Q 4); and finally, rating the performance of their interns related to their writing efficiency and providing recommendations (if required) about possible strategies to improve the writing skills of ABCD students (Q 5).

For question 1, if the majority of the workplace mentors selected options such as 'twice or more a week', 'once a day' or 'twice or more a day', it could be concluded that business writing skills are essential for students to succeed in the industry. Question two focused on the types of business documents that interns were required to write during their internship. If 'business letters' or 'business reports' were the documents chosen by the majority of the workplace mentors based on the frequency of writing, these would, for example, be considered the most important documents that the interns needed to be able to write successfully. Question 3 focused on the workplace mentors' experience with their interns relating to the effectiveness of the kinds of documents they produced. If most of the mentors perceived the documents produced by their interns as 'not effective', 'slightly effective' or 'fairly effective', it could be concluded that there was a need to investigate the possible reasons why the interns were unable to produce effective documents. The fourth question was related to question 3 in the sense that the mentors were requested to mention the specific areas in writing that they found to be problematic for the interns that caused them to write ineffective business documents. For example, if the majority of the workplace mentors commented that the 'appropriate use of grammar' or 'organisation of ideas' were the specific areas in which their interns had difficulties, these would be the areas to be considered for further study. In addition, if the majority of the mentors indicated options 3 to 4 ('Fairly difficult', 'Difficult' or 'Very difficult'), it would be a clear indication of which areas need further attention. For the fifth question, the workplace mentors rated their interns based on the effectiveness of the documents that they produced during the period of their internship. As mentioned before, if the mentors rated the interns as 'Very poor', 'Below average' or 'Poor', they also had to make recommendations as to how they believed the writing skills of the students could be improved. The workplace mentors' choices for each question were counted and percentages calculated. The results of the workplace mentor survey were then also compared to that of the intern survey in the data analysis in Chapter 4.

3.1.3.6 Fourth-year student/intern questionnaire

The intern questionnaire also contained five questions, which were largely similar to those included in the mentor questionnaire. The first question focused on the frequency with which

interns produced business-related documents during their internships. If they were not required to write any business documents, they could select the option 'Not at all'. Conversely, if they were required to produce documents on a daily or weekly basis, they could choose from the options 'Once a week', 'Twice or more a week', 'Once a day' and 'Twice or more a day'.

The second question requested information on the types of business-related documents interns produced during their internship as well as the frequency at which these were produced. Similar to the question in the workplace mentor questionnaire, the question provided the same list of business documents given to the workplace mentors: (1) Business letters; (2) Business reports; (3) Weekly internship reports; (4) Reports on meetings with clients; (5) Email messages; and (6) Any other kinds of business documents. They were also provided with the same five options as for the mentors, i.e. (1) Not at all; (2) Once a week; (3) Twice a week; (4) One to two per day; and (5) Three to four per day.

The third question focused on the challenges or /difficulties the interns experienced when producing the different types of documents mentioned above during their internship. If the interns encountered no difficulty in producing business letters, for instance, they could choose the option 'Not difficult at all'. Conversely, if they encountered challenges in producing the business documents as mentioned, the interns could choose the options 'Slightly difficult', 'Fairly difficult', 'Difficult' and 'Very difficult'.

The fourth question was identical to the fourth question in the workplace mentor questionnaire. This question investigated the interns' specific areas of difficulty in writing business documents. This question, therefore, focused on whether the interns were struggling to use appropriate punctuation, grammar, tone or style to make their documents more effective. The interns were given the same options, similar to the fourth question of the workplace mentors, from which they could choose.

The fifth question was again a combination of both closed- and open-ended questions. The first part of the question focused on the interns' ratings of their own writing performance and required them to indicate whether the IBC course helped them to produce effective business-related documents. If they felt that the IBC course did not help them, they could opt for 'Not well at all'. On the other hand, if the interns believe that the course helped them, they could choose between the options, 'Slightly well', 'Fairly well', 'Well' or 'Very well'. The second part of the question depended on their choice for the first part of the question. That is, if the choice was one among the first three options, they were asked to provide suggestions about possible ways in which the IBC course could be adjusted so that it could better prepare students to write effective documents at the workplace.

3.1.3.6.1 Capturing of the data, fourth-year student/intern questionnaire

The data were again entered into an Excel sheet similar to that of the workplace mentors (see Annexure 11). As noted earlier, the fourth-year student and the workplace mentor questionnaires were similar in that both collected information on: (1) the frequency of writing business-related documents by the interns, (2) the types of documents that they wrote during their internship, (3) the challenges that the interns experienced in writing the specific documents, and (4) the specific areas of difficulty that the interns had in writing. The fifth question in the mentor questionnaire focused on mentors' evaluations of their interns' written documents, as well as their recommendations regarding the IBC course (if they had any). For the interns, the fifth question was related to their self-assessment of their performance as well as their suggestions/recommendations about the course. Since both questionnaires sought similar information, the comparative analysis of the results of the surveys produced a more accurate and conclusive answer for the researcher.

3.1.3.6.2 Scoring of fourth-year student/intern questionnaire

The researcher adopted similar methods of data capturing for the intern survey as for that of the workplace mentors. The choices of the interns for each question were, therefore, also counted and entered into the specific columns of the Excel sheet (see Annexure 12).

The results of both surveys were analysed and then compared to identify similarities and differences. A comparison of the results for the first question of the two surveys yielded clarity on the number of business documents that interns were expected to write in the workplace. Similarly, the comparison of the answers to the second question in both surveys revealed the kinds of business documents that interns were expected to produce. Similarly, comparing the results of the third question for both surveys provided valuable information about the types of documents that the interns found difficult to produce at the workplace. Responses to the fourth question enabled the researcher to compare the perceptual data from interns and mentors regarding specific writing difficulties with the empirical data sets of the pre- and post-tests in the earlier phases of the study. Therefore, the analysis of answers to this question of both surveys assisted in identifying the specific area(s) in which the interns' committed mistakes in writing business-related documents. As mentioned above, the fifth question on the intern survey was a self-assessment of their writing ability. If they believed that the IBC course at ABCD did not prepare them well enough to write effective business-related documents, they had to provide recommendations on how to improve the business writing skills of the students. Additionally, the fifth question also asked the workplace mentors to provide suggestions on how interns' business writing skills could be improved based on how they rated the

effectiveness of the documents produced during the period of their internship. Therefore, the comparative analysis of the fifth question of both surveys gave the researcher a more accurate understanding of how effective the IBC course was with respect to preparing the learners to produce business-related documents.

3.1.4 Phase 4

3.1.4.1 Purpose

In Phase 4, the researcher addressed two issues: first, the researcher wanted to investigate how the learning outcomes of the IBC course at the ABCD related to the learning outcomes of the BC courses offered by other universities and colleges in Botswana. For this purpose, the researcher collected the syllabuses of the IBC/BC courses offered by two universities in Botswana, namely the Botswana Open University (BOU) and BA ISAGO University. Secondly, the researcher wanted to determine whether the learning outcomes of the IBC course at ABCD were adequate in meeting the expectations of the employers with regard to the types of business documents that the interns had to produce (as revealed by the workplace mentor and intern surveys). An analysis of the alignment between these learning outcomes and the specific writing difficulties of the IBC students (as revealed by the results of both surveys and the results of the pre-and post-tests) provided valuable information in Chapter 4 regarding the identification of specific areas in the current IBC course that could be adjusted to better address student needs.

3.1.4.2 Method/procedures

The learning outcomes of the IBC course at the ABCD were compared with the learning outcomes of similar courses offered at Botswana Open University (BOU) and BA ISAGO.

3.1.4.3 Documents analysed

For this phase, the researcher analysed the syllabus of the IBC course at the ABCD, and the syllabi of similar courses offered at the two other universities mentioned above (comparing the learning outcomes of all three courses).

3.1.4.4 Capturing of data for the analysis of the learning outcomes of BC/IBC courses at different universities

A table (see Annexure 13) was used to capture the data on the learning outcomes of the three institutions mentioned above. The names of the three universities were arranged in three

adjacent columns. All the learning outcomes (LOs) of the IBC/BC courses offered by the respective universities were captured in the subsequent rows of the respective universities.

3.1.4.5 Scoring of data of the learning outcomes of BC/IBC courses at different universities

The researcher determined the similarities and differences between the LOs of the three syllabi. The result of the comparative analysis provided information on whether the learning outcomes of the IBC course at the ABCD were aligned with similar courses designed to address similar issues with regard to the development of student writing. These learning outcomes were further compared with the responses of participants to the second, third and fourth questions of both the intern and workplace mentor surveys in the data analysis (Chapter 4). As previously discussed, these questions focused on the types of business documents interns had to write during their internship, the types of documents they found difficult to produce and the specific areas of difficulty in producing the different types of business documents. This comparison provided valuable information about the appropriateness of the IBC course at the ABCD to prepare the students to write priority business documents, as identified by comparing the different data sets. It therefore provided substantiated guidelines as to how the learning outcomes of the IBC course could be adjusted in order to enable the students to become more competent writers in the context of business.

3.1.5 Phase 5

3.1.5.1 Purpose

Phase 5 of the investigation augmented Phase 4 in the sense that it focused specifically on pertinent aspects of the current business writing intervention at the ABCD. As mentioned previously, the current writing intervention forms part of the IBC course, which is a twelve-credit module spread over four months during the first semester. The course is assessed using both Continuous Assessment (CA) and Summative Assessment (SA). In this regard, CA consists of two assignments and an internal test, which contributes fifty per cent to the final marks. SA takes place in the form of a final written examination that contributes another fifty per cent to the final mark (a total of 100 marks). According to the assessment policy of the ABCD, students have to achieve a minimum of fifty per cent from both the CA and the SA to pass the course. In other words, if a student is absent from one of the CA tests or receives a low mark, it will result in an automatic failure, although the student may have achieved a high percentage in other tests. This is because (according to the policy) students have to achieve a separate minimum in each test and obtain at least 50% in the combined marks for the CA

component (the combination of two assignments and an internal test) and another separate minimum of 50% in the SA (the final examination) to pass the subject.

3.1.5.2 Method/procedures

In addition to utilising the results of the pre-and post-tests discussed earlier to assess the effectiveness of the current business writing intervention, the researcher also sought to determine the following aspects: (1) the appropriateness of the resources, such as the prescribed text(s)/study manual used in the presentation of the IBC course; (2) the appropriateness of assessment instruments such as examination question papers; and (3) the method of teaching of the IBC lecturers when they teach the writing component of the IBC course. This information further enabled the researcher to determine whether any adjustment was needed to enhance the effectiveness of the teaching intervention. The first aspect was addressed by analysing documents used as resources for the presentation of the course. This included a comparative analysis of the prescribed textbooks or study manuals used for the IBC course at the ABCD and those used in other BC courses. Secondly, the assessment instruments of the IBC course (past question papers from 2018-2020) were assessed to determine their appropriateness. The third task involved investigating the teaching methods employed in the classroom during the delivery of the IBC course through classroom observations. The researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews with the IBC lecturers to gather information about various pertinent aspects of the course.

3.1.5.3 Analysis of past final examination question papers

For this aspect, the researcher completed a comparative analysis of three past examination papers of the IBC course. The purpose of this analysis was to determine whether these question papers assessed the learning outcomes of the IBC course sufficiently, with specific reference to the business writing skills of the students.

3.1.5.3.1 Capturing of data

All data from the three question papers was entered into an Excel spreadsheet (see Annexure 15). For instance, the year of the question paper was entered in column A, while column B represented the different sections of the question paper (sections A to D). Similarly, the questions, the specific focus area of the questions (knowledge, comprehension or application), marks for each question, percentage and total were captured in the subsequent columns. For example, the 2018 question paper was entered in the first column of the Excel sheet. Sections of the question paper, the number of questions, the focus areas of the questions, the marks of each question and their percentages were noted in the following columns in the Excel sheet.

In this manner, if question 1 in section A required the students to write a business letter, it could be inferred that the focus area of assessment was the students' actual ability in writing business letters. Similarly, if the second question under section 1 or 2 focused on the writing of a memorandum or a business report, one could reach the conclusion that students' ability in writing memorandums or business reports was tested here. On the other hand, if there was any question asking students to mention specific similarities and differences between a memorandum and a business letter, for example, it could be concluded that students' knowledge about the characteristics of a memorandum and a business letter was examined by the question. Therefore, if the question papers from the three years contained, for example, a high percentage of questions that focused on students' knowledge of business communication or, in other words, theoretical aspects of business communication, it could be ascertained that a disproportionately high percentage of the assessment was focused on the knowledge of business communication rather than the application thereof. This further implied that students who passed the course by obtaining 50% or more for the above-mentioned examinations were assessed primarily on their knowledge and understanding with respect to the concepts of business communication and not the application thereof.

3.1.5.3.2 Scoring of data

Once the assessment areas of each question paper were recorded, the researcher calculated the total marks for the different focus areas of assessment, including 'knowledge', 'comprehension' and 'application'. A critical aspect of this analysis (presented in Chapter 4) was determining the percentage of each examination paper that assessed students' actual business writing skills, corresponding to the 'application' component of the IBC course. If this percentage was comparatively low, it could be concluded that the students' actual writing abilities were not adequately evaluated, even if they may have passed the module. In other words, what was tested was their knowledge and understanding of the concepts and theory of business communication.

3.1.5.4 Analysis of textbooks/study manuals

As mentioned above, the researcher also conducted a comparative analysis between the prescribed textbook/study manual of the IBC module at the ABCD and the available textbooks/study manuals from other Business Communication courses, including study manuals from ABE (the Association of Business Executives), BOU and BA ISAGO (see Annexure 14). The purpose of this analysis was to ascertain whether the ABCD used appropriate and relevant resources for the IBC course.

3.1.5.4.1 Capturing of data

The data for the analysis of all the study resources mentioned above were entered into a table. The headings of units/chapters of the other IBC/BC courses were entered in the first column of the table, and the headings of units of the prescribed textbook/study manual of the IBC course of the ABCD were captured in the second column for comparative purposes.

3.1.5.4.2 Scoring of data

Listing the contents of the prescribed textbooks/manuals of the other IBC/BC courses indicated the knowledge and skills a learner should have acquired upon completion of such courses. The units/contents of the IBC course offered by the ABCD were then compared to those of the other IBC/BC courses and all differences and similarities recorded. These results were further compared with the results of the second question in the workplace mentor and the intern survey, which sought information about the kinds of business-related documents that the interns had to produce during their internship. If the survey results indicated that business letters and business reports were the two documents interns had to produce most frequently in the workplace, the researcher could then assess the extent to which these documents were emphasised in the content of the prescribed study material of the ABCD and the other BC/IBC courses.

3.1.5.5 Participant class/lecture observation

The researcher personally observed IBC lectures, with particular focus on sessions covering written business communication. For purposes of clarity and future reference, lectures were video recorded. Both lecturers were informed of the observation and their consent obtained before observing their lectures. The primary purpose of the observation was to determine the teaching methodologies and practices employed during the IBC course to determine whether they adequately prepared students to write business documents. The observations of the researcher focused on: (1) the lesson plan; (2) the objectives of the lesson; (3) the selection of teaching resources/materials and how these related to the objectives of the lesson; (4) the teaching strategies employed to accomplish the objectives (e.g. instruction, explanation, feedback, error correction and evaluation); (5) language of instruction; and (6) specific learner activities.

3.1.5.5.1 Capturing and scoring data from the lesson observation

The capturing of this data was also done in a table. The themes to the different focus areas mentioned above were entered in the first column of the table (see Annexure 18). Subsequently, the comments of the researcher from the lesson observations were registered

in the adjacent columns. Common themes and patterns in the data that could inform possible adjustments to the IBC course (if required) were then identified.

3.1.5.6 Semi-structured interviews

The researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews with two IBC lecturers. The interactions between the interviewer and the interviewees were video-recorded and transcribed for future reference. Interview questions focused on (1) the learning outcomes of the IBC course; (2) the current method of teaching; (3) the number of Guided Learning Hours (GLH) for the completion of the course; (4) assessment methods/criteria; (5) assessment instruments; and (6) the specific difficulties that the lecturers observed concerning their student's writing skills.

3.1.5.6.1 Capturing of data from semi-structured interviews

The main themes reflected in the interview question was recorded in the first column of a table (see Annexure 16). The analysis of the interview results involved the identification of specific themes that emerged from the data. The comments of the lecturers with respect to the main themes were then captured in the column next to the specific areas mentioned above.

3.1.5.6.2 Scoring of data from semi-structured interviews

The researcher examined the comments of both lecturers and noted common comments/suggestions with respect to similar questions. These common comments were counted and considered in proposing a possible adjustment to the IBC course. If both lecturers, for example, experienced the number of GLH as too few to present the course contents successfully, the comment would be regarded as a serious consideration in the possible adjustment of the course.

3.1.5.7 Conclusion

As comprehensively discussed in this chapter, the empirical investigation made use of both quantitative and qualitative methods and was carried out in five different phases to answer the five research questions. The first-year students' general as well as business writing difficulties were determined in Phase 1. To accomplish this, a pre-achievement test, which consisted of writing a general essay and a business letter, was administered to first-year students before they started with the IBC course. The purpose of the post-achievement test was to determine whether the first-year students showed any improvement with regard to their writing ability as a result of having completed the IBC course. The fourth-year students (who also completed the same course in their first year) were also tested using the same test to determine whether

their exposure to, firstly, the IBC course and, secondly, the tertiary academic environment for several years may have contributed to them becoming more efficient writers of business documents. The post-test included writing a formal report and a business letter, which are both generally accepted kinds of documents used in a business context.

Phase 3 investigated whether the interns from the ABCD met the employers' expectations regarding writing business documents. Two surveys, one with the mentors and one with the interns (fourth-year ABCD students), were conducted. The purpose of the surveys were to collect information about the different types of business documents required to write, how often they had to produce such documents, whether they experienced difficulty in writing the documents, the specific areas of the business documents that challenged them the most, as well as their opinions about whether the IBC course prepared them well enough for the demands of business writing in the workplace. Lastly, the interns were asked for possible recommendations as to how the IBC course may be improved. The mentors were required to provide the same information mentioned above from their perspective.

Phase 4 of the study focused on whether the Learning Outcomes (LO) of the IBC course at the ABCD were appropriate and adequate in preparing the students to write the business documents that are required in the workplace (as identified in the survey results of the mentors and the interns). The LOs of the IBC were also compared to the LOs of similar courses offered at the BA ISAGO University and the Botswana Open University in order to determine whether the other courses addressed similar issues towards the development of business writing.

In Phase 5, the researcher evaluated various documents to inform potential adjustments to the IBC course at the ABCD. This included a comparative analysis of the specific topics covered in the ABCD IBC study manual with those included in the IBC manuals of the BOU, BA ISAGO and ABE. The analysis of these documents provided valuable insights for the possible refinement of the IBC course at the ABCD.

The document analysis also focused on a determination of the appropriateness of the assessment instruments used to assess students' writing abilities, in this case, the final summative assessment that took the form of a final examination paper. The researcher, therefore, analysed the final examination papers of the IBC course at the ABCD from the years 2018 to 2020.

Lastly, the teaching methods used by the lecturers who taught the IBC course were observed to determine their adequacy with specific reference to the teaching of business writing skills.

Interviews were also conducted with the same lecturers for more in-depth information regarding the same issue.

The following chapter presents the data analysis and interpretation of all the different data sets discussed in this chapter. The prominent findings in Chapter 4 were then utilised towards making recommendations for possible adjustments to the IBC course at the ABCD in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical data collected for the study as well as its analysis and interpretation. As stated before, the research was carried out in five phases in order to address the objectives discussed in the first chapter. As each phase focused on a specific objective, this chapter discusses the data collection, presentation, analysis and interpretation in the order in which the five phases occurred. In all cases, a student's performance for a whole section/aspect/ criterion was considered in awarding a specific mark and rating (i.e., "Good", "Average" or "Poor"), and not only the specific example(s) used with regard to the written assessments reported in the Chapter.

The first-year students' ability to produce written general and business documents was tested upon entry to the tertiary level of education. This assessment aimed to determine their writing ability before exposing them to the IBC course, aimed, in part, at developing their writing skills. These students' writing ability was assessed again after they had completed the IBC course to determine its effect on their ability to produce effective business documents. In combination with the results of the other data sets discussed in this chapter, the assessment results were utilised to contribute towards proposing an adjustment to the course content and its mode of delivery to better support students' writing skills.

The results of the first step in Phase 1 of the study, which focused on writing a general essay as well as a business letter, are presented in the ensuing section.

4.1.1 Phase 1: Essay writing test

The first-year students participated in writing the essay in the first week of their entry to the college (on the 8th of October 2021). The assessment focused on four primary areas: their skills in writing a purposeful introduction, a well-structured content section, a suitable conclusion, as well as the effective use of language (see Annexure 1: Phase 1, essay test question).

4.1.1.1 Introduction

In the introduction, the assessment focused on three aspects: the title, statement of the problem and solution. The analysis of these aspects is discussed below.

a. Title

Students were expected to provide an appropriate, meaningful title reflecting the essay's theme and capturing the reader's attention (see Annexure 2: Phase 1, essay test analysis table). The table below presents the results of the students' performance in providing suitable titles for their essays.

Table 4.1: Marks breakdown for the title of the essay

Assessment criterion	Total marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-1 mark)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (2 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (3 marks)
Title	3	55	44 (80%)	6 (11%)	5 (9%)

Interpretation

The analysis revealed that the majority of the students did not include titles for their essays. A small number of students copied the question and presented that as a title. The results indicate that only 9% of the students included suitable titles for their essays. The following are examples of the titles provided (students are represented by numbers to maintain anonymity and confidentiality).

Student 35 provided the following title: ***“There has been an increase of crime in your society what do you think”?*** This student clearly copied the title from the question. Student 6 wrote ***“Essay writing”*** as a title. Students 4, 7, 8, 16, 21 and 33 wrote ***“Increasing crime in society”*** as a title. Therefore, these titles were graded as “Poor”. However, Student 25 provided the title ***“Factors leading to crime in society”*** and Students 26, 12, and 54 wrote ***“Three Factors which might account for more crime”***. The last three titles could be considered more appropriate as they reflected the essay's theme more accurately and prepared the reader for the forthcoming content; hence, they were rated “Good”.

b. Statement of the problem

Result analysis

The second aspect assessed in the introductory part of the essay was students' ability to express appropriately the “statement of the problem” at the beginning of their essays. The

analysis of the results in this area, as recorded in the table below, shows that the majority of the students (58%) achieved a rating of “Poor” and only 7% were graded as “Good”.

Table 4.2: Marks breakdown for the statement of the problem of the essay

Assessment criterion	Total marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-1 mark)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (2 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (3 marks)
Statement of the problem	3	55	32 (58%)	19 (35%)	4 (7%)

Interpretation

A majority of the students failed to present the problem statement in the introductory section of their essays. The essay question required students to identify three reasons for the increased incidence of crime in society, which collectively constituted the statement of problem(s). However, 58% of the students either mentioned only one reason for the increase in crime or omitted to mention any reasons. Although several students did state the causes of rising crime in subsequent paragraphs, they did not include them in the introduction. Only a small number of the students identified two contributory factors in the introduction, and only four students articulated all three factors contributing to the increase in crime as required by the essay question.

Student 48 wrote the following introduction for the essay:

“There are so many factors that are leading to the increase of crime in the societies and as well as the country at large which disrupts and interfere with people’s security and they may even lead to loosing of lives by some people because of those attacks”.

The extract above is a vague statement (graded as “Poor”) that would have been more appropriate had the student mentioned the specific factors that contributed to crime in society.

Student 6 presented the statement of the problem as:

“There has been an increase in crime in our society due to Lack of Employment, teenage pregnancy, Lack of parenting and good behaviourable skill”.

Although the student mentioned four factors that they believed contributed to criminal behaviour in society, **“teenage pregnancy”** could not be considered relevant in this context. Teenage pregnancy rather results from ignorance or a lack of education and cannot be

considered to be a cause of criminal activity, but ‘lack of employment’, ‘lack of parental care’ and an absence of ‘good behaviour’ could be considered possible causes of criminal activity. Student 5 provided the following statement of the problem:

“Crime is an unlawful act punishable by law. There are many factors that can lead to one committing a crime. Factors such as poverty, unemployment Depression or stress and being greed for money can led to crimes”.

Although the language use is not completely correct in terms of language use, the response may be considered a more appropriate problem statement because the student identified three factors: poverty, unemployment and greed in the introduction as contributing to increased criminal behaviour. Both students 5 and 6 were assessed as “Average” with regard to their problem statements.

c. Solution

Result analysis

Students were also required to suggest brief solutions to the problems or issues identified in the introductory section of their essays. The following table presents the scores for students’ performance in this section.

Table 4.3: Marks breakdown for the solution of the essay

Assessment criterion	Total marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-1 mark)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (2 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (3-4 marks)
Solution	4	55	53 (96%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)

Interpretation

The majority of students did not propose solutions to the problems identified in their introductions and, were therefore, graded as “Poor”. Only two students attempted to include solutions in their introductions. For example, Student 22 wrote:

“The problem of poverty may be curbed by trying to come with government policies that support people to start their business, trying to come with solutions like increasing jobs available”.

The above attempt was graded as “Average”.

As noted earlier, the grading of the introductory section of the essay was based on the students' ability to provide a purposeful and relevant title, a clear problem statement, and appropriate proposed solutions. The essay required students to focus on the factors, at least three, that contribute to the rise in criminal behaviour in society. The analysis reveals that students encountered significant difficulty in writing this section effectively.

4.1.1.2 Body of the essay

The assessment of this section of the essay comprised twenty-five marks (representing 38% of the total essay assessment). Two specific areas were assessed in this section, i.e., the students' ability to integrate their ideas logically and arrange the content in an orderly manner regarding the various points of discussion (unity, order and construction of coherent sentences), and to organise the content in meaningful and relevant paragraphs (paragraphing).

a. Unity, order and construction of coherent sentences

Result analysis

The aspects assessed in this section included the extent to which students presented their content convincingly through the logical arrangement of details to support the subject under discussion. Students were also evaluated on their skills in linking sentences and ideas by utilising appropriate transitional words (such as conjunctions) and phrases to ensure logical cohesion. The table below presents the results regarding the students' ability to logically integrate ideas and arrange them in an orderly manner in the main body of their essays.

Table 4.4: Marks breakdown for unity, order and construction of coherent sentences of the essay

Assessment criterion	Total marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (1-6 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (7-14 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (15-20 marks)
Unity, order and construction of coherent sentences	20	55	13 (24%)	42 (76%)	0 (0%)

Interpretation

The majority of the students (76%) achieved only an 'Average' rating in this section, while the remaining 24% were assessed as 'Poor'. A notable concern was the students' substantial difficulty in using appropriate conjunctions to link sentences or sentence elements logically.

The following is an example of the poor integration of ideas extracted from Student 6's essay.

"Lack of employment causes crime because of our citizens are uneducated. The un educated citizens end up looking for jobs they dont qualify for to survive that hunger and feed their families however they dont get hired due to their lack of qualifications leading to lack of jobs and increased number of unemployment".

In the example above, the student used the phrase **"because of"** incorrectly in order to connect the ideas of **"lack of employment"** and the state of being **"uneducated"**. Three topics were presented in the first sentence. These were **"lack of employment"**, **"causes of crime"**, and **"uneducated citizens"**. The writer combined the three topics illogically, resulting in ambiguity. A clearer and more logical alternative would have been: *"Since most of our citizens are uneducated, they are unemployed, and a lack of employment can lead to crime"*. Thus, the illogical connection in the original statement stemmed from the writer's inability to establish an appropriate link between being uneducated, unemployment, and the manner in which unemployment contributes to crime.

The second sentence indicates a similar illogical connection between ideas. The ideas appear to have been included randomly without any regard for the cause-and-effect relationship between the ideas. The adverb **"however"** is used inappropriately in the second part of the sentence. The function of this conjunctive adverb is to link contrasting ideas. For example, "John was delayed by the traffic. However, he still managed to catch the train". It would have been more appropriate for the student to connect the two ideas in the following way: *"Citizens are uneducated and as a result, they are not hired"*. Students' difficulty in using appropriate connecting devices to link ideas logically is evident in the discussion above.

The example presented below was taken from Student 38's work, illustrating a failure to position ideas sequentially. In this case, the student wrote about a particular idea in the first sentence, but instead of elaborating on that idea by providing supporting facts or further explanation, the student introduced an unrelated notion in the following sentence.

"Lack of security can also be factor leding to high crime rate. This days people do not act like in the past where one could call a meeting just to talk about how to curb high crime rate".

In this example, the student first wrote about the **“lack of security”** as one of the reasons for the increased crime rate. The following sentence should have justified the point. For instance, the student could have provided reasons for the insecure conditions or how the ineffective practice of “law and order” could favour criminals and how this was related to increased crime. However, the student expressed a different idea in the next sentence, focusing on how people failed to collaborate in addressing the high crime rate.

A similar example taken from Student 6’s essay reinforces the foregoing analysis, indicating students’ difficulty in connecting sentences in an orderly and coherent manner. The student starts the paragraph without a topic sentence as:

“This is why we most of the children/youth in our society sitting near the road waiting for truck drivers so they can exchange money for sex. And there is an increase in Gender based violence man beating woman, murdering, raping even their own blood”.

There is no connection between what was written in the first and the second sentences of the paragraph. The first sentence focuses on the reason for young children becoming prostitutes, and the second on gender-based violence. Furthermore, the order of elements in the expression **“exchange money for sex”** creates the impression that the children have money, so they exchange money for sex. It should have been the other way around; they exchange sex for money. As a result, both students 38 and 6 were graded as “Poor”.

The following example is taken from student 9, which illustrated an “Average” attempt in logically connecting sentences. The student wrote:

“Alcohol and drug abuse also account for more crime in society. Alcohol and drug abuse is taking more than enough or specified amount of liquid to be absorbed by the body at a given time. Therefore by giving more drugs than your body can take can lead to tolerance hence being added to alcohol and drugs. When one is added , they can go a day without taking or absorbing drugs. In modern world, we see homeless people sleeping under bridges, getting food from dustbin which shows how poor and suffering they are”.

The first sentence of the above extract from student 9 started by stating that drug abuse is one of the reasons for the increasing crime in society. The second and third sentences were an explanation of how the excessive usage of drugs can make somebody a drug addict. Even though the student did not explain how drug abuse leads to crime, these two sentences, in this context, are acceptable as they address the same topic, which is drug abuse. However, the last sentence that starts with **“In modern world....”** discussed a different point, which is the situation of the homeless people which has no logical connection to the former sentences.

b. Paragraphing

Result analysis

In this aspect of the essay, students' ability to organise information into coherent paragraphs was assessed. Specifically, students were assessed on their ability to group related ideas within the same paragraph. For coherence, students were expected to present opposing or alternative arguments regarding the same primary theme in a separate paragraph following the initial discussion of that theme. In such cases, a single theme could be developed across two or three paragraphs, provided that it was examined from multiple perspectives. Alternatively, students could fully develop a primary theme within one paragraph before beginning a new paragraph to address a different theme.

The results of students' ability to position the content in coherent paragraphs are shown in the table below.

Table 4.5: Marks breakdown for paragraphing of the essay

Assessment criterion	Total marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-1 mark)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (2-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (4-5 marks)
Paragraphing	5	55	2 (4%)	24 (43%)	29 (53%)

Interpretation

In this section, students' performance was encouraging regarding the organisation of essay content into coherent paragraphs, with 53% of the students receiving a “Good” rating. However, nearly half of the students (43%) experienced difficulties in structuring their content coherently and were graded as “Average”.

The example from Student 17's essay, presented below, demonstrates an effective division of content into coherent paragraphs. As a result, the student was rated as “Good” for this aspect. The student organised the essay into meaningful paragraphs by addressing two distinct issues separately: unemployment, discussed in paragraph 1, and alcohol and drug abuse, discussed in paragraph 2:

“Employment rate in Botswana is very low. Graduates spends years without finding any service of employment. Some are even head of the family but still unemployed, so they resort to criminal activities like robbery in order to provide for their families which in turn leads to increase in crime rate”. (Paragraph 1)

“Alcohol and drug abuse have become a life style for the youth of this generation. Due to the uncontrolled behaviour of alcoholists and drug addicts, they end up involving in passion killings, rape and robbery. Alcohol and drug abuse is the most contributing factor to an increase in crime in our society”. (Paragraph 2)

The following example is taken from Student 6’s essay and was considered a “Poor” attempt at paragraph division, as multiple paragraphs addressed the same topic. In the second paragraph, the student discussed unemployment as a reason for crime:

“Lack of employment causes crime because most of our citizens are uneducated. The uneducated citizens end up looking for jobs they don’t qualify for to survive their hunger and feed their families however they don’t get hired due to their lack of qualifications leading to lack of jobs and increased number of unemployment”.

The student then included a third short paragraph (containing a single sentence) that still elaborated on the same topic:

“Most of the unemployed citizens in our society end up looking for ways to make money and to take care of themselves and their families, carrying out crimes like, theft, robbery, and hijacking”.

It would have been more appropriate if the student had included the idea in the third paragraph as part of the second paragraph, discussing the same topic.

Similarly, Student 42 wrote two consecutive paragraphs discussing the same issue, which is regarded as a ‘Poor’ attempt to divide the content into functional paragraphs.

“Poverty; this is whereby one does not have need and wants at the same time but it is also very hard for them to find or get. In most cases in poor families is hard to find a breadwinner so almost everyone has to come up with a way of putting bread on the table. Eventhough this is resulted by a lot of factors like orphanhood, needy and destitution, sometimes it get hard for family members to be tempted to commit some crimes like stealing. This is to say the life of that poor person would influence them on to stealing people’s properties or belongings to meet their needs resulting into being caught and punished by the law authorities”. (Second paragraph)

“In these poor families even youngsters can end up committing crimes as poverty influences their behaviour. They will then start stealing their classmate’s belongings as they can realise that they cannot get those things from their families. Poverty is really a big concern in the society and even in this country. The government is really trying to help does who are not able but sill they find it not enough resulting them into committing crimes. Other than stealing some of these families would be given food baskets by the government & through Poverty

eradication programmes but rather they will sell them to get money in return not knowing that it is wrong to do so. In most cases this happens in families where there are orphans, need, vulnerable and destitute children. So this factor also has an effect in lots of people's lives; therefore increasing the rate of crime in the society". (Third paragraph)

As is evident from the content of the two paragraphs above, there is no clear rationale for dividing the material into two separate paragraphs, as both address the same issue. The first paragraph explained how poverty can drive individuals to commit crimes such as theft to satisfy their needs and wants. The second paragraph described how young people from impoverished families stole their classmates' belongings because they could not afford such items and further emphasised poverty as a significant societal concern that leads to criminal behaviour, points already covered in the first paragraph. Therefore, both paragraphs convey a similar idea that could have been effectively presented in the same paragraph.

The three paragraphs included below were taken from student 16's essay.

"One thing might account for crime in my society is that due to COVID 19 protocols. As the COVID 19 protocols, there should be social distancing and less number of people in an area, and some people end up losing jobs and become unemployed. This thing made more people to indulge in crime to seek for money and other essential things to improve them".

"Since COVID 19 emerges, criminal activities had been increasing in our society. People engage in criminal activities to feed their family, and some to pay rents and school fees for their children. Due to COVID 19 protocols, most people seek to provide for themselves and they do not have needs which led to them engaging in criminal activities".

"These people who engage in criminal activities end up being caught and arrested which ruin their lives. And some are being jailed which is not a good thing rather than to stay and seek help from relevant stakeholders rather than to do crime".

In the example above, the first and second paragraphs address the possible reason for crime, which is the COVID-19 protocols. These two paragraphs could have been combined as the point of discussion is the same. The third paragraph, however, discusses a different topic as it explains what happened to those who engaged in criminal activities. This was considered an "Average" attempt at dividing the essay into sensible paragraphs.

4.1.1.3 Conclusion

Result analysis

The results regarding the conclusion of the essay indicate that students demonstrated a limited understanding of the purpose and significance of conclusions. As shown in the table below, none of the students could write a conclusion for their essays.

Table 4.6: Marks breakdown for the conclusion of the essay

Assessment criterion	Total marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-1 mark)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (2-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (4-5 marks)
Conclusion	5	55	55 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Interpretation

As noted above, none of the students completed this section of their essays. This may be attributed to a lack of understanding that an essay requires a conclusion or insufficient knowledge of how to write one.

4.1.1.4 Language use

The assessment of students’ language use focused on two specific categories: (1) style, register and tone; and (2) grammatical accuracy.

a. Style, register and tone

Result analysis

The style in which a text is written is highly significant in both academic and professional contexts. Style is shaped through the techniques a writer employs in relation to syntax (the arrangement of words into sentences) and diction (word choice), taking into account the target audience and the purpose of the text (Cruthers, 2019:49). As noted earlier, the essay task required students to identify three factors contributing to crime in society and to support these factors with factual evidence. Students were additionally expected to present their essays in a formal style appropriate for the tertiary academic environment. According to Wangu, Anggraeni, and Balqis Aprilia (2025:1), “Formal writing is typically used in academic, professional, and official communication, characterised by precise vocabulary, complex

sentence structures, objective tone and adherence to grammatical conventions. In contrast, informal writing is commonly found in personal messages, casual conversations, and digital communication; it features colloquial expressions, contractions, simpler sentence patterns, and a more personal or conversational tone”. In essence, a sense of formality in academic writing is created by avoiding the use of informal, conversational language. Other important characteristics of academic writing include its factual basis (reliance on evidence) and objective, impersonal tone, which requires writers to avoid the use of personal pronouns (e.g. ‘I’, ‘we’ and ‘you’) as far as possible to prevent subjective expressions. (cf, Butler & Butler, 2022). Thus, in terms of writing style, attention must be given to the use and arrangement of formal vocabulary, the avoidance of contractions and colloquial expressions, and the exclusion of personal references.

According to Williamson (2021:77), “Tone reflects the way a writer thinks and feels about a text or piece of work and the desired feeling that he/she expects from the target audience. It is highly dependent on word choice and structure. It should match the intended purpose and audience of the text”. For example, a writer may aim to explain, establish, amuse, frighten, argue, or persuade. In all cases, word selection and sentence construction should support the intended purpose. As noted earlier, for the essay task, students were required to write a formal essay presenting convincing reasons for the increase in crime in society. Accordingly, the tone, therefore, had to be persuasive with compelling arguments.

A reader can often judge the credibility of the information presented by the tone of the language used. For example, overusing words such as “maybe” or “can be” may give the impression that the writer lacks confidence in their statements. Therefore, in general, expressions that create uncertainty should be avoided whenever possible in argumentative or persuasive essays.

Williamson (2021:77) further mentions that an objective tone is preferred in formal and professional writing. Consequently, writers should choose neutral or impartial words and expressions, avoiding personal or emotional phrases that contribute to a subjective tone such as “I think”, “I feel”, or “I believe”.

Consequently, the assessors evaluated the students’ essays for characteristics constituting a formal style, register and tone in this section.

The table below indicates that only one student (2%) was able to write the essay in an appropriated style, register and tone. Sixty-two per cent of the students were graded as “Poor” for this aspect and the remainder (36%) were graded as “Average”.

Table 4.7: Marks breakdown for the style, register and tone of the essay

Assessment criterion	Total marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-2 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (3-6 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (7-10 marks)
Style, register and tone	10	55	34 (62%)	20 (36%)	1 (2%)

Interpretation

The following examples reflect students’ difficulty in writing an academic essay in an appropriate style, register and tone.

The example below was extracted from Student 43’s essay:

“What say, we live in a judgemental society. The reasons why there is an increased rate in crime is because of poverty. Some people resort to theft as a way of solving their needs, its just that they are under the compulsion even if they have to go against their morals. Its hurts a lot too, if we take a look at someone who is a victim in theft, because some struggle to earn for themselves thus creating an inconvenience and an example, I may have lost my phone in main mall and just imagine as being a first year student I will lose lot of content on the phone because emails, everything is in there therefore leading to lagging in getting updated”.

The paragraph above contains a number of examples (all underlined) of informal words and expressions (**“go against”, “a lot too”, “take a look”, “just imagine”, and “to lagging”**), subjective expressions including personal pronouns (for example, **“we”, “I may”, “I will”, and “my”**), and contractions such as **“its”** (it’s) that do not adhere to a formal style of writing.

Similarly, the following is an extract from Student 47’s work indicating the student’s difficulty in adopting a formal register and tone:

“Peer pressure: Peer pressure may be the reason why they are increase in crime in the society. As people we sometimes don’t consider our decisions, before taking actions, as that we sometimes find ourselves surrounded by bad people who might ruin our future. This would lead to increase in crime because some of our friends may encourage us to take actions that they want, not how we want things to be, some may encourage others to steal and do some criminal acts like rape which may end up putting lot of people in prisons because they have done what their friends influenced them to do because they also wanna to be the part of the group and they do not want to betray their friends, they may end up forming groups which may destroy other people’s belonging. This may lead to increase in crime because sometimes is really hard for some people to resist negative peer pressure without realising that what they are doing is not acceptable”.

The passage contains numerous instances of subjective (personal) expressions (e.g. **“we”**, **“ourselves”** and **“our”**), an example of contraction (**“don’t”**), indecisive words and expressions such as **“may”**, **“maybe”**, **“might”**, **“sometimes”**, **“some people”**, **“some of our”**, and **“some criminal acts”**, which undermine the formality of the content. The personal expressions used in this example may create the impression that the writer refers to his or her first-hand experience and are not appropriate for academic writing. These expressions contribute to a more personal style of writing that should preferably be avoided in formal writing. The excessive use of the indecisive terms may further give the impression that the writer lacks confidence in his/her statements. In addition, the slang term **“wanna”** is too informal for academic writing. Consequently, Students 43 and 47 were rated as “Poor” for this aspect.

The following extract was taken from Student 50’s essay:

“ UNEMPLOYMENT-Most of the youth in our society are unemployed as the jobs are no nowadays. As a result of being unemployed, they are forced to stay at home doing nothing and as a result they starve. In order to cool for themselves they will be forced to engage in crime activities hence leading to more crime in the society”.

Although the student clearly identified unemployment as a reason for crime, the informal expressions such as **“jobs are no”**, **“doing nothing”**, personal expression like **“our”**, as well as the presence of the slang word **“cool”** detract from the formality of the passage. Consequently, the student received an “Average” rating. Without major revisions, the passage could be written in a more formal style as follows: *“Unemployment - Most of the youth in society are unemployed, as there are no jobs nowadays. As a result, they are forced to stay at home without doing anything. In order to satisfy their needs, they will be forced to engage in criminal activities, thus leading to more crime in society”.*

b. Grammatical accuracy

Result analysis

Most students performed poorly in using grammatically correct language in their essays. The table below presents the results regarding the grammatical accuracy of the students’ essays.

Table 4.8: Marks breakdown for the grammatical accuracy of the essay

Assessment criterion	Total marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (1-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (4-6 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (7-10 marks)
Grammar	10	55	53 (96%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)

Interpretation

Overall, students’ performance in this category highlights a need to improve the grammatical accuracy of their writing. A substantial majority of students (96%) received poor results for grammatical correctness in their essays. Since grammatical errors could result in unclear communication and negatively affect the reception of academic and professional documents, it is essential that students develop the ability to write grammatically correct texts.

The example presented below was taken from Student 8’s essay (again, the most prominent errors are underlined).

“Another Factor which might account for more crime in our society is being poor. When someone is poorly and not having solution to meet his/her needs can end up stealing . Some people they are orphans and needy so they did not have anyone to support them with their needs as result end up accessing to others property. According to Coanstable Mrs Mosiane Said they catch an orphan stealing neighbours food in the house, when they went to that orphane’s house they find an empty house without food so then, they found out the reason why he commit crime. Also the security at Mabule Mabule Primary School said that they found a boy stealing beans at the kitchen. Said they catch him trying to get out through the window. When they came closer they found him carrying packet of beans whey they question him why did that said so that can eat at home because there are no food. That is the reason why can lead to some people steal because they lack. Finally a Chef Mrs Pearl said when she on the way home a young boy took her bag and run away. Then call police and found that boy. They took him to police he is crying a lot said he was thinking will found Food in bag because he is hungry this difficult for him to meet needs and wants”.

The extract above contains numerous grammatical errors, and as a result, the student was rated as “Poor”. The errors include (1) missing articles (“a”, “an”, “the”); (2) the incorrect use of articles; (3) the incorrect use of tenses; (4) the inconsistent use of tenses (the inappropriate combination of past and present tenses in the same sentence); and the absence of required punctuation. For ease of analysis, each sentence in the example is numbered and reproduced below, with comments provided to explain the specific errors.

1. **Another Factor which might account for more crime in our society is being poor.**

The letter “**f**” in the word “**Factor**” should not have been capitalised.

2. **“When someone is poorly and not having solution to meet his/her needs can end up stealing”.**

In this sentence, the student incorrectly used the adverbial form “**poorly**” instead of the adjective “**poor**”. Similarly, the present participle “**having**” is misused (present participle form of ‘have’). This part of the sentence could be corrected as either: “*when someone is poor and has no solution to meet*” or “*when someone is poor and does not have a solution to meet*”. Additionally, an agent (for example, “*such a person*”) is absent between “**needs**” and “**can**”. A more grammatically correct version of the sentence would be: “*When people are poor and cannot satisfy their essential needs, they may resort to theft*”.

3. **Some people they are orphans and needy so they did not have anyone to support them with their needs as result end up accessing to others property.**

In this sentence, the word “**they**” is unnecessarily used at the beginning. Additionally, regarding tense consistency, the student should have used the third person plural present tense of the auxiliary verb “**do**” instead of “**did**”. Furthermore, the student should have used “**and**” before “**as**” to connect the latter part of the sentence correctly, or the sentence could be divided into two, ending the first sentence after “**needs**”. The phrase “**as result**” is incorrect because the article ‘a’ has been omitted; the correct phrase is “*as a result*”. Similarly, “**accessing to others property**” is inappropriate and reflects incorrect word choice. The correct version, instead of “**accessing**”, is “*stealing*”, the word “**to**” should be omitted and there should be an apostrophe after the letter “**s**” in the word “**others**” to use the possessive correctly. The sentence could be rewritten correctly and concisely as: “*Needy orphans without support sometimes resort to stealing other people’s property*”.

4. **According to Coanstable Mrs Mosiane Said they catch an orphan stealing neighbours food in the house, when they went to that orphane’s house they find an empty house without food so then, they found out the reason why he commit crime.**

This sentence contains a significant number of grammatical errors. There is a spelling error in “**Coanstable**” and the letter ‘**S**’ in the word “**Said**” should not be capitalised.

Furthermore, the present tense form of the word **“catch”** is incorrect, as the reference is to a past event and the past tense form **“caught”** should have been used. Similarly, there is the need for an article **“the”** to be inserted before the word **“neighbour’s”** to make it more specific. Additionally, there should be an apostrophe indicating possession following the letter **“r”** in the word **“neighbours”** if one neighbour was robbed or after the letter **“s”** if more than one neighbour was robbed. The preposition **“in”** after the word **“food”** is also incorrect. The correct preposition to use in this instance would be: **“stealing food from the house ...”**. The student also misspelt the word **“orphan”** the second time it was used in the possessive form in the sentence. Furthermore, the present tense form of the verb **“find”** is incorrect and must be replaced with **“found”** as the student is referring to a past event. There should also be a *full stop* after the words **“without food”**. Similarly, the use of **“reason why”** is incorrect. The correct form in this case is: **“They found/understood the reason ...”**. Lastly, the verb **“commit”** should be replaced by **“committed”** in order to maintain consistency in the use of tense. The sentence could have been written more correctly as follows: *“According to Constable Mosiane, the police had recently caught an orphan stealing food from the neighbours’ houses. When visiting the thief’s home, they found an empty house without food. The police then understood why he had committed the crime”*.

5. **Also the security at Mabule Primary School said that they found a boy stealing beans at the kitchen.**

In the sentence above, a comma is required after the word **“also”**. Furthermore, the correct preposition before the word **“kitchen”** is **“from”** and not **“at”**.

6. **Said they catch him trying to get out through the window.**

This sentence is not properly connected to the previous sentence because the student omitted the word **“they”** at the beginning. There is also evidence of the incorrect tense being used where, instead of the present tense verb **‘catch’** the student should have used the past tense **‘caught’**. The sentence could be corrected as follows: *“They (referring to the security) said that they caught him trying to get out through the window”*.

7. **When they came closer they found him carrying packet of beans when they question him why did that said so that can eat at home because there are no food.**

In this sentence, there should be a comma inserted after the word **“closer”** and the article ‘a’ should be inserted before the word **‘packet’** (“... a packet of beans ...”). The second part of the sentence should have been connected to the first part with the conjunction **“and”** before the word **“when”**. The verb **“question”** should have been the past tense **“questioned”** and the phrase **“... why did that said so that he can eat at home ...”** should have read **“... about why he did that, he indicated that they could not eat at home ...”**. Lastly, in the phrase **“... there are no food ...”**, the plural present tense form of the verb **‘are’** is incorrect; it should have been the past singular form **‘was’** (“... there was no food ...”).

8. **Finally a Chef Mrs Pearl said when she on the way home a young boy took her bag and run away.**

In this sentence, a comma is required after the word **“Finally”**, and the letter **‘C’** of the word **‘Chef’** should not be a capital letter. Furthermore, in the part of the sentence **“... when she on the way home ...”**, the past tense form of the verb **‘was’** has been omitted by the student (it should have been **“... when she was on her way home ...”**). Finally, in the last part of the sentence **“... a young boy took her bag and run away.”**, the use of **‘run’** is incorrect because to maintain consistency in the use of tenses, the student should have used the past tense form **‘ran’** (“... a young boy took her bag and ran away”).

9. **Then call police and found that boy.**

A subject, for example, **“they”** or **“somebody”** is required before the word **“then”** in the sentence. The tense of the word **“call”** is also incorrect. As the reference is to a past event, **“called”** should have been used. Lastly, the definite article **“the”** is required before the word **“police”** and **‘they’** is required after the word **“and”**.

10. **They took him to police he is crying a lot said he was thinking will found Food in baq because he is hungry this difficult for him to meet needs and wants.**

In sentence 10 above, the article **“the”** is required before **“police”**, as the word **“police”** is used as a collective noun. Furthermore, it would have been more appropriate if the first part of the sentence functioned as a separate sentence ending after the word **“police”**. The following sentence could therefore begin with the word **“He”** and end after the word **“hungry”**, omitting several words. A more grammatically correct sentence could have read: **“He was crying and claimed that he was hungry and had**

hoped to find food in the bag. A third sentence could then have started with the words “It was” and continued with “difficult for him to meet his needs and wants”.

A further example taken from Student 41’s essay is presented below (again, the prominent errors are underlined for easy identification). This student was rated “Poor” with regard to the use of correct grammar in the essay.

“Another factor which make crime increase is National pandemics such as Covid 19, As a society when they comes an outbreak of a pandemic some certain measures are taken by the government which must be followed by each and every citizen. The government protocol can either affect major business in the society such as banks, shops, Traders and Transport. During this pandemic era crime increase because when there is no one protecting the companies or businesses running in the society, it give the thieves a opportunity to be able to steal whatever they want when ever. They will rob the business and even rob the people which have followed the procedure and locked themselves inside their houses. Most certainly a lot of corruption can happen during the pandemic, as some people of the law can be easily bribed by the locals so that they can be able to escape their crimes easily hence increasing the crime in a society”.

The most prominent errors in the example above include several instances of incorrect concord (i.e. where a singular subject should agree with a singular verb, and a plural subject should take the plural verb).

1. ***“Another factor which make crime increase is National pandemics such as Covid 19, As a society when they comes an outbreak of a pandemic some certain measures are taken by the government which must be followed by each and every citizen.”***

The above sentence is long and complex due to the incorrect use of punctuation. Instead of a comma, a full stop is required after “Covid-19” to divide the sentence into two. In that case, the capitalisation of the letter “a” in the word “as” is justified. The capital letter ‘N’ is incorrect in ‘National’. In the first part of the first sentence, the combination of a plural verb (**make**) with a singular subject (**factor**) is incorrect. A similar mistake occurs with “... **when they comes** ...”. Here, the student combines a singular verb (**comes**) with a plural subject (**they**). Furthermore, the word “**they**” should be replaced with “**there**”. The use of two quantifiers “**some certain**” with the noun ‘**measures**’ is also incorrect because of the repetitive nature. One of the two words should therefore be omitted. Using “**each and every citizen**” is inappropriate with regards to formal writing since the phrase ‘**each and every**’ is considered a cliché. It should be corrected to “**every citizen**”. Ideally, the passage could be written as follows: “Another factor which contributed to the increased crime rate was the COVID-

19 pandemic, when the government imposed various restrictions which hindered individuals' ability to earn a living".

2. ***"The government protocol can either affect major business in the society such as banks, shops, Traders and Transport".***

In English, the word "either" is usually used to indicate that there is a choice between two options, e.g. "Either you take or leave it". Since there was no choice between the two options in the above sentence, the word **"either"** is unnecessary. Similarly, the usage of capital letters in the words **"Traders and Transport"** is incorrect. The sentence could have been written as: *"The government protocol can affect major businesses in society, such as banks, shops, traders and transport".*

3. ***During this pandemic era crime increase because when there is no one protecting the companies or businesses running in the society, it give the thiefs a opportunity to be able to steal whatever they want when ever.***

In the above sentence, **"crime increase"** and **"it give"** are examples of incorrect concord use. The correct forms of the verbs in these cases are **"increases"** and **"gives"** since the subjects "crime" and "it" are singular. Furthermore, the singular form of the word **"thief"** is incorrect and must be changed to the plural **"thieves"**. The student further used the article **"a"** instead of **"an"** before the word **"opportunity"**. In addition, the two separate words **"when ever"** are used incorrectly and should be corrected to one word, **"whenever"**. The complete sentence could have been written more correctly as: *"The crime rate increased during the pandemic because the enforced lockdown protocols hindered businesses' protection measures, allowing thieves free rein to commit crime".*

4. ***"They will rob the business and even rob the people which have followed the procedure and locked themselves inside their houses".***

The incorrect use of articles and relative pronouns is evident in the above sentence. There is no need for the article (**"the"**) before the word **"business"**. The usage of the article **the** signifies a specific business, which is not the case in this instance. The student should also have used the plural form **'businesses'** since this is a general indication and not a specific one. Furthermore, the relative pronoun **"which"** is not appropriate to represent people but refers to things, objects, animals and places. Therefore, the correct relative pronoun that represents people, in this case **"who"**, should have been used here.

5. ***Most certainly a lot of corruption can happen during the pandemic, as some people of the law can be easily bribed by the locals so that they can be able to escape their crimes easily hence increasing the crime in a society.***

In the last part of the sentence, “**escape their crimes**” is incorrect; it should have been “*escape from their crimes*”. Furthermore, the article “**the**” should have been omitted from the phrase “**the crime in a society**” because “**the**” crime could be construed as referring to a specific crime. The sentence could have been written more correctly and concisely as: “*Corruption was rife during the pandemic, and several authority figures were open to bribery, allowing criminals to remain unpunished. This situation contributed to an increased crime rate*”.

The examples discussed above illustrate several of the difficulties students experienced in applying correct grammar rules in their writing. These examples highlight, in particular, students’ challenges with the correct use of articles, prepositions, punctuation, tenses and concord.

4.1.1.5 Conclusion

An analysis of the students’ overall performance in the essay writing test revealed their need for further guidance in the writing of an appropriate academic essay in a formal style with a purposeful title, comprehensive introduction, logically structured content (of sentences and paragraphs) and an appropriate conclusion. It further revealed that students’ texts were riddled with grammatical errors.

4.1.2 Phase 1: Business letter writing test

The students had to write a business letter on the same day they wrote the essay (8 October 2021). The assessment of the letter focused on three categories: (1) basic format, (2) body of the letter, and (3) language usage. The letter was assessed out of 60 marks.

4.1.2.1 Format of the letter

Students were required to write the business letter in an e-mail format. Their skills in stating the address correctly, providing an appropriate subject heading, salutation and closure for the letter were assessed in this section (see Annexure 3: Phase 1, business letter test question).

a. Address

Result analysis

Students had to provide both the recipient's and the sender's addresses in this section. As the letter had to be written in an email format, the recipient's address constituted the receiver's name. The sender's address had to include the writer's name, position and details concerning the company he/she represented.

Students' performance in this section was comparatively better than in any other section of the letter writing test. As indicated in the table below, 95% were graded as "Good". The remaining 5% were rated as "Poor", primarily because they interchanged the sender's and receiver's addresses or failed to provide the details of the sender's address (see Annexure 4: Phase 1, business letter test's analytical table).

Table 4.9: Marks breakdown for the address of the letter

Assessment criterion	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: "poor" (0-0.5 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "average" (1 mark)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "good" (2 marks)
Address	2	55	3 (5%)	0 (0%)	52 (95%)

Interpretation

Most of the students included the address correctly, and as a result 95% of them were graded as "Good".

The following example was extracted from Student 21's letter. The student wrote the address incorrectly and, as a result, received a "Poor" assessment for this aspect.

"To: Christy

From: Gift Boenyana Radiposo"

In the instructions and scenario provided to the students for the letter-writing assessment, Christy is the senior accounts clerk at Johnson and Hickocks. Her manager asked her to write a letter to G. Johnson at Johnson Stationery to confirm an appointment. Christy is therefore the sender, and G. Johnson of Johnson Stationery is the recipient of the letter. The student

erroneously addressed the letter to Christy instead of G. Johnson. The correct version is presented hereunder.

“To: G. Johnson, Johnson Stationery

From: Christy, Senior Accounts Clerk, Johnson and Hickocks

The majority of the students wrote both addresses correctly and were rated as “Good” for this part of the letter. It must be noted in this instance that the instructions to students for the business letter writing test (see Annexure 3: Phase 1, business letter test question) may have helped them to include both the “from” and “to” addresses in their letters.

b. Subject heading

Result analysis

According to Kroeck (2025:1), the subject heading in business correspondence serves several purposes, including preparing the reader for the content of the letter, indicating its importance or urgency and guiding the reader’s attention. The subject heading enables the reader to grasp the letter’s purpose before reading the full text. It should be short, clear and direct. Accordingly, students’ skills in providing appropriate subject headings for their letters were assessed in this section. The results are presented in the table below.

Table 4.10: Marks breakdown for the subject heading of the letter

Assessment criterion	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (1-1.5 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (2-3 marks)
Subject heading	3	55	16 (29%)	17 (31%)	22 (40%)

The table shows that only 40% of the students were able to provide appropriate subject headings for their business letters. Several students attempted to state purposive headings and were subsequently graded as “Average”. The remainder either failed to provide subject headings for their letters or did so poorly.

Interpretation

Although some of the students were able to provide appropriate headings, the majority of the students appeared to have considerable difficulty with this section of the letter.

The following is an example of a poorly written subject heading (Student 25):

'RE: STATIONERY REQUIREMENT AT ANY TIME IN THE NEXT FORTNIGHT'

The student was required to write a letter to a supplier confirming the date of an appointment to discuss the company's stationery requirements. Therefore, the subject heading should have indicated confirmation of the meeting. Appropriate subject headings could, for instance, be: *"Confirmation of the appointment"* or *"Confirmation of the meeting as requested"*. The subject heading in the example above, however, relates to the company's requirement for stationery items, not a confirmation of the meeting as requested by the sender of the letter. This example, therefore, was considered to be an inappropriate ("Poor") subject heading for the letter.

Student 19 provided the subject heading: **"Stationary requirements"**.

Again, this was not an appropriate subject heading for the letter. The subject line did not reflect the client's willingness (confirmation) or unwillingness (non-confirmation) to be involved in a proposed meeting. As a result, the student was graded as "Poor" for this aspect.

However, the following is an example of a "Good" attempt at providing an appropriate subject heading for the business letter. Student 8 wrote: **"An appointment as per your convenience"**. This heading indicates to the recipient of the letter that the content discusses the sender's confirmation of the appointment for the meeting. Students 12 and 22 gave a similar subject heading for their letters: **"Confirmation of an appointment"**. These were also rated as "Good" subject headings because they indicated the letter's purpose.

The examples discussed above indicate that the students experienced some difficulty in writing suitable subject headings for their letters. Several of the students (29%) had no idea about the purpose of a subject heading for a business letter and, therefore, omitted this part. However, a noteworthy percentage of students (40%) did include appropriate subject headings.

c. Salutation

Result analysis

The salutation is the part of the letter that establishes the relationship between the sender and the receiver. According to Ahaiwe (2024): "The salutation sets the tone for a letter, acting as the gateway to effective communication. It conveys respect, establishes professionalism, and creates a connection with the recipient, making it an indispensable element of any well-crafted message or communication in general". In business correspondence, an appropriate

salutation for a business letter should reflect the sender's professional attitude towards the recipient. Such a format that is often employed for a business letter's professional greeting begins with the word "Dear" followed by the recipient's title and surname, for example, 'Dear Mr Brown'. Alternatively, the word "dear" could be combined with the recipient's position, for example, "Dear Marketing Manager".

The students' performance in presenting the salutation for their letters is shown in the table below.

Table 4.11: Marks breakdown for the salutation of the letter

Assessment criterion	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: "poor" (0-0.5 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "average" (1- mark)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "good" (2 marks)
Salutation	2	55	22 (40%)	6 (11%)	27 (49%)

Interpretation

The results indicate that although a large percentage of the students (49%) wrote appropriate salutations (which were rated as "Good"), an equally large group (51%) experienced difficulty in writing appropriate salutations (as a key part of a letter's introduction). The following is an example of an inappropriate salutation written by Student 1:

"Good day Johnson and Hickocks".

In this example, Student 1 greeted the wrong company because Johnson and Hickocks is the sender's company. Student 6 greeted the recipient of the letter as **"G. Johnson"**. Although the salutation was directed at the correct person, it was missing an honorific, Mr" or "Dear Mr" as a sign of respect for the recipient. This student was therefore rated as "Poor" for this aspect. An appropriate salutation in this instance would be: *"Dear Mr Johnson"*.

Students 3 and 18 presented their salutations as: **"Dear Mr. G. Johnson"** and **"Dear Manager"**. Both of these were rated as "Good" salutations.

The examples quoted above indicate that the students were aware that a salutation should be included and that a large group of students managed to write appropriate salutations. However, an equally high percentage experienced difficulty in writing appropriate salutations.

d. Closure

Result analysis

This part of the letter is intended to conclude the correspondence politely. In general, an appropriate closing depends on the nature of the correspondence, whether it is formal, semi-formal or informal. Formal correspondence, such as a business letter, requires a formal, complimentary closing. Hence, in this context, students were expected to include appropriate formal, complimentary closing sentences.

The table below indicates that 89% of the students were rated as “Poor” concerning the letter’s ending. Only a small percentage (11%) of the students were graded as “Good”. The most apparent reason for the generally poor performance was that most students did not include a suitable ending for their letters.

Table 4.12: Marks breakdown for the closure of the letter

Assessment criterion	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (1-1.5 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (2-3 marks)
Closure	3	55	49 (89%)	0 (0%)	6 (11%)

Interpretation

The results for this section of the letter indicate that students had limited knowledge of the purpose of a complimentary closing. They did not appear to understand that the ending of a letter should correspond with the content and reflect the relationship between the sender and the recipient. Many students, among them Students 1, 4, and 6, only stated their names in closing. Most of the students omitted expressions such as “Yours sincerely”, “Sincerely yours”, or “Yours faithfully”, which indicate a formal and respectful closure to a business letter.

4.1.2.2 Body of the letter

The main content of the letter consists of an opening part (introduction), a body and a closing part (conclusion). Accordingly, a formal business letter typically comprises three significant sections, each requiring various paragraphs. These include an introduction that explains the purpose for writing the letter, a body that presents the points of discussion, information or relevant details, and a concluding section that restates the purpose of the letter and, where

appropriate, offers a suggestion or calls for action from the recipient to action. Additionally, the assessment examined the students' ability to arrange the content of the letter logically. Therefore, a section (unity, order and coherence) is included in this analysis before the closing part of the letter.

a. Introduction

Result analysis

Students were required to provide a brief introduction that highlighted the letter's purpose, including all relevant information. For example, if the letter was an invitation for an event or meeting, the date, time and venue of the meeting should have been included in the introductory part. Furthermore, the wording needed to be courteous in order to establish rapport with the recipient. This section of the letter serves to introduce the recipient to what is to follow in the remainder of the letter. The table below shows that most students ignored this section or wrote inadequate introductions for their letters.

Table 4.13: Marks breakdown for the introduction of the letter

Assessment criterion	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: "poor" (0-2 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "average" (3-4 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "good" (5 marks)
Introduction	5	55	51 (93%)	4 (7%)	0 (0%)

The table indicates that a large majority of the students (93%) performed poorly in this section.

Interpretation

Students' difficulty in providing an appropriate introduction is evident from the results reported in the table above. Instead of addressing the theme, some students gave a self-introduction (that is, an introduction about the writer) at the beginning of the letter and ended there. Others wrote vague and confusing introductions. As a result, none of the students were graded as "Good".

Student 13's introduction for the letter is presented below.

"I am writing this letter to tell you that I am the Senior Accountant Clerk for Johnson and Hickocks".

The student provided a self-introduction but did not introduce the purpose of the letter, which would have been more appropriate. This was, therefore, considered a 'Poor' attempt to write an introduction for a business letter.

Similarly, the example below (that of Student 15) was rated as "poor":

"I, Tshepofatso Mokowe, a Senior Accounts Clerk for Johnsons and Hickocks, write a letter to reply you".

This extract also serves as an example of an incomplete introduction for a business letter since the topic has not been introduced (similar to the example of Student 13 above, this student mainly provided a self-introduction). The receiver would, therefore, have difficulty in understanding the letter's purpose.

The following example is that of Student 20's letter:

"As the Senior Accounts clerk I received that you want to draw my attention as my manager so that we wanted to discuss stationery requirements".

The introduction is unclear with regard to the writer's intention as well as to whom the letter was directed. For instance, the phrase *"... you want to draw my attention as my manager ..."* would be highly confusing to the receiver. The writer does not mention the letter's purpose, that is, to confirm the appointment for the meeting. This was therefore also considered a 'Poor' attempt at writing the introduction.

In another example, Student 26 introduced the letter in the following way:

"This serves as a communique for the response of request for quotation for stationery at any time in the next fortnight".

In this instance, the purpose of the letter is stated incorrectly. As noted earlier, the students were asked to confirm an appointment for a meeting to discuss stationery requirements for a company. Therefore, they were required to mention the date and time they were available for the meeting, rather than responding to a request for a quotation. All the examples cited above indicate students' difficulty in writing appropriate introductions for their business letters.

b. Body of the letter

Result analysis

The body is the section in which the writer elaborates on the topic that was introduced in the opening, providing supporting details and specific information. For example, in accordance

with requirements of the task, students were expected to confirm the day, time and venue of the meeting. They could also include suggestions regarding topics wished to discuss during the meeting. Finally, they needed to ask the recipient if the proposed date for the meeting was convenient.

The table below presents students' results for the body of their letters.

Table 4.14: Marks breakdown for the body of the letter

Assessment criterion	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (4-7 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (8-10 marks)
Body or content	10	55	30 (55%)	25 (45%)	0 (0%)

These results show that all students' performance in this section was either 'Poor' or 'Average'. None of the students was able to write comprehensive, appropriate content for their letters in the body.

Interpretation

Students' difficulty in presenting the content of the letter clearly and concisely without leaving any element of doubt regarding what the writer wanted to convey is evident in the following examples. Clarity, correctness and specificity in this part of the letter are very important to minimise further communication regarding the same topic and save time for both the sender and the receiver. No student was able to present the body of the letter satisfactorily enough to be graded as "Good" for this section.

The example presented below contains the body of the letter written by Student 15.

“As per our schedule, on the 9th of October 2021, there shall be a meeting at our company based on the stationeries. So in the next days there are some meetings within the company. We can schedule the dates confirming with the secretaries as to which time the meeting should be held”.

The message above is both incomplete and unclear, as the student does not confirm a suitable date, time or venue for the meeting. In this case, further communication would obviously be required for the same matter.

The following example is the complete body of the letter written by Student 3.

'Good day Sir I would kindly like inform you that I the appointment that was secudled for you for the next fort-night has been consider. I hope to be seeing you soon'.

Similar to the example from Student 15, the details about the possible date and time of the appointment are not indicated in the letter. Had the student mentioned a tentative date, time and venue for the meeting, the content would have been more appropriate. Both students, therefore, received a grade of "Poor".

Student 7 wrote the body of the letter as:

"Next week I will be meeting you at your office at Foster house, plot 61598/3F, Marupula, Gaborone, to discuss our stationery requirements, at 08:00 am. It is my pleasure to do business with you".

In the above extract, the student expressed willingness to meet and discuss their stationery requirements. He/she also stated the time and the venue of the meeting. However, further communication is required for clarity, as the specific day of the meeting was not indicated. In addition, the student stated the information as if the meeting had already been arranged, whereas it should have taken the form of a meeting request where the receiver should confirm the details of the meeting. Therefore, this student was graded as "Average".

c. Unity, order and coherence

Result analysis

Students' ability to arrange the content in a logical order was assessed in this section. The results are again shown in the table below.

Table 4.15: Marks breakdown for the unity, order and coherence of the letter

Assessment criterion	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: "poor" (0-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "average" (4-7 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "good" (8-10 marks)
Unity, order, and construction of coherent sentences	10	55	47 (85%)	8 (15%)	0 (0%)

As could be seen in the table above, none of the students was awarded a grade of “good” for organising the content of their letters with unity, order and coherence. A large majority of the students (85%) experienced considerable difficulty with this aspect of their letters.

Interpretation

The following examples illustrate some of the difficulties students encountered in presenting the main content of their letters coherently. For example, there is minimal evidence that students attempted to use connecting devices to create logical, orderly and coherent content.

The example presented below is the opening paragraph of the letter written by Student 23.

“Good day. Our organisation have requirements. The venue we both have to agree on and we have to be punctual all the time for appointment time. We discuss the requirements sometime later. Business organisation have to write a business letter to our organisation. One need to meet for an appointment done”.

In this example, the student addresses five different issues in the same paragraph. The first issue concerns the organisation’s requirements. Instead of providing the details of the requirements in the following sentence to maintain order, the student begins the second sentence with a new idea, discussing reaching an agreement about the meeting venue and punctuality. Subsequently, the student reiterates the requirements and states that these will be discussed later. The fourth sentence mentions the necessity for organisations to write letters, which has no connection with the previous sentences. The concluding sentence is about the need for an appointment. This student clearly had difficulty arranging ideas orderly and logically and was rated as “Poor” for this aspect.

The following example is the entire content of the letter written by Student 33. The lack of coherence in the construction of the single sentence is evident.

“I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for working with us to know more about your stationery as the receiver of the letter is part of the company”.

This letter is ambiguous to the extent that it is difficult to understand what the student wishes to communicate. In the first part of the sentence, the writer expresses gratitude for working with them. However, the next part of the sentence is not logically connected to the first part, with the student saying: “... **working with us to know more about your stationery ...**”. The last part of the sentence, “... **as the receiver of the letter is part of the company.**”, is also not logically connected to the preceding part of the sentence. As a result, the student also received a “Poor” grade.

d. Summary/conclusion

Result analysis

This section of the letter is intended to conclude the message to the recipient in a respectful manner, thereby reinforcing a professional relationship. The concluding paragraph should remind the recipient about the letter's purpose and, where appropriate, include a request for action from the recipient. For instance, confirmation of the attendance or acknowledgement concerning the subject or the purpose of the letter would have been appropriate in this instance.

In this section, as shown in the table below, the majority of students were rated as "Average", with 82% trying to conclude their letters in a cordial and professional manner. The remainder of the students were rated as "Poor" because they either did not attempt this section or did so unsuccessfully.

Table 4.16: Marks breakdown for the summary or conclusion of the letter

Assessment criterion	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: "poor" (0-2 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "average" (3-4 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "good" (5 marks)
Summary	5	55	10 (18%)	45 (82%)	0 (0%)

Interpretation

In general, students concluded their letters very abruptly without mentioning the main points of the content again in order to reinforce the specific purpose of the letter.

Concerning the conclusion, Student 54 included the following: ***"For more information please send us an email"***. This rather abrupt conclusion did not reflect the letter's purpose again and was therefore rated as a "Poor" attempt at writing the conclusion. Student 52 made a somewhat more appropriate attempt to conclude the letter: ***"We will sincerely appreciate your presence during the appointment"*** (this student was graded as "Average"). Another 'Poor' attempt to write the conclusion was evident in the case of Student 48, who summarised the letter in the conclusion with the words ***"Discuss our stationery requirements"***. Since this concluding part does not have a connection to the letter's purpose, the student also received a grade of "Poor". The elements of cordiality to leave a favourable impression on the

receiver or a request for a call to action from the recipient are also not reflected in the above examples that were rated as 'Poor'.

4.1.2.3 Language use

Similar to the assessment of students' use of language in the essay writing test, the assessment of this criterion focused on two aspects: 1) style, register and tone and 2) grammatical accuracy.

a. Style, register and tone

Result analysis

The writing task required students to write a formal business letter that displayed the characteristics of a professional, formal style, register and tone. Therefore, students' ability in the selection and arrangement of words, avoidance of personal or subjective expressions, contractions, informal expressions and their ability to convey a professional and respectful tone to maintain a cordial relationship with their stakeholders were assessed in this section. In some cases, however, the use of personal pronouns cannot be avoided, as is the case when there is direct communication between the sender and the recipient. Such cases were, therefore, not considered to detract from the formality in the analysis below.

As can be seen in the table below, most of the students were graded as "Poor" (86%) for this aspect.

Table 4.17: Marks breakdown for the style, register and tone of the letter

Assessment criterion	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: "poor" (1-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "average" (4-6 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "good" (7-10 marks)
Style, register and tone	10	55	47 (86%)	5 (9%)	3 (5%)

Interpretation

The following examples are an indication of the specific difficulties that students experienced with this aspect of the letter.

The extracts below are two paragraphs taken from Student 6's letter.

"I received your letter and I am looking forward to discuss our stationary requirements. Today I don't have much time and meet you guys tomorrow. I am carrying out cashflows and carrying out some accounts".

The second paragraph reads:

"The suitable time will be tomorrow at around 15:00 and you guys don't forget to bring the production details so I can manage to normalise finances for stationery coming in and out of the business".

In this example, expressions such as **"I don't have much time"**, **"you guys"**, **"carrying out cashflows"**, **"carrying out some accounts"**, **"don't forget to bring the production details"**, **"normalise finances"**, and **"stationery coming in and out of the business"** are more informal English phrases used in spoken or 'chatty' contexts. Although these expressions are acceptable in personal text messages or 'chats', in a formal letter, such expressions detract from the content's required formality. This attempt was therefore graded as "Poor".

The following example was written by Student 14, who was also rated as "Poor".

"I am taking this opportunity to enunciate that I will be on loose on the 9 October 2021 at 14:00 HRS in the afternoon to be able to discuss about the stationary requirements".

"The meet-up will start exactly at 1400HRS in the afternoon to be able to discuss about the stationery requirements".

The phrases **"I will be on loose"** and **"discuss about"** in the above extract immediately detract from the formal tone of the letter. Had the student written the first paragraph as *"This letter serves to inform you that I will be available on the 9th of October 2021 at 14:00"*, it would have been more professional.

The next example was taken from Student 24's letter:

"I would like to inform you that we agree to the time set for the appointment which is on Monday the 11th of October at 1200 oclock noon,at Johnson and Hickock'boardroom. Please note that you have Failed to deliver stationery for the past two months hence it being one of the issues to be discussed".

In this example, the tone employed in the second sentence is inappropriate as it conveys the writer's displeasure, in effect issuing a warning to the recipient. Considering the letter's purpose, the tone is unacceptable. This student, therefore, also received a rating of "Poor" for this aspect.

The above-mentioned examples indicate that the students experienced considerable difficulty in selecting appropriate linguistic devices to meet the stylistic requirements for more formal, professional writing.

b. Grammatical accuracy

Result analysis

This section discusses the students' performance related to their ability to make use of correct grammar, spelling and punctuation in their letters.

Table 4.18: Marks breakdown for the grammatical accuracy of the letter

Assessment criterion	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (1-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (4-6 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (7-10 marks)
Grammatical accuracy	10	55	44 (80%)	9 (16%)	2 (4%)

For this criterion, the majority of the students (80%) were graded as “Poor” as could be seen from the breakdown of results presented above.

Interpretation

The examples below show that students committed grammatical errors in several areas, i.e. with tenses, concord, prepositions, pronouns and articles, as well as with spelling and punctuation.

The following example was taken from the letter of Student 27.

‘I writing letter to confirm that convenience’

In the above example, the auxiliary verb “*am*” is missing before the word “*writing*” and the demonstrative pronoun “*this*” should be inserted before the word “*letter*”. In addition, a phrase such as “*an appointment*” is required after the words “*to confirm*”, followed by “*with you*”. A more correct version of this part of the sentence could therefore be: “*I am writing this letter to confirm an appointment with you...*”. Furthermore, the word “*that*” is used incorrectly in terms of word choice and needs to be replaced with “*at your*”. The last part of the sentence should therefore read: “*at your convenience*”. Because of the numerous grammatical errors, the student was graded as “Poor”.

The example below was taken from Student 3's letter. Student 3 also received a "Poor" grade.

"Good day Sir I would kindly like inform you that I the appointment that was secudled for you for the next fort-night has been consider . I hope to be seeing you soon".

In this example, the student should have first presented the information in two parts. The section, **"Good day Sir"**, should have been separated as the first part, and a comma is required after **"Good day"** (in essence, the salutation) and the remainder included as the second part (or the first sentence of the letter). In this second part, the preposition **"to"** is needed before the word **"inform"**. The expression, **"I the appointment"**, should be corrected to read, **"I would like to make an appointment"**. Furthermore, the spelling of the word **"secudled"** is incorrect and should have been **"scheduled"**. In addition, in the expression, **"has been consider"**, the student used the incorrect tense. The correct form of the verb in this instance would be: **"has been considered"**. Ideally, the information could be rewritten as:

"Good day, Sir

I would like to schedule an appointment with you at your earliest convenience."

The following example is an extract taken from Student 21's letter. This student also received a rating of "Poor" for grammatical accuracy.

I the Senior Accounts Clerk of Johson and Hickocks, Forster House say that it will be both for as to meet on the 11th of October 2021 at 10:30

The example above is another clear indication of the difficulty students experienced in expressing themselves correctly in English. In this sentence, a comma is required after **"I"** and another after **"Foster House"**. Furthermore, the word **"say"** is the incorrect word choice in this context and should be changed to **"request"** to make the sentence grammatically correct. It is further unclear what the student wanted to convey in **"it will be both for"**. This part of the sentence could be changed to **"whether it will be convenient for you"** so that it makes more sense in the context. Then, the spelling of the surname **"Johson"** and the word **"us"** is incorrect. A comma is further required after **"2021"** as well as a full stop after **"10:30"**. This sentence could be rewritten more correctly as follows: **"I, the senior accounts clerk from Johnson and Hickocks, Forster House, request that, if it is convenient for you, we meet on the 11th of October 2021, at 10:30"**.

The results for this section of the letter indicate that students had severe difficulty in writing grammatically correct sentences. Specific challenges that were identified include the correct use of tenses, punctuation, articles, auxiliary verbs and prepositions.

4.1.2.4 Conclusion

As could be seen from the discussion of the results presented for the business letter assessment, students' overall performance indicates that they experienced considerable difficulty in writing this type of business document. The students did not have adequate knowledge about a business letter's format or how to write a letter which includes a proper salutation, subject heading and complimentary closing. Students further experienced substantial difficulty in writing the introduction, structuring the content, providing an appropriate conclusion, maintaining logical order and integrating ideas coherently, as well as writing grammatically correct sentences. They also exhibited difficulty in writing in an appropriate style, register and tone. Possibly, the primary reason for this lack of knowledge could be that their secondary education did not include a specific focus on the writing of business documents (such as a business letter).

4.2 Phase 2: Report and business letter writing tests

The same first-year students who took part in Phase 1 and who completed the IBC course (of which the writing intervention forms part) were tested on their report and business letter writing skills in Phase 2. The fourth-year, first-semester students who were required to complete their industrial attachment (internship) during the second semester in order to fulfil the requirements of their programmes (and who had also completed the IBC course in their first year) also took part in these tests. The purpose was to assess the effectiveness of the IBC course in preparing students to write effective and appropriate business documents. In total, there were 54 first-year and 50 fourth-year students who participated in the post-achievement tests. In the discussion below, the results of both groups of students were combined since no considerable differences were found. In order to recognise the examples of first- and fourth-year students used in the discussion below, first-year students were numbered from 101 to 154, and fourth-year students from 401 to 450.

4.2.1 Report writing test

The report writing test assessed students' ability in presenting the content of the formal report in the correct format, constructing meaningful sentences, dividing the content into logical paragraphs, utilising appropriate vocabulary, making use of correct grammar and writing the report in a suitable tone and style (see Annexure 5: Phase 2, report test question).

4.2.1.1 Basic format

The basic format of the report includes seven sections, namely title, purpose, introduction, proceedings and findings, matters discussed, conclusion and recommendations (see Annexure 6: Phase 2, report analytical table).

a. Title

Result analysis

The report's title was assessed out of three marks. For this aspect, students were expected to provide a meaningful title that accurately reflected the topic of the report. The table below presents the students' performance in this regard.

Table 4.19: Marks breakdown for the title of the report

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (1 mark)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (2 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (3 marks)
Title	3	104	78 (75%)	26 (25%)	0 (0%)

Overall, the results indicate that the majority of the students (78% received a rating of “Poor” and 25%, “Average”) could not provide satisfactory titles for their reports.

Interpretation

The examples below indicate that the students failed to provide appropriate titles for the report, that is, a title that reflected the report's purpose.

Student 128 presented the following title: **“Student Welfare officer”**. This title does not reflect the report's theme and, therefore, was rated as “Poor”. This task required the students to write a report about the student welfare officer's address concerning students' absenteeism and drug abuse. An appropriate title would have been: “Addressing student absenteeism and drug abuse – A student welfare officer's comments”; “A student welfare officer's address concerning student absenteeism and drug abuse”; or “Report on the student welfare officer's speech about students' absenteeism and drug abuse”.

Student 143's title: **“Report to Student Support officer”**, is incomplete but could be considered a better attempt to provide a suitable title. However, the report's theme is not

evident in the title. This title was therefore graded as “Average”. Had the student presented the title as *“Report to student support officer about the speech of the student welfare officer on students’ absenteeism and drug abuse”*, it would have been considered a more suitable title than what the student had written.

b. Purpose

Result analysis

Students were also expected to include a purpose statement for their report. A purpose statement reveals what the writer intends to report. For this task, the report’s purpose was to highlight the content of the student welfare officer’s speech regarding student absenteeism from lectures and drug abuse. The table below shows the students’ results for this section.

Table 4.20: Marks breakdown for the purpose statement of the report

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (4-5 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (6-7 marks)
Purpose statement	7	104	96 (92%)	8 (8%)	0 (0%)

As indicated in the table above, students’ performance in this section was generally inadequate since the majority failed to write comprehensive purpose statements.

Interpretation

The examples below show that students had considerable difficulty in writing the purpose of the report. Although students attempted to engage with this aspect, most statements were inadequate due to their incompleteness.

Student 101 wrote the report’s purpose statement as shown below.

“On the 20th November, the student welfare officer from the Department of Tertiary Education Financing (DTEF) visited Imperial School of Business and Science”.

This purpose statement is incomplete, as it merely informs the reader about the student welfare officer’s visit. The reason for the visit should have been included as well. As a result, the statement of Student 101 was graded as “Poor”.

Student 422’s purpose statement is presented below.

“The main purpose of this report is to notify the Student Support Officer (SSO) about the main points that were discussed on the issue of student’s absenteeism and drug abuse by the Student Well fare Officer”.

This purpose statement was also rated as “Poor” as a result of its misleading nature. The statement could be misconstrued as a report to notify the reader about the student welfare officer’s drug abuse.

c. Introduction

Result analysis

This section of the report typically explains to the reader the writer’s motivation for drafting the report, the scope of the report and the structure of the report. Specifically, it should include the context or the reason for writing the report, as well as why the report is useful to the reader and worth considering. An appropriate introduction answers questions such as “What is the report about?”, “For whom was it written?”, “Why was it written?” and “What are the primary points addressed in the report?”.

The table below presents the students' performance in writing appropriate introductions for their reports.

Table 4.21: Marks breakdown for the introduction of the report

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-1 mark)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (2-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (4-5 marks)
Introduction	5	104	96 (92%)	8 (8%)	0 (0%)

Again, the results show that the majority of the students (96%) showed poor performance in writing suitable introductions for their reports.

Interpretation

The following examples illustrate the difficulties students experienced in writing introductory statements for their reports.

As an introduction, Student 406 wrote:

“I, Kgotso Nthseme the student of Imperial Business and Science School doing first year, also represent my class. I write this report regarding the meeting that I had attended on the 26th November 2021 which were held in ISBS School”.

This introduction does not indicate the topic of the report or its contents. Instead, the student informs the recipient that they attended a meeting as a class representative. This was considered to be a poor attempt at writing an introduction for the report, and the student was consequently graded as “Poor”.

The following example has been taken from the report of Student 107:

“The meeting took about 2 hor 30 min. It started from 0800 and ended at 1030 hors in the morning. The number of people who attended was 400 including student welfare officer from DTEF who main guest was”.

In this example, the student shared some detailed information regarding the duration of the meeting, the number of attendees and the name of the main guest in the introductory section of the report. Although this information could have been included, the information on what the meeting was about, as well as the main points of discussion, was not included. This introduction was therefore also graded as “Poor”.

Both examples quoted above show that students were still not able to write appropriate introductions for their reports, even after having attended the IBC course. Students failed to attract the readers' attention or provide the necessary information that focused on the purpose of their reports.

d. Proceedings and findings

Result analysis

This section required students to state how the meeting began, the order of proceedings, and the key points they deemed noteworthy for reporting. It could include speakers' and participants' opinions, data presented by the meeting organisers or the report writer's observations. For instance, it may include general opinions and comments raised in the meeting about students' absenteeism and drug abuse and participants' general reactions observed by the report writer. These findings should be recorded in the report following the topics as they occurred in the meeting's agenda.

The students' results for recording the proceedings and findings of their reports are captured in the table below.

Table 4.22: Marks breakdown for the proceedings and findings of the report

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (4-7 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (8-10 marks)
Proceedings and Findings	10	104	74 (71%)	30 (29%)	0 (0%)

As can be seen in Table 4.22, the majority of the students (71%) performed poorly in this section (since most students failed to include this item in their reports). Others only made an average attempt to write about their findings, even though students were taught this specific aspect of report writing in the IBC course.

Interpretation

In general, students did not state the order of the proceedings of the meeting. The following examples indicate that students experienced considerable difficulty in reporting the main issues that emerged at this specific event in a structured, coherent manner.

Student 404 wrote the proceedings and findings in the following manner:

“Botswana stadium from 8 o’clock in the morning until half past 11. We were 150 participants from different tertiary institutions. The meeting was very clear that everyone who was there understood that was been said by the DTEF”.

In this example, the introduction provides a brief reference to the meeting’s proceedings at the beginning of the statement; however, the student does not discuss any observations or findings as a record of the meeting. Consequently, this attempt was rated as “Poor”.

As another example, Student 419 wrote:

“The main finding of this meeting was about students absenteeism from lectures and drug abuse. The main topic of this was the students absenteeism that worries the lecturers and management, where students just decided not to attend classes without any valid reasons”.

Here, the student also received a “Poor” rating because he/she did not provide an account of the meeting’s order of proceedings but did share the primary point of interest, student absenteeism.

The following example was taken from Student 401:

“ The meeting was at 0800 hrs in the morning and they were 650 people who attended the meeting. The student welfare officer introduce the guest. At the meeting they discussed that when students have their allowance they give themselves day off to spend money. The student welfare officer also said due to peer pressure and other unknown reason tertiary students are involved in drug abuse”.

Student 401 provided a brief account of the order of proceedings of the meeting by stating when the meeting began and the number of people who attended. The above example also hinted at the opinions of the two speakers in the order of occurrence, which were worth noticing. Hence, the student was rated as “Average”.

e. Matters discussed

Result analysis

As part of the question requirements, students were expected to report the main discussion points in the meeting. Specifically, they needed to describe how the topics were debated and indicate whether any conclusions were reached during the meeting.

The table below presents students’ results for this aspect of the report.

Table 4.23: Marks breakdown for the matters discussed in the report

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (4-7 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (8-10 marks)
Matters discussed	10	104	72 (69%)	32 (31%)	0 (0%)

Again, the results above indicate that the majority of the students (72%) experienced significant challenges in reporting on the matters discussed in the meeting.

Interpretation

The following examples demonstrate the students’ difficulties in reporting the topics/issues discussed at the meeting that are relevant to record for future reference.

Student 414 reported the matters discussed in the meeting as follows:

“The first thing the student welfare officer from DTEF wanted to know were the reasons behind students’ absenteeism. Some students responded stating the reasons based on facts and assumptions because not all students were present to say out their challenge.”

The above extract was graded as “Poor” since it did not reflect the specific matters discussed in the meeting. Instead, the student reported on the student welfare officer’s interest in understanding the reasons for absenteeism.

Student 402 was also graded as “Poor” due to the lack of precision in reporting the matters discussed in the meeting. The extract is quoted below.

“Matters that was discussed was the consequences of absenteeism and the use of drug abuse. The absenteeism can affect the economy of the country as well”.

In this example, the student failed to provide details regarding the following matters discussed in the meeting: the causes of students’ absenteeism, drug abuse, how drugs have impacted students and the potential solutions to these issues.

Since a report is maintained as a reference for future action, it should serve as a record of key information that was discussed during a meeting, including any suggestions or recommendations worth documenting. However, the results presented above indicate that students had difficulty identifying and reporting the main points of discussion during the meeting.

f. Conclusion

Result analysis

This section of the report should indicate how the meeting ended and, in summary, highlight the key findings and proposals, the primary arguments presented and the meeting’s outcomes. In other words, it should reiterate the main findings of the report.

Students’ results in writing conclusions for their reports are recorded in the table below.

Table 4.24: Marks breakdown for the conclusion of the report

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (4-5 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (6-7 marks)
Conclusion	7	104	96 (92%)	8 (8%)	0 (0%)

As is evident in Table 4.24, most students (92%) failed to write appropriate conclusions for their reports (and received a rating of ‘Poor’ for this aspect). The remaining students’ performance was ‘Average’.

Interpretation

The following examples illustrate students’ difficulties in writing appropriate conclusions for their reports. Most students did not focus on the matters discussed and instead introduced unrelated points in their concluding statements.

Student 402 concluded the report by quoting the student welfare officer’s words:

“I hope students would put more pressure in their school work and take good decision in every work they do”.

As a result, this attempt at writing a conclusion was graded as “Poor”.

As noted above, students were expected to conclude their reports by summarising the main points of discussion, findings and the proposals presented during the meeting. As evidenced by the extract provided, the student did not attempt to summarise the key points that emerged from the meeting.

Student 406 wrote the conclusion as follows:

“In conclusion the students were encouraged to attend lectures so that they can have high or obtain high marks”.

This conclusion was written in one sentence, and although more details were required, this sentence could be perceived as a better attempt to conclude the report. An “Average” grade was awarded to this attempt.

g. Recommendations

Result analysis

The recommendations section of the report presents the proposed actions to be taken in response to the meeting's findings. For example, if a participant in the meeting suggested introducing counselling as a strategy to address students' absenteeism and drug abuse, this suggestion, if deemed valid, should be included as a recommendation in the report. The table below presents students' results in providing recommendations for their reports.

Table 4.25: Marks breakdown for the recommendations of the report

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: "poor" (0-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "average" (4-6 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "good" (7-8 marks)
Recommendations	8	104	102 (98%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)

Table 4.25 indicates that none of the students provided acceptable recommendations. As a result, the majority of the students (98%) were assessed as "Poor".

Interpretation

Most of the students failed to give valid recommendations in their reports. Some quoted the words of the speakers and others ignored this section completely.

Student 406's recommendation part was written as follows:

"Students absenteeism from lectures and drug abuse is really bad for student's future. In this case is recommended that student was abscond from lectures should be taken to guidance so that they can talk through their problems and also those in drug abuse they should be banned from school. Because I think drug abuse is choice they do it intentionally".

In this example, the student recorded the words of the DTEF welfare officer as the report's recommendation and was graded as "Average". The recommendation would have been more effective if the student had written the recommendation from the reporter's perspective. The student could have written, for instance: *"Recommendation 1: Educational institutions should provide guidance and counselling services for students"*.

In general, students were assessed as “Poor” for this section, as they either omitted the section or copied participants’ opinions.

4.2.1.2 Construction of meaningful sentences/logical integration of ideas

Result analysis

Students’ ability to present the concepts or ideas in a logical sequence that contributed to the coherence of the content, that is, without losing the connection between different points, was tested in this criterion. The table below provides a breakdown of students’ performance in this section.

Table 4.26: Marks breakdown for the logical integration of ideas of the report

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-1 mark)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (2-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (4 marks)
Logical Integration of Ideas	4	104	84 (81%)	20 (19%)	0 (0%)

Overall, students’ performance in this section was considered inadequate. A large majority of the students (81%) were graded as “Poor”, while the remaining students’ performance was considered to be “Average”. None of the students achieved a grade of “Good” for this aspect.

Interpretation

Students’ difficulty in logically connecting different parts of sentences as well as sentences with one another is reflected in the following example.

The following example is the second paragraph taken from Student 418’s report.

“He continued discuss the effects of drug abuse, he said drugs has many side effects on students and students are not spending their student allowance responsible. Drug abuse results in car accidents, rape even theft and counselling has to be taken serious, students has to attend some lessons why they are absent from school”.

In the above extract, the parts of the sentences are not integrated logically. For example, there is no connection between **“he said drugs has many side effects on students”** and **“students are not spending their student allowance responsible”**. The second sentence is also connected irrationally. The student began by mentioning the adverse effects of drug

abuse and continued to illogically connect this to the last part of the sentence about counselling. Poor integration is also shown in the last parts of the sentence, **“student has to attend some lessons”** and **“why they are absent from school”**. This student was therefore graded as “Poor” for this aspect of the report.

4.2.1.3 Appropriate vocabulary/choice of words

The use of unsuitable/inappropriate words in a document often leads to misunderstandings for the reader(s). It can also damage the reputation of the organisation from which these documents originated. Some examples where there is potential for misunderstanding as a result of the incorrect use of words would be words that sound similar but have different meanings, e.g. “leafs”/ “leaves”, “quiet” / “quite” and “where” / “were”, as well as the usage of words such as “advice” and “advise” without knowing the former is a noun and the latter a verb. Where incorrect choice of words in written documents can damage an organisation’s reputation, the converse usually applies where correct word choice conveys the writer’s intended meaning and establishes a positive relationship with readers. Therefore, this criterion tests students’ skills in selecting the correct words, that is, words appropriate in meaning and specific for the context.

Result analysis

The table below reflects students' performance in their selection of appropriate vocabulary.

Table 4.27: Marks breakdown for the choice of words in the report

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-1 mark)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (2-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (4 marks)
Choice of words	4	104	78 (75%)	26 (25%)	0 (0%)

The results indicate that the majority of the students (75%) were graded as “Poor” with the remainder of the students achieving “Average” performance in this area.

Interpretation

Students encountered considerable challenges in selecting appropriate words to express ideas clearly in their reports. The following examples illustrate these difficulties. Incorrect word choices are underlined for ease of identification.

The example below was taken from Student 412's report:

"The DTEF Student Welfare Officer had a topic to address on the absenteeism from lectures and drug abuse. The presenter had a quiet number of reasons for students to listen attentively and vividly. The presenter approved that lecturers are the most helpful gadget for an individuals success".

The incorrect words used in the above extract, i.e. "**quiet**", "**approved**", and "**gadget**", could be corrected by using appropriate alternatives such as "**quite**", "**agreed**" and "**resource**" respectively. The word "**vividly**" is not required because it does not contribute to the sentence's meaning. The student, therefore, received a "Poor" rating. Ideally, the passage could be corrected as follows: *"The DTEF student welfare officer addressed absenteeism from lectures and drug abuse among students. The presenter mentioned several reasons for students to pay attention to his speech and mentioned that lecturers are a valuable resource in a student's success".*

The following extract is taken from Student 123's report for which the student received a "Poor" grade. This example further highlights students' inappropriate word choices and demonstrates how such choices negatively affect the clarity and meaning of their writing.

"As per as me what I think and would recommend the campus to do is whenever they get to about drug abuse related news they should start making students pay a fine. I also totally recommend giving work at the college campus would infuse the students and make them come to college on regular basis and also attend lecturers. Another way I'd like to suggest is bringing in games in the campus to get new skills during leisure time".

The inappropriate phrases and words in the above extract, i.e. "**As per as me**", "**recommend the campus**" and "**infuse**", could be replaced with alternatives such as "**According to me**", "**recommend to the management of the college**", and "**motivate**" respectively. The example quoted above could be rewritten as follows to make it more appropriate: *"I recommend implementing a fine system for students found guilty of drug abuse. Additionally, assigning campus tasks to these students could promote regular lecture attendance. Introducing skill-building games during leisure time is another suggestion".*

4.2.1.4 Functional paragraphs/paragraph division

In this section, students were evaluated on their ability to organise content in logical paragraphs, specifically by presenting a main idea with supporting details within a single paragraph. Additional paragraphs could be used to further elaborate on the same from different perspectives. However, the discussion of a new main idea should have occurred in a separate paragraph.

Result analysis

Students' ability to organise their ideas into suitable paragraphs was also deemed unsatisfactory, as 81% were graded as "Poor".

The table below presents the students' results for this section.

Table 4.28: Marks breakdown for the paragraph division of the report

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: "poor" (0-1 mark)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "average" (2-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved grade: "good" (4 marks)
Paragraph divisions	4	104	84 (81%)	16 (15%)	4 (4%)

Interpretation

Most of the students divided the content into paragraphs without any obvious purpose. For example, they discussed one idea in various paragraphs without any functional reason. The examples below further elucidate this difficulty.

Student 411 wrote two paragraphs about the same main idea, which was regarded as a "poor" attempt at paragraph division.

"The drug dealers lure students into taking drugs and they end up getting them addicted to them. And once someone is addicted to drugs then it is very difficult to get the life back on track.

Once addicted, people are always left with no choice but to go to the rehabilitation centre. The government is trying their best to look for the drug dealers and stop all this Because this is destroying the youth and they are destroying the future of this country. In order to do their business, the drug dealers lookout for scapegoats to supply to".

In both paragraphs, the student writes about drug abuse, the adverse effects of drugs, how youngsters have become drug abusers and what will become of these youths. The content could have been placed in the same paragraph.

Student 413 also wrote two paragraphs discussing the same main idea.

"One of the points risen for students' absenteeism from lectures was that some students never take their schoolwork seriously, some think attending lectures is just a waste of time that they believe they can learn on their own. Another reason

is that some students nowadays feel going to school to listen to lectures is a waste of time, to the extent that some prefer to look for part-time jobs while in school and some of this job requires them to go to work every day meaning they invest much of their time on their work and not in their studies.

Some students feel that studying in a college is so easy that they believe they can study on their own, they feel that as long as they have internet connection at their places then they are sorted, everything is easy, which is not true because students we need to guidance and assistance from their lectures, that is why they end up failing as there is not eye-eye contact with their lectures.”

Again, both paragraphs provide information on the same idea that deals with reasons for students’ absenteeism from lectures from their point of view. For this reason, both Students 411 and 413 were graded “Poor” for paragraph division.

However, the following example from Student 405’s report is comparatively better than the two examples presented above because the first two paragraphs express different ideas.

Paragraph 1

“Another issue at hand is drug abuse. It is understood that students are growing and trying to experience new things but drug abuse should not be one of the things to experiment on as it has very bad impacts”.

Paragraph 2

“Drug abuse can causes diseases such as lung cancer and tuberculosis which is very deadly. Death can also be a result of drug abuse if the drugs are overdosed”.

Paragraph 3

“Some drugs can even damage the brain function hence leaving young people with serious mental illness. All in all drugs can not be combined with school as they are a distruction”.

The first paragraph discusses how students become drug abusers, and the second and third paragraphs are about the dangers of drug abuse. It would, however, have been better if the student had combined the second and third paragraphs. Student 405, therefore received a rating of “Average” for this aspect.

4.2.1.5 Use of grammar, punctuation and spelling

Result analysis

The assessment of this section included grammatical, punctuation and spelling errors. The section counted 10 marks.

Students' results in this section are presented in the table below.

Table 4.29: Marks breakdown for grammar, punctuation and spelling errors in the report

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (1-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (4-6 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (7-10 marks)
Grammatical errors	10	104	80 (77%)	24 (23%)	0 (0%)

The results indicate that a majority of the students (77%) were graded as “Poor”, 23% as “Average”, and none was graded as “Good”. Again, this points to the considerable difficulties students experienced in making use of correct grammar in their reports.

Interpretation

Students committed many grammatical errors, including the incorrect use of articles, tenses, concord and prepositions. They also made errors in their use of punctuation and misspelt words. The following examples (from students 127, 141, and 131) reflect students' difficulty in writing grammatically correct sentences and were graded as “Poor”.

“Last week_a student welfare office, from Department of Tertiary Education Financing in Botswana visit the Imperial School of Business and Science to discuss about the issues of drug abuse which is high at ISBS and absenteeism of the students of ISBS”.

This extract from Student 127's work contains numerous grammatical errors (e.g. incorrect use of articles, tenses, prepositions and relative pronouns), as well as spelling and punctuation mistakes. The first mistake is that a comma must be inserted between “**week**” and “**a**”. The word “**office**” should be “**officer**”, and the comma must be removed. The definite article “**the**” has to be inserted between the words “**from**” and “**Department**”. In addition, the word “**visit**” is written in the incorrect tense and should be corrected to the past tense “**visited**” as it refers to a past event. The word “**discuss**” is a transitive verb that is followed by a direct object, and

therefore, **“discuss about”** is incorrect, in which case **“about”** must be removed for correctness. The last part of the sentence further contains a concord error where the verb **“is”** does not agree with the subject **“issues”** introduced earlier. The correct form of the verb in this case would be the plural **“are”**. In the last place, both instances of the use of **“ISBS”** should be preceded by the article **“the”**.

Another example, taken from Student 141’s report, contains similar grammatical errors.

“The school welfare officer decided to inforce new laws about the issue of absentism and drug abuse. If a student an exam will faced to pay a lumpsum so that he/she will be given a exam to write which she/he missed deliberately. A weekly registered of class attendance will be submit to the student welfare office at DTEF on weekly basis from now on, to see or make analysis of class attendance from students of ISBS”.

Some words in the above extract have been misspelled (the corrected words are included in brackets after each example that follows). These words are **“inforce”** (*enforce*), **“absentism”** (*absenteeism*), **“attendance”** (*attendance*) and **“registered”** (*register*). The meaning of **“If a student an exam”**, is unclear. Also, the incorrect article **“a”** is used before the word **“exam”** in the following part of the sentence. In this instance, the student probably wanted to say: *“If a student misses an examination ...”*. Furthermore, the meaning of the phrase **“will faced”** is not exactly clear. However, the correct form of the verb should either be *“will face”* or *“will be faced”*. The usage of **“will be submit”** is grammatically incorrect and should be corrected to *“will be submitted”*. In addition, the definite article **“the”** is necessary before the abbreviation **“DTEF”**. Similarly, the article **“a”** is required before **“weekly”**, and the usage of **“make analysis”** has to be corrected to *“do an analysis”*. Lastly, the definite article **“the”** should precede **“ISBS”**.

The extract would have been more correct grammatically if it had been written as: *“The school welfare officer elected to enforce new laws regarding absenteeism and drug abuse. If students miss an examination deliberately, they will be required to pay a certain fee to rewrite it. A weekly record of class attendance will be submitted to the student welfare office at the DTEF for an analysis of the attendance of the ISBS students.”*

The following is an extract taken from Student 131’s report.

“The students requested that they be taught and remided on the importance of attending classes and they requested that a counselling officer be appointed around the school where they can go for guidance and counselling. The welfare officer, Mr gobakwe agreed the students to remain, focused on their education and achiving their goals. he also recommended that the school work hand with students they come across”

In the above extract, the words “**remided**” (*reminded*), “**councelling**” (*counselling*), and “**achiving**” (*achieving*) are spelt incorrectly. In the phrase “**remided on**”, the student used an incorrect preposition. The correct preposition that should be used here is either “*reminded of*” or “*reminded about*”. The preposition “**around**” before the word “**school**” must be corrected to “*at*”. A comma should be inserted after “**Mr gobakwe**” and the letter “**g**” has to be in the upper case because it is a proper noun. The word “**agreed**” is also used incorrectly in the context of what the student wanted to convey and needs to be replaced with “*advised*”. There is no need for a comma after the word “**remain**”. The usage of “**and achiving**” should be corrected to “*and achieving*”. A full stop is necessary after the word “**goals**”, and “**he**” should be capitalised to signify the start of a new sentence. The word “**work**” must be singular (*works*) if the student meant to say that the College needs to work with the students. Similarly, the usage of “**work hand with**” is incorrect. It has to be corrected to “*hand in hand*”. Lastly, the full stop is missing at the end of the sentence. For this example, to be more grammatically correct, it could be rewritten as: “*The students requested to be taught and reminded about the importance of attending classes. They also requested the appointment of a counsellor within the school premises where they can seek guidance and counselling. Mr Gobakwe, the welfare officer, agreed that the students should remain focused on their education and achieving their goals. He also recommended that the school must work closely with the students*”.

4.2.1.6 Professional, formal style and tone

Result analysis

As noted in Phase 1, formal style and tone are achieved through the selection and arrangement of appropriate words. Specifically, formality in writing can be maintained by avoiding contractions and colloquial expressions, choosing the more formal alternative when multiple word options are available, and using precise and concise language that avoids repetition and redundancy.

The table below presents the students' results in writing the report in a professional, formal style and tone.

Table 4.30: Marks breakdown for the professional, formal style and tone of the report

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (1-2 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (3-5 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (6-8 marks)
Professional style and tone	8	104	88 (85%)	16 (15%)	0 (0%)

The results presented in the table show that the majority of the students (85%) experienced considerable difficulty writing in a formal, professional style.

Interpretation

Students’ difficulties in creating a professional style and tone are evident in the examples below. Most students wrote their reports in a conversational style using contractions and other informal expressions.

The following example was taken from Student 449’s report:

“This meeting was about absenteeism from lectures and drug abuse. Its been found that student uses drugs resulting in the skipping classes. During the meeting we discussed the causes of drug abuse by students and how they affects us as students. We also discussed how to avoid or stop using drugs and the importance of not using drugs”.

The example above contains a number of words deemed to be unsuitable for writing in a formal and professional style. As a result, it was rated as “Poor”. For example, the use of contractions such as “*Its*” is not acceptable in a formal style. This should have been written as “*it has been found*”. The use of the expression “*skipping classes*” is too informal in a context where formal writing is expected. In this case, the student should have selected a more formal alternative, for example, “*absent from classes*”. In addition, personalised expressions such as “*we discussed*” and “*affects us*” also detract from a professional and formal tone.

The extract from Student 16’s work below is another example of the difficulties the students experienced with the aspect of formal style. This student wrote:

“The DTEF said, that our students are dodging classes but at the end these guys receive their monthly tip, which is not good and also it affect the country economically. The government is losing more money from people who are not serious to their school. It is against the law to receive money while you know that you are not attending the school punctually. Also, our students use drugs during

lessons which I cant allow because people changes themselves emotionally which is not good”.

The use of informal words such as “**dodging**” instead of “*absent from*”, “**guys**” and “**tip**” rather than “*students*” and “*monthly allowance*” undermines the formal tone of this student’s report. Furthermore, the use of personal pronouns such as “**our**” and “**I**” are usually avoided in a more formal writing style. Additionally, this student was also rated as “Poor.”

4.2.1.7 Conclusion

From the examples provided in the discussion of the students’ report-writing ability, it is evident that students experienced considerable difficulty in maintaining an acceptable format for a report. This includes providing a suitable title, stating the report’s purpose, writing a clear and sensible introduction, arranging findings in a proper sequence, presenting the matters discussed in detail and writing an appropriate conclusion and recommendations. A considerable number of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors were also identified in the reports produced by both groups. Additionally, students experienced difficulties in preparing their reports in a formal tone and style. The content of the students’ reports was also not arranged in logical order, and paragraphs were divided without a functional purpose concerning their content. These difficulties were evident in both first- and fourth-year students’ work, even after having completed the IBC course.

4.2.2 Business letter writing test

The instructions that were provided to the students for the business letter writing assessment included the following situation they had to use for writing the letter:

“A company called Pendle Electricals placed an order of goods with Pagoda Home Interiors a few days ago. The payment was made and the company was waiting for the delivery of the stock. The stock was not delivered in the expected time. Pagoda Home Interiors was notified a week ago, but there was no response. In this context, Magnus Atherton, the Managing Director, asked his Administrative Assistant to write a letter of complaint to the Marketing Manager to resolve the situation. That is, as the administrative assistant to Magnus Atherton, students were expected to write a letter of complaint to the Pagoda Home Interiors addressed to the Marketing Manager.”

A further requirement was that the letter had to be written in an email format. A similar method of assessment as employed in the pre-test was followed here (see attached Annexure 7, Phase 2, business letter test question).

4.2.2.1 Format of the letter

Students' ability in placing the correct address in an appropriate position, providing an appropriate subject heading, salutation and closure were evaluated in this section (see Annexure 8, Phase 2, business letter analytical table).

a. Address

Result analysis

Students' results in providing a correct address in the correct position is presented in the table below.

Table 4.31: Marks breakdown for the address of the letter

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-0.5 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (1 mark)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (2 marks)
Address	2	104	5 (5%)	5 (5 %)	94 (90%)

Interpretation

As is evident from the table above, 90% of the students were able to place the address accurately. A limited number of students provided only a partial address and were rated “Poor” or “Average”.

b. Subject heading

Result analysis

Students were also required to provide a suitable subject heading that revealed the letter's purpose. However, although the letter belonged to the 'complaint letter' category, students had to keep it friendly and courteous (as explained in their IBC study manual).

The table below displays students' results for this section.

Table 4.32: Marks breakdown for the subject heading of the letter

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-1 mark)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (1-1.5 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (2-3 marks)
Subject heading	3	104	82 (79%)	22 (21 %)	0 (0%)

Interpretation

As can be seen in the table above, 79% of the students could not provide suitable subject headings for their letters. Several students also omitted the subject headings completely and, as a result, they were rated as “Poor”.

The following are the examples of headings provided by the students: **“Please receive the letter”** (Student 417), **“For the marketing manager”** (Student 442) and **“Poor service”** (Student 430).

The examples provided above serve as evidence of inappropriate subject headings as they do not lead the reader to the purpose of the letter. As a result, the above students were graded as “Poor”. If the subject headings had more appropriate wording, for example, **“Delayed delivery”** or **“Stock not delivered”**, it would have been more amicable and informative (and could have been rated as “Good”) than a heading such as **“For the marketing manager”** or **“Please receive the letter”**. At the same time, the heading **“Poor service”** is not friendly or courteous. As a result, none of the students received a grade of “Good”.

c. Salutation

Result analysis

As mentioned earlier, a proper salutation reinforces the relationship between the sender and receiver. The table below presents students' performance in providing suitable salutations for their letters.

Table 4.33: Marks breakdown for the salutation of the letter

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-0.5 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (1 mark)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (2 marks)
Salutation	2	104	40 (38%)	10 (10 %)	54 (52%)

The 38% of students who received a rating of “Poor”, as indicated in the table above, failed to include a salutation in their letters. However, the results for this aspect are somewhat more encouraging because many students (52%) wrote appropriate salutations.

Interpretation

The following examples show that although many students still experienced some difficulty with this aspect of the letter, a slight majority of the students seemed to have this aspect under control.

The following are examples of salutations where students were graded as ‘Good’: **“Good day Mr. Reginald”** (Student 412 and Student 115), **“Dear Sir/Madam”** (Student 418), **“Dear Sir”** (Student 420), **“Dear Mr Arnold”** (Student 429 and Student 435) and **“Dear Mr. Reginald”** (Student 434). Student 436 wrote **“Arnold”**, Student 444 **“Manager”** and Student 443, **“Marketing Manager”**. The last three students were graded as “Average”.

d. Closure

Result analysis

This section’s assessment was based on the students’ ability to provide a suitable complementary closing for their letters.

The table below reflects the students’ results for the ‘closure’ section.

Table 4.34: Marks breakdown for the closure of the letter

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (1-1.5 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (2-3 marks)
Closure	3	104	85 (82%)	4 (4 %)	15 (14%)

The proper closing of a formal letter is usually reflected by its degree of formality and professionalism. Again, the students’ performance in this area was unsatisfactory. The table above shows that only 14% of the students were able to write the closure satisfactorily.

Interpretation

The majority of the students either did not write a closure or included inappropriate closures (they were accordingly graded as “Poor” for this aspect). Only a limited number of the students wrote a formal and cordial closure for the letter.

For instance, Student 402 wrote “***Yours Sincerely***”, and Student 101 wrote “***Yours Faithfully***”. These students were graded as “Good”.

Student 406 wrote “***Thanks***”, Student 414 wrote “***AA***” (which is probably an acronym for ‘administrative assistant’) and Student 415 closed with “***From, XYZ***” (the real name of the student is not revealed for confidentiality’s sake). These closures are not formal enough, so Students 406, 414 and 415 were graded as “Poor”. Overall, the results indicated that students experienced considerable difficulty in writing appropriate closures for their letters.

4.2.2.2 Body of the letter

The body of the letter was assessed in terms of students’ ability to write a purposeful introduction, presenting the main content with supporting details and including a conclusion that reminded the reader about the letter’s purpose. The assessment method for each section was similar to that of the business letter in the pre-test.

a. Introduction

Result analysis

For this aspect, students’ ability in providing a goal-directed introduction stating the letter’s purpose was assessed. Although this was a letter of complaint, the students were expected

to introduce the topic in a clear, concise and polite manner (as they were instructed in the IBC module), avoiding angry, sarcastic or threatening words that could damage relations with the recipient.

The table below presents students' performance in this section.

Table 4.35: Marks breakdown for the introduction of the letter

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: poor (0-2 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: average (3-4 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: good (5 marks)
Introduction	5	104	93 (89%)	11 (11 %)	0 (0%)

Overall, the results indicate that most of the students (89%) failed to write an acceptable introduction for their letters.

Interpretation

Students' difficulty in including suitable introductory statements for their letters is evident in the following examples.

"I am presented in the absence of Mr. Magnus, regarding to the response that our Managing director sent the previous week".

This introduction (written by Student 412) was regarded as a 'Poor' introduction for the business letter. The main difficulty in this example is the confusing and muddled nature of the message. In this case, it would be very difficult for the receiver to understand the purpose of the letter.

Student 119 wrote the following introduction:

"I am writing this letter concern about the service that you ows the agreement. We made the agreement before but your company destroyed it. This situation disturbs us, because it can destroy our company brand and image".

In the example above, the student does not mention the reason for writing the letter and the message is not courteous. Hence, the student was graded as "Poor" for this aspect. Comments such as **"you ows the agreement"**, **"your company destroyed it"**, **"the situation disturbs us"**, and **"it can destroy our company brand and image"** convey anger and displeasure and should rather be avoided, especially in the introductory part of a letter.

Student 417 wrote the introduction in a threatening way:

"I am the administrative assistance of the Pendle Electricals. We have placed an order for the domestic appliances 2 weeks back. We paid the sum of goods. I want to know why it is taking you guys so long to deliver the goods. Please note that we are not happy the way you do business with us. If you continue with this behaviour we have to take action about this".

This student was rated as "Poor" because of the impolite and intimidating expressions in the letter's introductory part.

Student 431's attempt was considered a somewhat better attempt at writing the introduction since the letter's purpose was reflected (the student was rated as "Average" for this aspect).

"This letter serves as a complaint from Pendle Electricals as some of the stock we requested has not yet paid. The stock was ordered online on the 3rd of November 2021 and paid online".

The abovementioned examples indicate that students were generally unable to present their complaints amicably without harming the relationship with their stakeholders.

b. Body/content of the letter

Result analysis

For this aspect, students were evaluated on their ability to provide the details of the goods they had ordered, the supporting information regarding the purchase and an explanation to the recipient on how the delay in stock delivery affected them. An alternative course of action in the letter could have been proposed to rectify the damage caused or a possible offer of compensation could have been made without harming the business relationship.

Students' performance in this section is recorded in the table hereunder.

Table 4.36: Marks breakdown for the body or content of the letter

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: "poor" (0-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "average" (4-7 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: "good" (8-10 marks)
Body or content	10	104	83 (80%)	21 (20 %)	0 (0%)

Students' results in writing the letter's content were also not promising. This is the part of the letter that details the reason for writing the letter and prompts the recipient to take the necessary action to resolve the issues discussed. However, the majority of the students failed to write the body of the letter in sufficient detail to serve the purpose of such a section.

Interpretation

The following examples indicate that students experienced considerable difficulty stating the content clearly and accurately. Many students did not mention the essential details related to the purpose of the letter.

Most of the students wrote the body or the content of the letter in a "one-sentence" paragraph.

For instance, Student 408 wrote:

"As the administrative Assistant to Magnus Atherton, Managing Director of Pendle Electricals, I am writing this letter of complaint about the stock that we paid for and we have not received the goods".

In this example, the student does not provide details about the stock ordered, the date of the order or what the sender expected from the receiver.

Student 444 only wrote the following as the body of the letter:

"This letter serves the purpose of letting you know that we would like our stock in the next two weeks or a cash reversal".

This is another example of a student's inability to write the main content of the letter correctly in order to achieve the desired goals. There is no mention of the type of stock ordered, how the tardy delivery affected their business or a request for an alternative plan for rectifying the situation without damaging the business relationship. Consequently, the bodies of the letters written by Students 408 and 444 were rated as "Poor".

Several students made reasonable attempts to explain the issue and suggest actions to solve the problem. These contents were considered "Average". For instance, Student 445 wrote:

"The main agenda of this complaint letter is to demonstrate your incompetence in business and your lack of professionalism and most importantly to demand the right action to be executed with immediate effect because as far as I am concerned our business is severely affected by your poor services. To this point we have been out of stock for the period of two weeks now and we have been failing to meet our market demand because we are in short in stock".

In the above extract, Student 445 pointed out the damage caused by the supplier due to their delay in delivering stock and the need for the issue to be resolved quickly, as they were running out of stock. In this respect, apart from strongly disapproving expressions such as **“your incompetence”** and **“lack of professionalism”**, the content was comparatively better than Student 408’s or Student 444’s content. However, both Student 408 and 444 only complained about the delay of the stock and failed to mention how the situation affected their business negatively.

c. Unity, order and coherence

Result analysis

Students’ ability to join sentences meaningfully by utilising suitable conjunctions and placing discussion points in order of significance was tested in this section. The table below presents students’ performance in maintaining unity, order and coherence in their contents.

Table 4.37: Marks breakdown for unity, order and coherence of the letter

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-3 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (4-7 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (8-10 marks)
Unity, order, and construction of coherent sentences	10	104	78 (75%)	26 (25 %)	0 (0%)

As shown in the above table, students experienced substantial difficulty to present information coherently. For this aspect, 75% of the students were graded as “Poor”.

Interpretation

The students’ difficulties in integrating the ideas logically and arranging the sentences in order are reflected in the examples presented below.

The extract taken from Student 436’s work presented below is an example of making use of inappropriate conjunctions in order to connect the ideas in the extract logically. The student wrote:

“I have ordered stock weeks ago and it was not yet arrived. It is my second telling you that stock has not yet arrived. Because it reported last week, but there was not response and the payments has been made. Delays to stock, leads to slow

business because production is not taking place in this case it also contribute to poor customer satisfaction because I can not offer them services well because of our delays. It has been a week now, without stock in business”.

In this example, it is very difficult to understand the logic in the construction of the third sentence, **“Because it reported last week, but there was not response and the payments has been made”**. The conjunctions **“because”**, **“but”**, and **“and”** have been utilised ineffectively and do not create any logical connection between the different parts of the sentence. Furthermore, the word **“because”** at the beginning of the sentence does not link this sentence with the previous sentence in the extract, which is: **“It is my second telling you that stock has not yet arrived”**. An improved version of the sentence could be: **“The payment has already been made, and the matter was reported last week, but there was no response.”** Therefore, as a result of the ineffective use of conjunctions, the student was rated as “Poor” for this aspect.

In another example, Student 433 wrote:

“Unfortunately, our product have not yet delivered to our company. Our order did not arrive at all hence were already paid for to your company. In a nutshell, the company paid for the stock which were not delivered”.

The sentence, **“Our order did not arrive at all hence were already paid for to your company”** does not express the desired meaning since it was connected with an incorrect connector. Here the conjunctive adverb **“hence”** does not create the appropriate logical connection between the different parts of the sentence. Had the student used the conjunction **“although”**, the sentence would have made more sense (with some additional alterations). Student 433 was also awarded a rating of “Poor” for this aspect.

Student 404 arranged sentences in the following way:

“I complaint about the stock from S.A that has not yet Arrived. The payment has been made so what we are waiting for is the stock that I have not received them. I have tried to call them so that I can get the issue that may not make the stock to arrive, they did not replay my mail. The payment made on 9 April I tried to call them in office still there is no response.”

In this example, the sentences were not arranged in the correct order of events (the student was also rated as “Poor”). For instance, the first sentence mentions the non-arrival of stock. The second sentence is about the payment made for the stock, and the third is a reminder about stock delivery and mentions their unresponsiveness. Then the student writes about the date of the payment and finally returns to the stock issue and the company’s unresponsiveness. If the student had arranged the sentences by placing the same ideas

together, it would have created a logical order. For example, the details about the non-arrival of the stock should come first, then the reminders (both e-mail and telephonic) about delivery, the reminder about the payment and finally, the date of payment. Without changing the grammar or spelling mistakes, the above example could be re-ordered more logically as: *“I complaint about the stock from S.A that has not yet arrived. I have tried to call them so that I can get the issue that may not make the stock to arrive. They did not reply my mail. I tried to call them in office still there is no response. The payment made on 9 April, so what we are waiting for is the stock”*.

Student 414 ordered the content of the letter as follows:

“ This letter to complain that stock we have paid for from S.A not yet arrived. The managing director of Pendle electricals has reported the matter last week and there was no response. I am Administrative Assistant at Pendle electricals company”.

This student was graded as “Average” for this attempt, as the above two sentences were arranged in logical order. That is, the first sentence expressed the purpose of the letter, and the second reinforced the same idea. However, the self-introductory sentence, ***“Iam Administrative Assistant at Pendle electricals company”***, was out of place. It would have been better had the student arranged the content in the following way: *“I am an Administrative Assistant at Pendle Electricals Company, writing this letter to complain that the stock we have paid for from S.A. has not yet arrived. The Managing Director of Pendle Electricals has reported the matter last week, and there was no response”*.

d. Summary/conclusion

Result analysis

In this section, the assessors evaluated the students’ ability to remind the receiver about the primary points of discussion in an amicable manner and request action. Students’ performance in the section is recorded in the table below.

Table 4.38: Marks breakdown for the summary and conclusion of the letter

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-2 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (3-4 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (5 marks)
Summary and conclusion	5	104	84 (81%)	20 (19 %)	0 (0%)

As noted above, the concluding part of a letter is significant because it reminds the reader of the most important matters discussed in the content. However, the results of the majority of students (81%) show 'Poor' performance in this section.

Interpretation

The following examples show students' difficulty in concluding the letter. Most students either failed to write a conclusion or did so inadequately.

Student 119 wrote:

"If the stock is delivered or arrived in 3 days time we would like you to return the money in full".

As the final section of the letter, the summary/concluding part also serves the function of a farewell message. Ideally, a business letter should therefore end with a friendly expression of respect and professionalism rather than a threat, which is clearly not the case in the example above.

Student 118 concluded the letter with: **"*Trie by all means to bring that stock on time to avoid consequences*"**. This concluding statement is brief, impolite, and intimidating. Words such as "kindly" and "please" would be expected in the concluding statement. An example of a polite ending that still addresses the issue at hand purposefully could be: *"Kindly arrange to send the stock as soon as possible, as our customers are waiting for the items"*. Hence, the concluding part of Students 119's and 118's letters was rated as "Poor".

As an example of a more appropriate ending for the letter, Student 132 attempted to conclude the letter amicably by writing: **"*I will be very grateful if my request can be granted*"**. This student was graded as "Average".

4.2.2.3 Language use

a. Style, register and tone

Result analysis

Similar to the method of assessment employed for the business letter assessment in Phase 1, students' ability to utilise formal language and convey professionalism through the selection and arrangement of appropriate words was evaluated in this section. The results of the students' performance are captured in the table below.

Table 4.39: Marks breakdown for style, register and tone of the letter

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-2 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (3-5 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (6-8 marks)
Style, register, and tone	8	104	90 (86%)	8 (8%)	6 (6%)

For this aspect as well, the results show that a large majority of the students (86%) were generally unable to write the content of the letter in an appropriate style, register and tone.

Interpretation

The following examples show students’ difficulty in conveying the sense of professionalism required in the writing of a business letter. In this instance, it is clear that students struggled to distinguish between the formal nature that characterises most business writing and informal writing (such as the text messages sent via their cell phones to their friends).

In the first example, Student 436 wrote:

“I look forward for positive response concerning the services because it is not good at all. Because it can also tarnish the reputation of your company or the othhand leading to no customer who wants your services. Thank you guys in advance for changes that will take in place while improving your services offered”.

This is an example of a ‘Poor’ style of writing due to the presence of informal words and expressions. The use of “**it is not good at all**” and “**you guys**” are both instances of informal language use. The first two sentences could have been written more appropriately in the following way, with suitable words that are placed functionally in the sentence: “*I am looking forward to an improvement in your service, as it can safeguard your company’s reputation and enhance customer support.*” Similarly, the third sentence could be written as: “*Thank you in advance for your support.*”

Student 426 wrote the second paragraph of the letter as:

“On the 10th May, Pendle Electricals company ordered domestic electrical appliances from your company, but there has been delay and the stock has not yet arrived. You guys were mum. The stock should have arrived the beginning of September and this now have become a complaint. We as Pendle Electricals Company have made payments”.

In the first sentence of the above extract, the student stated the problem clearly. However, the usage of the informal words **“guys”** (instead of “you” or “people”) and **“mum”** instead of “quiet” or “not responsive” affected the formal style of the writing. Hence, the student was graded as “Average”. Without changing the order (or correcting the language mistakes), the extract could have been written more appropriately as: *“On the 10th May, Pendle Electricals company ordered domestic electrical appliances from your company, but there has been a delay and the stock has not yet arrived. **We have not received any response from your company.** The stock should have arrived at the beginning of September, and this has now become a complaint. We, as Pendle Electricals Company, have made payments”*.

The examples above illustrate the students’ general inability to write the business letter in a professional style, register and tone to maintain an organisation’s professional image.

b. Grammatical accuracy

Result analysis

This section reports on the assessment of the grammatical accuracy (including spelling and punctuation) in the students’ letters.

The table below presents the results for the above criterion.

Table 4.40: Marks breakdown for grammatical accuracy of the letter

Assessment criterion for first and fourth-year students	Total Marks	Number of students	Number of students who achieved the grade: “poor” (0-2 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “average” (3-6 marks)	Number of students who achieved the grade: “good” (7-12 marks)
Grammatical accuracy	12	104	98 (94%)	3 (3%)	3 (3%)

The results for grammatical accuracy in the table above show that students had serious difficulty in using grammatically correct language in their letters. As indicated above, most of the students (94%) failed to write grammatically correct sentences. As should be evident from literally all the examples of student writing presented in this chapter, this points to the need for including some form of productive grammar instruction in the IBC course since it does not form part of the course at present.

Interpretation

The extracts below present examples of the types of grammatical mistakes made by the students. These mistakes range from spelling errors to the incorrect use of auxiliary verbs, tenses, concord, and punctuation.

The following example was taken from Student 402's letter:

"This have affect my business too much because as we speak they is no stock which is not good. This have lead to low productivity and it has affect the economy of the country as well because we do pay tax".

This brief paragraph contains several grammatical errors. As a result, the student was graded as "Poor" for this criterion. For example, the expression **"this have"** is grammatically incorrect in the sense that the demonstrative pronoun **"this"** is singular and should not be accompanied by the plural verb **"have"**. The use of **"have affect"** is also incorrect because verbs that follow any of the auxiliary verbs – has, have, or had – must take the past participle form. Therefore, the correct form is **"affected"**. This phrase should have been written as **"this has affected"**. Furthermore, a comma should be inserted between **"because"** and **"as"** as well as between **"speak"** and **"they"** to signify the parenthesis "..., as we speak, ...". In addition, the expression **"they is"** should be corrected to **"there is"**, **"this have lead"** should be **"this has led"**, a comma is required after the word **"productivity"** and **"it has affected"** must replace **"it has affect"**.

The following paragraph was written by Student 117:

"Our agreement is not reacted, then bring back our money please. If these situations are not solved, we are going forward. This is the things that made a lot of business to declined because losing customer is means losing busines as well".

Several of the words in the above extract are spelt incorrectly, including words such as **"reactied"** (reacted), **"costomer"** (customer) and **"busines"** (business, businesses). Also, an incorrect connective **"then"** was used in the first sentence. The correct conjunction in this instance is **"so"** (if the student was discussing the breach of agreement), and a comma must be inserted after the word **"money"**. This sentence would have been more correct (depending on what the student meant) if the student wrote: *"If our agreement is not honoured, our money should please be returned"*. Furthermore, the use of **"this is the things"** must be corrected to **"this is the thing"** or **"these are the things"**. In addition, utilising **"to declined"** is incorrect because the base or infinitive form of the verb should be used after the infinitive marker 'to' (to decline). Lastly, the article **"a"** must be inserted before **"customer"**, and the auxiliary verb

“is” after **“customer”** has to be removed. As a result of the above-mentioned grammatical errors, the extract was regarded as “Poor”.

A grammatically correct (and more meaningful) paragraph in this instance could have been: *“If you cannot comply with the terms of our original agreement, please refund our money. If the prevailing issues are not resolved, we will have no choice but to move our business elsewhere. Unfortunately, the issues we are experiencing have been known to lead to customer loss and business failure”.*

4.2.2.4 Conclusion

A very prominent finding from the analysis of students’ business letters is that students showed no significant improvement in the writing of appropriate and effective letters after having completed the IBC course. Both first- and fourth-year students still showed considerable difficulty in providing appropriate subject headings, salutations, introductions, content and conclusions for the letter. Students also experienced serious challenges in arranging sentences logically and adopting an acceptable style and tone for business letters. As pointed out previously, “Business letter writing” is one of the topics included in the unit of “written communication” in the IBC course, which the students had to complete as part of the course during their first year of study.

Another very significant finding is similar to the analyses of all the other texts that were reported on in this chapter, students displayed an inadequate level of English language proficiency, in this case with specific reference to the writing of grammatically correct sentences. This included difficulties in using the rules of concord correctly, making use of the correct tense to indicate time, the appropriate use of prepositions and conjunctions, and utilising proper punctuation and spelling words correctly. As noted previously, specific grammar instruction is not included in the IBC course at the ABCD. Although one would expect a higher level of English proficiency from students having completed English language as a subject at secondary school, there is clearly a problem in terms of students’ English language proficiency levels. One would, therefore, have to seriously consider including such a component in the IBC course or offering additional assistance to students to improve their English language proficiency.

Alternatively, the entry requirement for language could be adjusted to students who have achieved a minimum of 60% (or at least 50%) in English. Currently, for most colleges in Botswana, including the ABCD, the entry requirement for any of the tertiary programmes is a minimum pass (a total of 36 points) from any of the six subjects taken at secondary school. In

essence, this means that students can get admission to programmes at most tertiary colleges without a pass result in English (50%). To get the entry requirements changed for admission to programmes at colleges specifically for English may, however, involve a complicated and protracted process with the education authorities. This means that, if students' English language proficiency is considered a serious problem at tertiary institutions, it may be better to address this issue in the form of additional language support at specific institutions.

4.3 Phase 3

4.3.1 Purpose

Phase 3 of the study comprised two surveys. The first focused on collecting information from workplace mentors (employers) and the second on interns (fourth-year students) (see Annexure 9: Phase 3, Workplace mentor questionnaire and Annexure 10: Phase 3, Intern Questionnaire). As mentioned in Chapter 3, the mentor questionnaire addressed the types of business documents interns were required to produce during their internship, the frequency with which they had to produce such documents, how these documents the interns produced during their internship were rated in terms of quality, common mistakes interns made in their writing of business documents and workplace mentors' suggestions to the ABCD concerning improving students' writing skills.

Similarly, the intern survey sought to determine the types of written business documents they were required to produce during their internship, the frequency at which they produced them, the document(s) they found challenging to write, the specific area(s) of the document(s) with which they experienced the most difficulty and their perceptions concerning the IBC course at the ABCD with specific reference to whether the course helped them to produce effective business documents. In the case where they were of the opinion that the IBC did not prepare them well, they were requested to provide suggestions on how the course may be improved so that students could become more efficient in producing business documents once employed in the industry.

a. Workplace mentor questionnaire

The workplace mentor questionnaire comprised five questions. In the end, twenty-two mentors representing various companies participated in the survey. For purposes of analysis, the results of the five questions are dealt with individually in the discussion below.

Question 1

The first question asked the mentors about the frequency at which their interns produced business documents during their internship.

Data analysis: (also see Annexure 11: Phase 3, workplace mentor survey analytical table)

The following table reflects the workplace mentors' survey results for Question 1.

Table 4.41: The frequency at which interns produced business documents

Total: 22 participants	1 Not at all	2 Once a week	3 Twice or more a week	4 Once a day	5 Twice or more a day
	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents
	0 (0%)	4 (18%)	6 (27%)	10 (45%)	2 (10%)

Interpretation

As can be seen in the table above, no mentor indicated that the interns did not have to produce business documents at all. All mentors indicated that the interns should produce such documents, ranging from once a week to twice or more per day. Out of a total of 22 mentors, 45% indicated that their interns are required to write business documents at a rate of one document per day. Similarly, 45% of the mentors further indicated that business documents are produced once or more times a week. This is a clear indication that the writing of effective business documents forms an important part of what is required of interns during their internships.

Question 2

The second question required the workplace mentors to provide information regarding the types of documents their interns wrote during their internship and the frequency of each. A list of the documents that their interns were likely to produce was provided in the questionnaire.

Data analysis

The following table reflects the workplace mentor survey results for Question 2.

Table 4.42: The types of business documents interns produced

Total: 22 participants	1 Not at all	2 Once a week	3 Twice or more a week	4 Once a day	5 Twice or more a day
Types of documents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents
1. Business letters	0 (0%)	13 (59%)	7 (31%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)
2. Business reports	0 (0%)	10 (45%)	7 (31%)	3 (14%)	2 (10%)
3. Weekly internship reports	0 (0%)	22 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
4. Reports on meetings with clients	0 (0%)	12 (54%)	5 (22%)	4 (19%)	1 (5%)
5. E-mail messages	0 (0%)	14 (63%)	5 (22%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)
6. Any other type of document. Please specify.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

With regard to the types of business documents the interns were expected to produce, all the mentors indicated that their interns wrote weekly internship reports. The reason for this is that the weekly report is a requirement for the students' final internship reports to be submitted to their college. Apart from that, a large majority of the mentors pointed out that students wrote business letters (91%) and business reports (77%) at a rate of one or two documents a week. The remaining mentors mentioned that their interns wrote these documents at a frequency of one or two (and more) a day. A high percentage of the mentors (87%) further indicated that their interns wrote email messages once or twice (and more) a week, and 13% at intervals of one or two (and more) times a day. According to 77% of the mentors, their students wrote "Reports on meetings with clients" one or two (and more) times every week, and 23% of the mentors indicated that these reports were written even more often, that is, one or two (and more) a day. None of the workplace mentors mentioned any other documents their interns were required to write.

Interpretation

These results indicate that regardless of the frequency, the interns are expected to produce all the types of business documents listed in the question, i.e., business letters, business reports, weekly internship reports, reports on meetings with clients and email messages. The results point to the fact that effective writing of business documents has become one of the vital soft skills required for prospective employees. The results with regard to the frequency of producing such documents further provide some insight into the relative importance of including specific documents in a Business Communication course in a context where one may be constrained by the availability of time and may have to focus on the more important types of documents.

Question 3

This question sought workplace mentors' opinions regarding their interns' effectiveness in producing the required documents.

Data analysis

The following table reflects the workplace mentor's survey results of Question 3.

Table 4.43: The effectiveness of business documents interns produced

Total: 22 participants	1 Not effective at all	2 Slightly effective	3 Fairly effective	4 Effective	5 Very effective
Types of documents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents
1. Business letters	16 (72%)	4 (18%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
2. Business reports	16 (72%)	4 (18%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
3. Weekly internship reports	18 (80%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
4. Reports on meetings with clients	16 (72%)	4 (18%)	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
5. E-mail messages	16 (72 %)	4 (18%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
6. Any other type of document. Please specify.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The results for this question reflect that most of the respondents (73% or more) believe that interns' skills in writing the various business documents presented in the table were very poor. Most mentors were therefore of the opinion that the interns' letters, business reports, weekly internship reports, reports on meetings with clients and email messages were "not effective at all".

Interpretation

The data in the table above reinforces the results of the post-test conducted among the first- and fourth-year students regarding the writing of business reports and letters (see Sections 4.2.1.7 & 4.2.2.4, Phase 2). Students' abilities to write effective business documents have therefore not improved to a level that satisfies employers even after having been exposed to the IBC course or the tertiary academic context for several years.

Question 4

The fourth question sought information regarding the interns' specific areas of difficulty in composing business documents. The aim was to ascertain if the mentors perceived their interns as competent in specific areas, such as the use of correct grammar, organisation of ideas, selection of appropriate words, achieving a formal style and tone and whether they made use of the correct format for the composition of business documents.

Data analysis

The table hereunder reflects the workplace mentor's survey results for Question 4.

Table 4.44: The specific areas of business documents interns found difficult

Total 22 participants	1 Not difficult at all	2 Slightly difficult	3 Fairly difficult	4 Difficult	5 Very difficult
Aspects and areas of difficulty	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents
1. Appropriate use of punctuation	3 (14%)	15 (68%)	4 (18%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2. Grammar usage	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	4 (18%)	16 (72 %)
3. Choice of appropriate words	1 (5%)	3 (14%)	14 (63%)	4 (18%)	0 (0%)
4. Organisation of ideas	1 (5%)	3 (14%)	14 (63%)	4 (18%)	0 (0%)
5. Using the appropriate format for the specific document	1 (5%)	3 (14%)	14 (63%)	4 (18%)	0 (0%)
6. Appropriate use of tone and style	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	4 (18%)	16 (72 %)

The results, as presented in the table above, indicate that most of the workplace mentors (68%) believed that their interns had only "slight difficulty" in the use of punctuation. For them, this is therefore not an area of great concern. However, 91% of the mentors indicated that using correct grammar and using a suitable tone and style for the document were "difficult" or "very difficult" for the interns. Furthermore, 64% of the mentors believed that interns had some

difficulty (in their selection of the “fairly difficult” option) in finding appropriate words to express their ideas, the “organisation of ideas” and “using the appropriate format for the specific document”.

Interpretation

What is very evident from the survey results for this question is that mentors believed that interns had considerable difficulty in specific areas of producing business documents. Such areas include using correct grammar, selection of appropriate words, organisation and arrangement of ideas, application of a suitable tone and style, as well as using the correct format needed for a specific document. Students’ difficulties with these aspects were also identified in the pre- and post-tests written before and after students completed the IBC course (see Sections 4.1.1 & 4.1.2, Phase 1, and 4.2.1 & 4.2.2, Phase 2).

Question 5.1

The first part of the fifth question addressed mentors’ opinions concerning their interns’ general ability in producing effective business documents.

Data analysis

The following table reflects the results of Question 5.1.

Table 4.45: The interns’ general ability in producing business documents

Total 22 participants	1 Very poor	2 Below average	3 Average	4 Above average	5 Excellent
	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents
	16 (72%)	4 (18%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)

The results in Table 4.46 indicate that the majority of the mentors perceived their interns’ ability in writing business documents to be unsatisfactory, with 72% indicating that interns are “very poor” in producing effective written documents, 18% indicated the interns’ ability as “below average” and 5% as “average”. The remaining 5% of the mentors rated their interns as “above average” for this part of the question.

Question 5.2

The second part of Question 5 required the mentors to offer suggestions or recommendations on how the ABCD could improve interns' business writing skills.

Data analysis

Four themes emerged from the mentors' recommendations and comments towards enhancing interns' writing skills. These themes, as well as the number of mentors who suggested them, are indicated in the table below.

Table 4.46: Mentors' recommendations to improve interns' business writing skills

Workplace mentors' comments				
Total 22 participants	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4
	Students need more practice in writing business documents	Students need more grammar instruction	Students need training to write in a professional way	No comments
	13 (59%)	3 (13%)	4 (18%)	2 (10%)

Interpretation

The results indicate that, generally, 91% of the workplace mentors recommended that learners require additional training on various aspects of business writing to develop their writing ability to produce effective business documents. Most notably, 59% of the mentors indicated that the students required more practice with the writing of business documents.

In summary, the results of the workplace mentor survey indicate that interns produced business documents frequently. This includes different types of reports and letters as well as formal email messages. However, there was a strong perception that the quality of the documents that the interns produced was very low. More than 70% of the mentors commented that such documents were not effective. The mentors further reported that the major areas of difficulty in interns' writing of business documents included the use of correct grammar, the use of appropriate words to express their ideas, using the proper format as demanded by the nature of the documents and writing in an appropriate style and tone. The mentors further recommended that the ABCD should provide additional training for their students to write effective business documents. These survey results also support the results of the pre- and post-achievement writing tests reported earlier in the study.

b. Fourth-year student/intern questionnaire

Similar to the workplace mentor questionnaire, the intern questionnaire comprised five questions. A total of forty-six (46) fourth-year students (all busy with their internships at the time) participated in the survey (see Annexure 12: Phase 3, intern survey analytical table).

Question 1

Similar to the mentor questionnaire, the first question required interns to indicate how often they were required to write business documents during their internship.

Data analysis

The table below presents the interns' survey results for Question 1.

Table 4.47: The frequency at which interns produced business documents

Question 1	1 Not at all	2 Once a week	3 Twice or more a week	4 Once a day	5 Twice or more a day
Total 46 participants	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents
	0 (0%)	4 (9%)	10 (22%)	25 (54%)	7 (15%)

As shown in the table above, 54% of the students commented that they wrote at least one business document daily, and 15% indicated that it could be two or more in a day.

Interpretation

Similar to the mentor survey, the results of the intern survey also confirmed that students on internships had to write business documents with regular frequency. In essence, therefore, the results for this question for both the mentors and interns indicate a regular frequency at which interns were required to produce business documents, with 82% of the mentors and 91% of the interns indicating that such documents had to be produced at the very least “twice or more a week” (cf. Tables 4.41 & 4.47).

Question 2

Question 2 was designed to obtain information about the different types of business documents the interns produced and how often they had to produce such documents during their internship. It also served the purpose of confirming the information provided by the mentors in this regard.

Data analysis

The survey results for Question 2 are presented in the table below.

Table 4.48: The types of business documents interns produced

Total 46 participants	1 Not at all	2 Once a week	3 Twice or more a week	4 Once a day	5 Twice or more a day
Types of documents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents
1. Business letters	0 (0%)	26 (57%)	17 (37%)	2 (4%)	1 (2%)
2. Business reports	0 (0%)	22 (48%)	17 (37%)	4 (9%)	3 (6%)
3. Weekly internship reports	0 (0%)	38 (83%)	6 (13%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)
4. Reports on meetings with clients	0 (0%)	32 (70%)	6 (13%)	6 (13%)	2 (4%)
5. E-mail messages	0 (0%)	40 (88%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)
6. Any other types of documents. Please specify.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Interpretation

The interns indicated that they were regularly required to produce business documents such as letters, reports and email messages. More specifically, the majority of the interns reported that they had to write business letters (94%), business reports (85%), weekly internship reports (96%), reports on meetings with the clients (83%) and e-mail messages (92%) at a rate of one or two and more documents a week (all percentages reported here therefore combine the respondents of the columns labelled as 'Once a week' and 'Twice or more a week' in the table above). The rest of the interns commented that they wrote such documents at a rate of either one or two or more a day. These results for the intern survey are very similar to the results of the mentor survey for the same question. Both surveys therefore indicate that the documents

the interns had to write most frequently were business letters, reports of different kinds and email messages, and they were generally required to write them more frequently.

Question 3

The third question was a self-assessment requiring the interns to evaluate their challenges and difficulties in writing the types of business documents they were required to produce during the internship.

Data analysis

The table below shows the results for Question 3.

Table 4.49: The types of documents interns had difficulties in producing

Total 46 participants	1 Not difficult at all	2 Slightly difficult	3 Fairly difficult	4 Difficult	5 Very difficult
Types of documents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents
1. Business letters	1 (2%)	10 (22%)	5 (11%)	30 (65%)	0 (0%)
2. Business reports	1 (2%)	10 (22%)	5 (11%)	30 (65%)	0 (0%)
3. Weekly internship reports	2 (4%)	10 (22%)	4 (9%)	30 (65%)	0 (0%)
4. Reports on meetings with clients	1 (2%)	8 (18%)	5 (11%)	30 (65%)	2 (4%)
5. E-mail messages	4 (9%)	8 (18%)	4 (9%)	30 (65%)	0 (0%)
6. Any other types of documents. Please specify.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

In general, the results in Table 4.49 indicate that most of the students reported experiencing difficulty in producing efficient business documents in general. For literally all the documents mentioned in the table above, the majority of the students (65%) indicated that these

documents were 'difficult' for them to produce. Students reported that it was difficult for them to produce reports on meetings with clients, business letters, business reports and formal e-mail messages, which could be due to a lack of practice in writing business documents during their studies. Only a minority of students (22% or lower) indicated that they did not find the production of these documents particularly difficult.

Interpretation

The results of the mentor and intern surveys show significant similarity for this question. More specifically, 73% of the mentors pointed out that the business documents produced by their students were not effective. The self-assessment of the interns regarding their performance in producing the business documents indicates that 65% acknowledged that they experienced difficulties. Therefore, the results of both questionnaires show that a large majority of respondents believed that the interns experienced difficulty in producing written business documents.

Question 4

Question 4 elicited information from the interns about specific areas of the listed business documents that they found difficult to produce during their internship.

Data analysis

The table below presents the results for Question 4.

Table 4.50: The specific areas of the business documents interns found difficult to produce

Total 46 participants	1 Not difficult at all	2 Slightly difficult	3 Fairly difficult	4 Difficult	5 Very difficult
Aspects/areas of difficulty	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents
1. Appropriate use of punctuation	6 (14%)	40 (86%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2. Correct grammar use	0 (0%)	3 (7%)	3 (7%)	36 (78%)	4 (8%)
3. Choice of appropriate words	3 (7%)	3 (7%)	37 (79%)	3 (7%)	0 (0%)
4. Organisation of ideas	3 (7%)	3 (7%)	37 (79%)	3 (7%)	0 (0%)
5. Using the appropriate format for the specific document	0 (0%)	3 (7%)	3 (7%)	36 (78%)	4 (8%)
6. Appropriate use of tone and style	0 (0%)	3 (7%)	3 (7%)	36 (78%)	4 (8%)

According to the results, the majority of interns indicated experiencing most difficulty in using the correct grammar when writing business documents (78% chose the 'difficult' option and 9%, "very difficult"). In addition, other noteworthy areas of difficulty, as indicated by the interns, include using an appropriate format for the document (indicated as 'difficult' by 78%) as well as using the appropriate tone and style for the specific documents (again, 78% of the interns selected 'difficult'). The interns seem to find the appropriate use of punctuation the least difficult (87% indicated only 'slight difficulty' for this aspect). The majority of respondents (80%) found selecting appropriate words and organisation of ideas 'fairly difficult'.

Interpretation

According to the results presented above, the interns reported experiencing most difficulty in the use of correct grammar, finding suitable words to express their ideas clearly, placing the content in a suitable format, and writing in a formal style and tone. Of slightly lesser concern were matters such as finding suitable words to express their ideas clearly and how they organised their ideas. Again, the difficulties identified by the interns who participated in the

survey show a strong similarity to the results of the pre-and post-achievement writing tests reported earlier in the chapter, as well as with the mentor survey (see Sections 4.1.1.5 & 4.1.2.4, Phase 1, and 4.2.1.7 & 4.2.2.4, Phase 2).

Question 5.1

Question 5 consisted of two parts, with the first part requesting the interns to express their opinions about the IBC course to ascertain if interns felt that it had assisted them in producing business-related documents during their internship.

Data analysis

The results of the above question are displayed in Table 4.51 below.

Table 4.51: Interns' opinions about the effectiveness of the IBC course

Question 5.1	1 Not well at all	2 Slightly well	3 Fairly well	4 Well	5 Very well
Total of 46 participants	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of respondents
	36 (78%)	6 (14%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)

The results indicate that a large majority of the students (78%) believed that the course did not prepare them sufficiently to write effective business documents.

Interpretation

Students' opinions about the effectiveness of the IBC course, as stated above, are strongly related to the comments of the mentors (cf. Question 5.1 of the mentor's survey). The majority of the mentors (73%) indicated that their interns' skills in producing effective business documents were "very poor". In addition, the pre- and post-test results also indicated that the considerable writing difficulties students experienced before they started with the IBC course persisted even after they completed the course.

Question 5.2

The second part of Question 5 required the interns to make suggestions and recommendations concerning possible adjustments to the IBC course to ensure that students could produce more effective business documents.

Data analysis

Similar to the mentor survey, four strong themes emerged from the interns' responses. These themes and the number of interns who made the suggestions are displayed in Table 4.52 below.

Table 4.52: Interns' recommendations for possible adjustments to the IBC course

Interns' comments				
	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4
Question 5.2	Need more practice in writing business documents, such as letters and reports	Increase the duration of the IBC course	Need grammar instruction	No comments
Total 46 participants	24 (52%)	10 (22%)	7 (15%)	5 (11%)

Interpretation

The results indicate that 52% of the students recommended adjusting the IBC course by providing more opportunities to practice the writing of business documents. In addition, 22% of the interns recommended an increase in the duration of the IBC course and 15% suggested that the College provide grammar instruction for students.

4.3.2 Conclusion

Students' considerable difficulty in writing business documents was evident in both the pre- and post-tests conducted before students commenced with and after the completion of the IBC course. Most students did not achieve a grade beyond "Poor" or "Average" in the pre-test for writing a general essay. In the second test (the writing of a formal letter), students experienced similar difficulties. As stated before, the pre-tests were written before students were introduced to the IBC course, soon after they entered tertiary-level education. The test results indicated that only a negligible percentage of the students achieved a "Good" grade for the aspects that were assessed.

The results of the post-test (written upon completion of the IBC course) were not promising either. The test again included the writing of two documents, a formal report and a letter. Overall, the results indicated that students had not made any significant progress in writing business documents despite completing the IBC course. Regarding the writing of the report, the results indicated that no students scored higher than "Average" for most of the aspects

that were assessed. As discussed in detail earlier in the chapter, students' performance in the writing of a business letter was also not satisfactory, where again, very few students achieved a grade beyond "Average" for the aspects that were assessed.

The results of the pre- and post-tests regarding the students' writing difficulties were further confirmed by the opinions of the workplace mentors. A large majority of the mentors indicated that their interns had considerable difficulty in producing appropriate business documents. The results of the intern survey also support the findings, where the majority indicated that they experienced difficulty with the writing of business documents.

A comparison of the workplace mentor and intern survey results highlights the fact that interns are required to produce a number of different business documents during their internship. However, as stated above, both mentors and interns underscore the difficulties of interns in producing such documents. Additionally, both the workplace mentors and the interns recommend that the ABCD make various adjustments to the IBC course to strengthen students' writing skills.

4.4 Phase 4

4.4.1 Introduction

Phase 4's data analysis aimed to compare the learning outcomes (LOs) of the IBC course at the ABCD with the LOs of similar courses offered by the Botswana Open University (BOU) and BA ISAGO University in Botswana (see Annexure 13: Phase 4, IBC LOs analytical table).

The summarised learning outcomes of the IBC courses offered at the above tertiary institutions are presented in Table 4.53 below.

Table 4.53: Learning Outcome analysis of IBC courses at ABCD, BOU and BA ISAGO

	IBC at the ABCD	IBC at the BOU	IBC at the BAISAGO
	Learning Outcomes	Learning Outcomes	Learning Outcomes
1	Develop advanced knowledge and skills to communicate business matters effectively in an organisation.	Demonstrate the use of basic and advanced business writing skills.	Improve students' communication skills, making them more effective at managing internal and external business relationships.
2	Understand different types of communication	Produce clear and concise written business documents.	Maximise the company-customer interface by deploying effective communication skills
3	Demonstrate skills in writing business-related documents, including letters, reports and memorandums.	Develop the interpersonal communication skills required for social and business transactions.	Write reports and other company communications.
4	Execute advanced skills in oral communication.	Plan and conduct effective meetings.	Appreciate and employ various communication methods and media.
5	Demonstrate broad skills in communicating with large audiences through electronic media.	Employ proper public speaking techniques.	Grasp the latest trends and technological advances in communication.
6	Execute skills to conduct academic research.	Develop and deliver a formal presentation.	
7	Develop advanced knowledge in applying skills in integrating appropriate techniques for effective communication.	Employ proper telephone etiquette.	
8		Communicate effectively in the online environment.	
	Level:7	Level:7	Level:7
	Credits:12	Credits:12	Credits:12
	Nature of the module: Fundamental	Nature of the module: Fundamental	Nature of the module: Fundamental

Interpretation

An analysis of the learning outcomes (those addressing the development of students' writing skills are highlighted in Table 4.53 above) of the IBC courses at the ABCD, BOU and BA ISAGO indicates that most of the outcomes focus on similar areas of knowledge, skills and competency. More specifically, the outcomes place emphasis on preparing the learners to understand and apply both verbal and non-verbal communication, write various business-related documents, develop skills in different types of oral communication (e.g. meetings, telephone calls and interviews) and integrate technology in communication with respect to developing students' presentation skills. All the IBC modules offered at the above institutions are pitched at the National Credit Qualification Framework (NCQF) level 7 and comprise a weight of twelve credits. Therefore, the estimated learning time required for an average student to achieve the module's specified learning outcomes (LOs) is equivalent to 120 Notional Learning Hours (NLH). The 120 NLH include guided learning, self-study and the time taken to complete assignments.

4.4.2 Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the LOs of the IBC module at the ABCD with those of the IBC courses offered by BOU and BA ISAGO universities reveals no fundamental differences between the LOs of the courses at the three learning institutions. Therefore, the LOs of the IBC module at the ABCD are largely similar to those of the IBC courses offered at the other two tertiary institutions in teaching business communications skills, including general communication, business communication focusing on writing letters, reports and emails, and integrating technology in business communication. Furthermore, there is adequate alignment between the LOs of the IBC course (and more specifically, those focusing on the writing of business documents) at the ABCD and the types of documents that interns are required to produce in the workplace (as was confirmed by the results of the mentor and intern survey). In addition, the comparative analysis of the IBC study manual (cf. Table 4.54), confirmed that various kinds of business documents, including memorandums, reports, business letters, notices and agendas for meetings, that is, all the major documents that were indicated as important in the surveys, were included in the syllabus of the IBC at the ABCD aiming at preparing the students to utilise their business writing skills in the industry.

4.5 Phase 5

The investigation in Phase 5 was aimed at a number of additional aspects that could indicate whether an adjustment was required to the current IBC intervention at the ABCD to develop a revised course that would address learners' writing skills in the field of business communication. This section, therefore, includes a comparative analysis of the IBC study manual with those of the courses offered at other selected institutions, an analysis of past ABCD question papers, participant lesson observations at the ABCD and semi-structured interviews with the IBC lecturers at the ABCD.

4.5.1 Comparative analysis between the IBC study manual and those of other courses

4.5.1.1 Introduction

This section examines the study manual or resources of the IBC course at the ABCD and compares these to the study manuals and resources utilised by other universities or colleges for the presentation of their IBC courses. Thus, the ABCD study manual was compared with the IBC manuals utilised by the Association of Business Executives (ABE) in the United Kingdom (UK), as well as the BOU and BA ISAGO in Botswana (see Annexure 14: Phase 5, ABCD IBC study manual analytical table).

Data analysis

The following table presents the units and sub-units in the study manuals of the different institutions mentioned above.

Table 4.54: Comparative analysis of IBC study manual

IBC - ABCD	IBC - ABE	IBC - BOU	IBC - BA ISAGO
Unit 1: Process of Communication Sub-units: ▪ Communication cycle ▪ Nature of communication in business ▪ Know how communication is applied in business ▪ Barriers to communication ▪ How to overcome the barriers	Unit 1: The Process of Communication Sub-units: ▪ Introduction ▪ The communication cycles ▪ Barriers to communication ▪ Overcoming the barriers ▪ Forms of communication	Unit 1: Communication Basics Sub-units: ▪ Understanding communication ▪ Barriers to communication ▪ Types of communication ▪ Communication skills	Unit 1: Introduction ▪ What is meant by communication? ▪ What are the elements of communication? ▪ Why is communication important in business? ▪ Communication process ▪ Purpose of communication ▪ Communication cycle (model) ▪ Levels of communication ▪ Communication in organisations

IBC - ABCD	IBC - ABE	IBC - BOU	IBC - BA ISAGO
Unit 2: Types of Communication Sub-units: • Written communication ▪ Letters ▪ Memos ▪ Notices ▪ Advertisements ▪ Press releases ▪ Reports • Oral communication • Electronic communication • Non-verbal communication • Non-verbal communication and the physical environment • Design and presentation in written communication	Unit 2: Principles of Effective Communication Sub-units: ▪ Introduction ▪ Planning ▪ Acquiring and organising information ▪ Structuring communications ▪ The importance of clarity	Unit 2: Business Correspondence Sub-units: ▪ Audience analysis ▪ Types of business correspondence	Unit 2: Written Communication Sub-units: ▪ What is written communication? ▪ Writing business letters ▪ Writing business reports ▪ Writing memos and briefs ▪ Writing proposals ▪ Writing notices and circulars ▪ Writing instructions ▪ Writing a press release

IBC - ABCD	IBC - ABE	IBC - BOU	IBC - BA ISAGO
Unit 3: Meetings and Groups Sub-units: ▪ Requirements for a valid meeting ▪ Meeting procedures, notice of a meeting, agendas ▪ Conventions for recording minutes ▪ Style of minutes ▪ Roles and responsibilities of office bearers ▪ Group formation and development ▪ Advantages and disadvantages of groups ▪ Characteristics of group effectiveness ▪ Implications for communication in groups	Unit 3 Written Communication Sub-units: ▪ Introduction ▪ Writing business letters ▪ Memoranda ▪ Using e-mail ▪ Using and designing forms ▪ Writing notices ▪ Writing to persuade ▪ Internal company documents	Unit 3 Business Meetings, Reports and Presentations Sub-units: ▪ Business meetings ▪ Business reports ▪ Presentation skills	Unit 3 Oral Communications Sub-units: ▪ What is oral communication? ▪ Making presentations ▪ Making speeches ▪ Using audio-visual aids ▪ Using the telephone effectively

IBC - ABCD	IBC - ABE	IBC - BOU	IBC - BA ISAGO
Unit 4: Interviews Sub-units: ▪ Three stages of an interview ▪ Techniques for the interviewer ▪ Types of interview questions ▪ Types of interviews	Unit 4 Oral and Non-Verbal Communication Sub-units: ▪ Introduction ▪ Basic skills of oral communication ▪ Using the telephone ▪ Face-to-face encounters ▪ Non-verbal communication and personal presentation ▪ Non-verbal communication and the physical environment ▪ Design and presentation in written communication		Unit 4 Visual Communication Sub-units: ▪ Different visual communication tools ▪ Using visual communication tools

IBC - ABCD	IBC - ABE	IBC - BOU	IBC - BA ISAGO
Unit 5: Research Sub-units: ▪ Research process ▪ Data interpretation methods ▪ Key elements to consider when gathering data	Unit 5 Communication with Customers Sub-units: ▪ Introduction ▪ Dealing with customers on the telephone ▪ Meetings with customers and clients ▪ Listening to customers ▪ Dealing with enquiries ▪ Supplying information to customers		Unit 5 Formal Meetings Sub-units: ▪ What are formal meetings? ▪ Aspects of formal meetings

IBC - ABCD	IBC - ABE	IBC - BOU	IBC - BA ISAGO
Unit 6: Graphic Communication Sub-units: - Advantages and disadvantages of graphic communication - Various components of graphs - Bar chart - Pie chart - Flow chart	Unit 6 Communication within Organisations Sub-units: - Introduction - The role of communication in organisations - Communications systems - Management styles - The layout of the office		Unit 6 Interpersonal Effectiveness Sub-units: - What is meant by interpersonal communication? - Importance of interpersonal communication in organisations - Communication climate - Aspects of listening - Understanding non-verbal communication - Aspects of non-verbal communication - Increasing interpersonal effectiveness in organisations
Unit 7: Projects and Communication Tools Sub-units: - Project and project management - Communication tools for the project	Unit 7 Technology and Communication Sub-units: - Introduction - An introduction to technology - Technology and communication		Unit 7 Technology and Communication Sub-units: - The electronic office - How technology can be used for communication effectiveness

IBC - ABCD	IBC - ABE	IBC - BOU	IBC - BA ISAGO
Unit 8: Multimedia Communication Equipment Sub-units: ▪ Use of technology in communication ▪ Multimedia equipment			

Interpretation

The comparative matrix of the IBC study manuals from the four institutions summarised above indicates that the study manuals share most topics. The section below provides a consolidated summary regarding the similarities and differences between the courses of the other three institutions and the ABCD.

Similarities

The significant topics shared by the IBC courses at the mentioned institutions include:

1. The process of communication that includes types of communication, verbal/non-verbal communication, barriers to communication, means to overcome communication barriers and the importance of communication in business.
2. Written communication in the business context (business correspondence), which comprises the writing of different types of business documents, including letters and reports; and
3. Other topics include interpersonal communication, levels of communication in organisations, the role of communication in organisations, meetings, presentation techniques, utilising technology in communication and using audiovisual aids in communication.

Differences

The only significant difference identified between the ABCD IBC study manual when compared to the study manuals of the other institutions is the inclusion of topics such as “Group” and “Research.” The unit “Group” involves the stages of group formation and implications for communication in groups, while the unit “Research” includes the sub-topics of the research process, data interpretation methods and the elements to consider when gathering data. The “Group” unit is included in the ABCD IBC syllabus to prepare students for group activities that form part of their second assignment, which is always a group assignment. The “Research” unit is aimed at preparing students for the dissertation and internship modules that form part of their final semester.

4.5.1.2 Conclusion

This comparative analysis indicates primarily that, in terms of the major aspects on which the study manual of the IBC course at the ABCD focuses, there are no significant differences from the study manuals of the other three institutions. A number of other sources also confirm the basic aspects that are usually included in a business communication course. For example, according to Guffey and Loewy (2015:1-610), there are six critical units for their Business Communication course. These include: (1) Business Communication in the Digital Age; (2) The Business Writing Process in the Digital Age; (3) Workplace Communication; (4) Business Reports; (5) Professionalism; and (6) Employment Communication.

Similar topics are also recommended by Hartley and Bruckmann (2007:1-399) in their book “Business Communication”. The content is divided into five parts that include the topics: (1) Communication Fundamentals; (2) Communication and Organisations in Context; (3) Written Communication in Organisations; (4) Interpersonal Communication in Organisations; and (5) Communication and Change.

The open-access textbook, “Libre Texts on Business Communication for Success” (University of Minnesota, 2010:1-146) covers many of the same topics discussed above. These include: (1) Effective Business Communication; (2) Delivering your message; (3) Understanding Your Audience; (4) Effective Business Writing; (5) Writing Preparation; (6) Writing; (7) Business Writing in Action; (8) Developing Business Presentations; (9) Non-verbal Delivery; (10) Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Business Communication; and (11) Group Communication, Teamwork, and Leadership.

Given the substantial similarity between the key topics outlined above and those presented in the ABCD IBC study manual, as well as, in the study manuals of the three other institutions referenced, it can be concluded that the ABCD study manual addressed relevant and appropriate content for the development of students’ business communication skills in general and their business writing ability in particular.

4.5.2 Appropriateness of assessment instruments (past final examination question papers) of the IBC course at the ABCD

4.5.2.1 Introduction

The question paper analysis in Phase 5 aimed to determine the appropriateness of past examination papers in assessing students’ writing ability specifically. Therefore, the aim was to determine whether the IBC question papers effectively assessed students’ knowledge and

skills in writing business documents (as taught in the IBC course). Three past question papers from 2018, 2019 and 2020 were included in the comparative analysis.

- **IBC question paper from 2018**

This question paper comprised two sections: Section A consisted of two compulsory questions, each worth ten marks. Section B contained five questions, and students had to choose four to answer. Each question was worth twenty marks (see Annexure 15: Phase 5, ABCD past question paper analytical table).

Data analysis

The table below presents an analysis of the assessment areas of the 2018 final examination paper.

Table 4.55: Analysis of the 2018 final examination paper

IBC question paper from 2018	Section	Nature of questions	Focused area of assessment	Total marks for this area	Percentage
	A1	Paragraph question	Knowledge and understanding	10 marks	10%
	A2	Paragraph question	Knowledge and understanding	10 marks	10%
Any four of the following questions					
	B1	Descriptive type of question	Knowledge and understanding	20 marks	20%
	B2	Descriptive type of question	Knowledge and understanding	20 marks	20%
	B3	Descriptive type of question	Knowledge and understanding	20 marks	20%
	B4	Descriptive type of question	Knowledge and understanding	20 marks	20%
	B5	Descriptive type of question	Knowledge and understanding	20 marks	20%

Interpretation

Most of the questions focused on assessing students' knowledge of the concepts concerning the various business communication topics included in the course. A pertinent example of such a "knowledge"-type question is Question 1 in Section A (10 marks) that assessed students' knowledge and capacity to recall specific aspects of business communication, in this case, oral communication (telephonic communication). This question required students to identify five pieces of information to record on voicemail: ***"You have telephoned a company to enquire whether a product is available. Your call is answered by a 'voice mail' and you have to leave a message. State 5 pieces of information that you should leave in that message."*** The students were required to include information such as "the name of the caller", "to whom the call was directed", "the purpose of the call", "what the receiver was expected to do, for example, to call back" and the "contact details of the caller".

Similarly, Question 2, Section A: ***"What are the advantages and disadvantages of groups?"*** is an example of a question that assessed students' knowledge and understanding of a specific aspect of working in groups. Another question that belongs to this category is Question 1, Section B: ***"Explain the process of group formation, indicating behavioural patterns in each category."***

All three examples discussed above focus on students' knowledge and capacity for remembering important issues in business communication. The remaining questions in the paper that are not used as examples all have a similar focus on knowledge about business communication. It is, therefore, clear that students' skills and competencies to write appropriate business documents were not assessed at all in this examination paper. In this context, one would have expected questions about the writing of, for example, business letters, reports or memorandums, based on a specific situation. In a workplace context, what is required from an employee is the ability to apply the knowledge and skills related to writing business documents in order to produce such documents effectively.

- **IBC question paper from 2019**

The total assessment for this paper was again out of 100 marks. The paper consisted of three sections: Section A, Section B and Section C, which all again (as could be seen in Table 4.56 below) primarily focused on assessing the learners' knowledge of business communication.

Section A comprised ten true or false questions, five short-answer questions and five fill-in-the-blank questions, all counting one mark, resulting in a total of 20 marks.

Section B included five short descriptive-type questions, where answers were expected to be written in one or two sentences. Each question counted two marks for a total of ten marks. There were also two paragraph-type questions requiring answers of between 200 and 250 words. Each question was worth ten marks, totalling 30 marks for this section.

Section C counted a total of 50 marks. Students were required to choose two out of three questions, each worth 25 marks. These were essay-type questions, with answers between 500 and 800 words.

Data analysis

The table below reflects the assessment areas of the 2019 final examination paper.

Table 4.56: Analysis of the 2019 final examination paper

IBC question paper from 2019	Section	Nature of questions	Focused area of assessment	Total marks for this area	Percentage
	A	True/False, short-answer type and fill in the blanks	Knowledge and understanding	20 marks	20%
	B	Short paragraph questions	Knowledge and understanding	30 marks	30%
	C	Essay-type questions	Knowledge and understanding	25 x 2 = 50	50%

Interpretation

The questions in Section A were designed to assess learners' ability to recollect information, testing whether they remembered specific details related to business communication. The true/false questions in this section, therefore, tested students' knowledge of specific aspects of business communication. For instance, students had to answer either true or false for the following statement: "***The complimentary close of a letter is a polite way of leave-taking***". Similarly, the question requiring students to write short notes on "***Non-verbal communication***" aimed to assess if the student remembered the definition of non-verbal communication.

The questions in Section B were more descriptive in nature. For example, Question 3 required students to: "***Outline the 5 W's and H of planning a message***". This was also a question that focused on students' knowledge of business communication.

Section C comprised 3 essay-type questions, each worth 25 marks. Although longer written answers were required of the students in this case, the questions again focused on their knowledge of specific issues in business communication, for instance, for Question 6, students had to: ***“Describe the five types of business letters, indicating in each case why a businessman may use them”.***

Again, the above question paper was designed to evaluate students’ understanding and recall of concepts and information related to business communication. Similar to the 2018 paper, a major omission in the 2019 paper was questions assessing students’ actual ability to write the specific business documents taught in the IBC course in order to test whether they were capable of producing them effectively. Therefore, this question paper also did not assess one of the critical objectives of the IBC course, that is, students’ actual ability in written business communication.

- **IBC question paper from 2020**

This paper comprised six questions arranged in two sections, A and B. Students could answer two out of three questions from Section A and two out of three from Section B. Each question was worth 25 marks.

Data analysis

The following table shows the assessment areas of the 2020 final examination paper.

Table 4.57: Analysis of the 2020 final examination paper

IBC question paper of 2020	Section	Nature of questions	Focused area of assessment	Total marks for this area	Percentage
Section A (Any two questions)					
	A1	Essay-type question	Knowledge and understanding	25 marks.	25%
	A2	Essay-type question	Knowledge and understanding	25 marks.	25%
	A3	Essay-type question	Knowledge and understanding	25 marks.	25%
Section B (Any two questions)					
	B1	Essay-type question	Knowledge and understanding	25 marks.	25%
	B2	Essay-type question	Knowledge and / understanding	25 marks.	25%
	B3	Essay-type question	Knowledge and understanding	25 marks.	25%

All questions in this paper were essay-type questions designed to assess students' understanding and knowledge of business communication. For example, Question 1 in Section A required students to: ***“Describe the purpose of business communication at the Imperial School of Business and Science”***. Similar to the 2018 and 2019 papers, this question paper did not assess students' business writing skills regarding producing any of the business documents that were taught in the course.

4.5.2.2 Conclusion

The results of the analysis of the past IBC examination papers indicate that in all three papers, the questions only assessed students' knowledge and understanding of business communication concepts and principles. Most importantly, none of the question papers tested students' productive ability to write business documents that are required in a workplace context.

4.5.3 Class observation

4.5.3.1 Introduction

The objective of the lesson observation was to investigate the classroom activities that took place during the lectures presented by the IBC lecturers, specifically concerning written communication and to determine if such activities were appropriate for developing students' abilities in writing business documents. The researcher observed two lectures of written communication (see Annexure 18: IBC lesson observation analytical table), Class A and Class B, respectively. The IBC lecturers were coded as Lecturer 1 (L1) and Lecturer 2 (L2).

Data analysis

The information below reflects the researcher's lesson observations of Lecturers 1 and 2.

Table 4.58: Analysis of lesson observations of L1 and L2

	Criterion	Observer's comments on L1's lesson	Observer's comments on L2's lesson
C1	Lesson plan	The lecturer provided lesson plans.	The lecturer provided lesson plans.
C2	Objectives	The lecturer discussed the lesson objectives with the students.	The lecturer discussed the lesson objectives with the students.
C3	Teaching resources	Lesson plan, whiteboard marker, projector, and handouts on business letter writing.	Lesson plan, whiteboard marker, projector, and handouts on a "notice" and "agenda" for a meeting.
		The duration of the lesson was 1 hour and 30 minutes. The lecturer randomly examined a few of the students' homework on writing a memorandum. The common errors in spelling, content, grammar, format and the choice of words were explained to the class. Once this was done, the lecturer began discussing a new topic, namely 'business letter writing'. The lecturer explained the following facets: • the difference between a memorandum and a letter. • various types of letters; • each type of letter's purpose; • the format of a letter; • the characteristics of a business letter; and • the various parts of a business letter. Once this was concluded, the lecturer asked the students a few questions to test their understanding of the concept of a business letter. During the concluding session, the lecturer gave the students a homework assignment, which was to write a business letter.	The duration of the lesson was 1 hour and 30 minutes. The lesson was divided into three sessions. In the first 30 minutes, the lecturer randomly examined a few of the students' homework concerning the writing of a business letter. The common errors, specifically in grammar, choice of words, content and format, were explained in the class. The second session focused on a new topic: the preparation of a notice and agenda for a meeting. This session was approximately 45 minutes long. The lecturer spoke about the purpose and characteristics of notices and agendas for a meeting. Later in the session, the lecturer asked the students questions to assess their understanding of the purpose and characteristics of notices and agendas. During the concluding session, the students were presented with a scenario and asked to draft a notice and agenda for a meeting as homework.

	Criterion	Observer's comments on L1's lesson	Observer's comments on L2's lesson
C4	Teaching strategies	Teacher- and learner-centred strategies were used that included, lecturing, discussions, question and answer sessions, assignments for students to do as homework and providing collective feedback on their written work.	Teacher- and learner-centred strategies were used that included, lecturing, discussions, question and answer sessions, assignments for students to do as homework and providing collective feedback on their written work.
C5	Language of instruction	English	English
C6	Learners' activities	Listening, participating in discussions, answering questions and presenting their written work.	Listening, participating in discussions, answering questions and presenting their written work.

Interpretation

Both lecturers were equipped with resources such as lesson plans and handouts for the specific topics, whiteboard markers and projectors for teaching the specific topics in the two lectures that were observed. The lecturers employed similar teaching methods, that is, they used the first 30 minutes to examine a few of the students' homework assignments (during this time students were free to engage themselves either in gathering ideas about the new topics or reading the study manual) and indicate common errors such as grammar mistakes, incorrect selection of words and inappropriateness of the content and format of the specific documents. The common mistakes which were found in those students' documents were discussed in class. More specifically, Lecturer 1 discussed the common challenges that the students experienced in writing a memorandum, and Lecturer 2 discussed the problematic issues in the students' writing of a business letter. It was further observed that the lecturers did not provide individual feedback to students on their written documents. Once this was done, both lecturers moved on to new topics, that is, the lessons on business letter writing (L1) and the preparation of a notice and agenda for a meeting (L2). Once the lecturing part was concluded, the lecturers asked their students several questions to assess their understanding of the specific topics. At the end of the lessons, both lecturers provided their learners with homework assignments (both as writing tasks) related to the new topic introduced in the lecture.

The language of instruction was English, and each Lesson lasted 1 hour and 30 minutes. The lecturers employed teacher- and learner-centred (mixed) teaching methods to present their classes. Students actively participated in discussions and question-and-answer sessions.

4.5.3.2 Conclusion

A crucial observation in these sessions was that students were not engaged in actual classroom writing activities. Lecturers also did not provide individual written feedback on students' written documents explaining each student's mistakes. Appropriate activities to correct those specific mistakes could have been instrumental in assisting students to become better writers. For example, regarding the common mistakes found in applying English concord rules, the lecturers could have provided instructions that focused specifically on the concord rules for such common mistakes. This could then have been combined with individualised feedback on concord use in the written documents that students produced. According to Bayat (2014:1133-1141), the process writing approach has a significant effect on writing success, and therefore, the lecturers of the ABCD could have resorted to such an approach by incorporating the above writing activities and encouraging students to produce a

number of versions (or drafts) of a specific document. Each draft could have received individual feedback from the lecturers that could have enabled students to increasingly improve their texts towards more appropriate, acceptable business documents. The lecturer could also have established a peer-review system in which the whole class was divided into 4 or 5 groups, where each group reviewed the written work of the others with the lecturer's assistance. This could have had a positive impact on both the writer, who acknowledges the mistakes, and the reviewer during the assessment. However, in the observed lectures, it seemed as if there was a rush on the part of the lecturers to move on to the new topic before having determined whether students made any significant progress in their writing of the previously discussed business documents. This is a clear indication that the module's duration was inadequate for practical writing assistance regarding the teaching of the writing of business documents.

4.5.4 Semi-structured interviews

The last aspect that was addressed in Phase 5 was the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with the two IBC lecturers at ABCD. The lecturers' responses during the interviews were recorded, and the data were later transcribed for analysis. The interview data were first captured in an Excel sheet, with the interviewer's questions in the first column and the responses from lecturers 1 and 2 in subsequent columns. Later, the significant responses from the interviewees (lecturers) were considered in the comparative analyses.

4.5.4.1 Introduction

The interviews aimed to determine the lecturers' perceptions about the effectiveness of the IBC course and their students' writing proficiency specifically. The interviews further focused on whether lecturers believed that adjustments to the course were required in terms of the content and mode of delivery that may contribute to improving students' writing ability. The researcher served as the interviewer. The interview schedule consisted of nineteen questions related to the IBC syllabus. Questions focused on a determination of:

- 1) Whether the lecturers believed that the LOs were appropriate;
- 2) The current teaching methodology to ascertain if the method was suitable or if amendments were required;
- 3) The current number of guided learning hours (GLH) to confirm if the course requires additional time;

- 4) The assessment methods and instruments to confirm their appropriateness in terms of developing students' writing skills; and
- 5) The common mistakes lecturers observed when their students wrote business documents (see Annexure 16: Phase 5, interview analytical table).

Data analysis

The interview data is presented in the following table.

Table 4.59: Analysis of lecturer interviews

	Questions	IBC lecturer 1's responses	IBC lecturer 2's responses
	Lecturers' observations/opinions of their students		
1	With what type of communication do your students perform best, oral or written?	"Generally, students experience more difficulty in writing in English than in speaking English. My students perform best in oral communication".	"My students perform better in oral communication than in written. They have serious challenges in writing documents".
2	What could be the reason for your answer to the previous question?	"Cultural backgrounds. In primary school, they did not need to express their ideas in English. Most of them tend to think in their mother language and translate their ideas into English. Most students have challenges using correct grammar in English, that is, the correct spelling of the words, punctuation and grammar rules. These challenges will be exposed while they write documents in English, and that will affect their performance. However, if they communicate orally, these challenges will not be noticed".	"In Form 5, students do not take English seriously. However, in colleges, especially in classrooms, all communication is in English. Students lack confidence and are afraid of being noticed for their mistakes in grammar, punctuation, and spelling in their written documents. In oral communication, their errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar will not be noticed. So, they perform better in oral communication".
3	What do you propose could be done to improve their weakest area in communication?	"High school English teachers should teach English in English and not translate into their mother tongue. Even during their primary education, school children should be encouraged to think and write in English. Tertiary students need to practice improving their writing skills. As a first stage, students' weakest areas in written communication should be identified and improved by providing additional lessons for writing documents. These practice sessions will improve their writing skills".	"In my opinion, students need to be engaged in public speaking to promote their oral communication skills and practice sessions to enhance their written communication skills. What they need is practice writing different types of documents".

	Lecturers' experience		
4	How long have you been working at ABCD	"Eight years"	"Twelve years"
5	How long have you been teaching the IBC course at ABCD?	"Seven years"	"Seven years"
6	Based on your experience as a lecturer, what is your opinion about the proficiency of tertiary students at the ABCD in English writing?	"The students had difficulties writing in English, for example, writing letters, reports, notices and agendas for meetings. There is a significant gap to fill in terms of students' written communication skills".	"Students at the ABCD are having serious difficulty in writing efficient documents in English".
7	What might be the reason for that?	"Background. Form 5 high school students learn the English language in theory. They do not regard it as a practical subject such as mathematics".	"Students are not provided with sufficient opportunities to practice writing in English in their high schools".
	The current method of teaching		
8	At the ABCD, what is your primary method of teaching the IBC course? For instance, do you employ a teacher-centred or learner-centred methodology?	"Mixed methods, learner- and teacher-centred methods".	". A combination of lecture methods, including role-play and discussions, is primarily learner-centred because the learners do the majority of the work".
9	Is there any specific reason for the particular methodology you chose?	"We employ the teacher-centred method for introducing a concept and then switch to the learner-centred method by encouraging the students to participate and learn for themselves".	"It is a tried and tested method. So, we adopt the combination of learner and teacher-centred methods".
10	Is there any other method or strategy you would like to implement in your IBC classes?	"I would like to introduce case study methods to provide practical business writing lessons".	"We would like to introduce industry experts, company secretaries and guest lecturers to teach the students how to write business documents, such as meeting minutes and business letters".

	The current method of teaching		
11	Is there any specific reason for wanting to implement other methods or strategies?	"Through case studies, the lecturer wants to make the students aware of the importance of written communication".	"Industry experts will tell the students exactly what is happening in the industry and what is required for the industry".
12	Do you think the resources for teaching business communication are useful and effective?	"We need more computers so the students can learn by themselves. It will improve their skills in typing".	"Yes, we are well-resourced".
13	Are the IBC lecturers allowed to use any other teaching resources apart from what is provided by the ABCD? If so, what additional resources do you use to teach BC?	"We are allowed to utilise secondary data such as newspaper cuttings".	"We are not limited to the prescribed resources; we can use YouTube videos and conduct our presentations".
14	What is your opinion concerning the adequacy of the total learning hours provided for the BC module?	"It is fine, 120 hours".	"Require more hours".
15	Do you think that the learning outcomes for written communication are appropriate and sufficient?	"We need to integrate IT subjects such as the Internet and practical lessons for typing".	"They are appropriate and sufficient – we benchmarked with other awarding bodies".
	Assessment methods criteria		
16	How do you assess students' knowledge, skills and abilities in the IBC module?	"Formative and summative assessments".	"Presentations and assignments".

Specific difficulties that have been observed in students' writing of business documents			
17	Have you noticed any difficulties in your students' ability to write professional documents?	"Students have difficulties writing efficient documents".	"Yes, they have difficulties in writing".
18	If so, what are the difficulties that you have noticed in your students concerning writing professional documents?	"Students have difficulties in using the correct format, words, spelling, style and tone. They also have challenges in using correct grammar, including punctuation".	"Students have many difficulties, such as using the correct format, tone, grammar, punctuation and words".
19	What are your recommendations for improving your students' writing skills?	"Need a lot of practice, as a mathematics teacher gives problems to the students to solve, English should be treated as a practical subject".	"So many suggestions: 1. Practice 2. More learning hours to allow time for more practice 3. Essay writing competitions.

Interpretation

Both lecturers believed that students struggled more with writing in English than speaking. According to them, students had difficulty in using correct spelling, punctuation, grammar and appropriate words. The lecturers therefore felt that the students performed better in oral communication than in written communication because these challenges exposed in their writing were not as visible in oral communication. This gave them more confidence to speak than to write in English.

Both lecturers indicated that students' difficulty in English communication is due to their constrained backgrounds, that is, right from the primary to the secondary levels of education, they did not take English seriously, and as a result, communication in English, specifically in writing, is difficult for them. Additionally, Lecturer 1 tends to think that translating from their native language into English results in inappropriate use of English. This lecturer, therefore, suggested that encouraging students to think and communicate in English could enhance their English communication skills. The second lecturer suggested providing opportunities for public speaking to improve their oral communication and offering writing practice sessions to address their English writing problems.

Both lecturers, each with more than seven years of experience teaching the IBC course at ABCD, indicated that they employed mixed methods in their classes, combining teacher-centred and learner-centred approaches. When asked about implementing other teaching strategies, the first lecturer advocated for introducing case study methods of teaching, while the second lecturer argued for guest lectures by industry experts and company secretaries to demonstrate effective written communication in real-world scenarios.

While the first lecturer was comfortable with the duration of the IBC course at ABCD, the second lecturer recommended extending the duration to provide more practice sessions for improving students' writing skills.

As noted above, both lecturers mentioned that students struggled with correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, appropriate style, tone and selecting suitable words and format when writing. Both lecturers agreed that students needed more practice to enhance their writing skills.

4.5.4.2 Conclusion

The interview session with the lecturers revealed several significant themes:

1. Students encountered difficulties in writing business documents, particularly in using the correct spelling, appropriate language, grammar, punctuation, format and writing convincingly.
2. Students needed more practice in writing English documents relevant to the workplace context; and
3. There may be a need to introduce the case study method of teaching and guest lecturing with the assistance of industrial experts to enhance students' writing skills.

4.5.4.3 Summary

The investigation of the specific writing difficulties of tertiary-level Business Communication students in Botswana (with specific reference to students of the ABCD) was conducted in five different phases. A pre-test was conducted with the students at the ABCD before they engaged in any form of business communication course to test their general academic and business writing skills. The test results for the academic essay and business letter writing revealed that students encountered considerable writing difficulties, specifically in the application of correct grammar, organisation of ideas, arranging sentences coherently, choosing appropriate words, placing the contents in the correct format and writing in a formal style and tone. Students' writing ability in the writing of business documents was tested again in the post-test, that is, after the intervention of the business communication course (IBC). The results of the post-test showed that students experienced similar difficulties in their writing of business documents to those that were identified in the pre-test. In addition to the two written tests, two surveys (for workplace mentors as well as interns) were conducted to investigate the importance of business writing skills at the workplace, the types of documents that the interns were required to produce and the performance of the interns in terms of writing appropriate business documents. Both the mentor and the intern surveys confirmed that students were required to write various business documents such as business letters, reports of their meetings with clients, daily internship reports and e-mails. The survey results further reflected that, according to the perceptions of both groups surveyed, students experienced considerable difficulties in writing work-related business documents effectively, and that the majority of their difficulties were similar to the specific areas revealed by the pre- and post-tests results. It is therefore not surprising that both groups of respondents suggested that more training should be provided to the students, which may enable them to write more effective

business documents and that grammar instruction specifically should be included in the curriculum of the IBC. The remaining investigations (Phases 3 to 5) were directed specifically at assessing the appropriateness of the IBC course at the ABCD. The Learning Outcomes of the IBC were compared to those of two other universities in Botswana, BOU and BA ISAGO. This comparison revealed that there were no significant differences between the LOs of the three institutions. Similarly, the comparative analysis of the study manuals of the IBC course at the ABCD and the business communication courses offered by colleges and universities showed that the study manual used by the ABCD was largely similar to the aforementioned institutions with respect to the themes that were included in these manuals. Additionally, the interviews conducted with the IBC lecturers at the ABCD investigated their perceptions about the level of proficiency of their students' communication abilities, the specific areas that presented difficulty for their students in writing business documents and whether the IBC course adequately prepared students to write effective business documents. Lecturers were also asked to provide suggestions for improving the writing skills of their students. The opinions of the IBC lecturers supported the results of the pre-and post-tests conducted in Phases 1 and 2 and the surveys in Phase 3. That is, the IBC students at the ABCD encountered severe writing challenges in producing business documents, especially in the areas of grammar, construction of coherent sentences, adopting a suitable style and tone and selecting appropriate words to express their ideas. In the final stages of the investigation, the researcher examined three final examination question papers from the years 2018, 2019 and 2020. The results indicated that all the question papers focused primarily on assessing students' knowledge and understanding of business communication concepts and principles, rather than evaluating their actual business writing skills. Finally, observations of the IBC classes that emphasised writing were conducted to determine whether adjustments were required in the lecturers' instructional practices. The results indicated that during these classes that focused on writing specifically, lecturers did not provide their students with written individual feedback to identify and rectify their mistakes or with actual writing practice opportunities in class. In conclusion, the overall results confirmed that the IBC students at the ABCD faced serious writing difficulties in producing effective business documents, even after having completed the IBC course at the College. Based on the prominent findings and observations in this chapter, the following chapter includes recommendations towards the provision of writing support to students that may enable them to produce more effective and appropriate business documents. The table below displays the different phases in the investigation and their findings

Table 4.60: Analysis of the investigation in different phases

Phases	Research methods	Objectives	Findings
Phase 1	Pre-test • Essay writing • Business letter writing	To investigate ABCD students' specific writing difficulties before the intervention of the IBC course as writing support	Students had specific writing difficulties in: • using correct grammar, including the use of articles, prepositions and conjunctions; • proper use of punctuation; • organising and arranging ideas in order; • choosing appropriate words; • placing the contents in the correct format; and • writing in a formal style and tone.
Phase 2	Post-test • Formal report writing • Business letter writing	To determine ABCD students' specific writing difficulties after the intervention (the IBC course)	Students still have serious challenges in: • Using correct grammar; • expressing thoughts logically and coherently; • choosing correct words to present ideas; • using proper formats for professional documents; • applying correct punctuation; and

Phases	Research methods	Objectives	Findings
			• using a professional style and tone.
Phase 3	1. Intern survey 2. Workplace mentor survey	To determine: • Whether students must write business documents at the workplace during their internship • The type of documents they have to produce and how frequently they produce them • Whether students have specific difficulties in writing professional documents • What specific writing difficulties they encounter	• Students do write business documents • They write letters, reports and e-mails most frequently • They have specific writing difficulties • The specific difficulties are: • usage of grammar; • choosing appropriate formats; • using the correct words and punctuation; and • conveying messages in a professional style and tone.
Phase 4	Comparative analysis of ABCD IBC LOs with LOs of similar programmes offered at other universities	• To validate whether ABCD IBC LOs are similar to the LOs of other universities (offering similar programmes) with respect to their objectives. • To ensure that the LOs of the IBC module at ABCD are capable of preparing the learners to write effective business documents (as reflected in the surveys).	• ABCD LOs are similar to the LOs of courses at other universities regarding their objectives. • ABCD IBC LOs have the potential to prepare the learners to write effective business documents.
Phase 5	1. Comparative analysis of the IBC text books/study manuals with	1. To investigate the effectiveness of the current ABCD IBC intervention with respect to	1. The resources (textbook(s)/study manuals) used at the ABCD are similar to those used for

Phases	Research methods	Objectives	Findings
	texts books/study manuals of other universities offering similar courses 2. Analysis of past final ABCD IBC question papers 3. Lesson observation during the teaching of the writing of business documents 4. Semi-structured interviews with ABCD IBC lecturers	the validity of the textbook(s) /study manuals in comparison with similar programmes in other universities. 2. Appropriateness of the assessment instruments 3. The teaching methodology to prepare students for the writing of business documents 4. IBC lecturers' opinions about their students' business writing efficiency	similar programmes at other universities regarding their purposes. 2. Assessment instruments only tested students' knowledge and understanding of business communication concepts and principles. 3.1. Students were not engaged in actual classroom writing activities. 3.2. Lecturers did not provide individual written feedback on students' written documents. 4. Students displayed the following difficulties in writing: • the correct use of grammar, punctuation, articles and prepositions; • using appropriate formats for professional documents; • using formal style and tone; and • choosing appropriate words to express their thoughts.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Overview

The research questions formulated to examine the specific writing difficulties of tertiary-level Business Communication students in Botswana have been comprehensively addressed throughout the course of this study. This chapter reiterates the research questions and provides an account of how they have been answered. Furthermore, it offers recommendations for mitigating the challenges identified at each phase of the investigation, as well as discussing the limitations of the study and possible areas for future investigation.

Overall, the literature review in Chapter 2, the findings of the assessments, the pre- and post-achievement tests, the results of the employer and intern surveys, and the interviews conducted with the IBC lecturers collectively highlight the significant writing challenges by students in producing acceptable business documents. Based on these results, the answers to the research questions, as well as recommendations that address the specific difficulties identified in the study, are discussed below.

5.1.1 Research question 1

The first question sought to examine the general and business writing difficulties experienced by tertiary ESL students in the African context, but also in a wider international setting. To address this, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken, incorporating studies from African countries, including Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and Botswana, as well as studies from India, China, Austria, Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, the USA and the UK. The principal findings from these sources are briefly summarised below.

Evidence from various studies conducted at Ghanaian universities (e.g. from Gyasi (1990:24-26), Mireko-Gyimah (2014:23-46), Yeaboah and Owusu (2016:1-9) and Nartey and Dorgbetor (2014:168-173), indicates that tertiary students in Ghana face significant challenges in writing, particularly to the correct application of grammar and the adoption of an appropriate style and tone.

Similarly, research by Hollis-Turner and Scholtz (2010:239-245), Tanga and Maphosa (2018:1-15), Pineteh (2014:12-22), Archer (2008:248-264) and Schulze and Lemmer (2017:54-66) highlights key writing difficulties of South African students. These studies document substantial challenges in the use of proper citations, appropriate

vocabulary and grammar, additionally, students further exhibited challenges in paraphrasing documents without losing the core concept.

Tertiary-level students in Zimbabwe have demonstrated significant challenges in composing business documents, particularly with regard to correct spelling, applying the correct concord rules, using punctuation correctly, adopting a suitable method of citation, and making use of correct tenses and prepositions. Furthermore, students struggled with paraphrasing content and presenting ideas logically (Gonye *et al.*, 2012: 71-83).

In the Botswana context, Magogwe *et al.* (2018:1-6), Chimbhanda (2011:1-21), Ntereke and Ramoroka (2018:81-95) and Umunnakwe and Pitse (2017:31-43) indicate that tertiary students exhibit generally poor English writing skills. The study by De Beaugrande (2000:334-349) specifically highlights deficiencies in students' business writing competencies.

Studies by Arputhamalar and Kannan (2017:84-90) and Ramya Devi (2016:165-173) indicate that college students in India have specific writing difficulties in using correct grammar and vocabulary, constructing logical sentences and creating an appropriate tone and style for their documents.

Similarly, research from China (Xie (2020:123-135), the Philippines (Jimenez *et al.*, 2024:1440-1451 and Ramos, 2020:49-66) and the USA (Pittenger *et al.*, 2006:257-263 and Lentz, 2013:474-490) indicates that students encounter a range of writing difficulties, including the correct application of grammar (including using concord rules correctly), making use of correct tenses, accurate punctuation, correct spelling, and expressing content in an appropriate style and tone. Students also struggled to link clauses effectively using appropriate conjunctions, organise sentences coherently and convey content in a proper style and tone.

The literature review of studies from Africa and other regions indicates that tertiary students face substantial difficulties when producing general academic and professional business documents. It is therefore suggested that writing difficulties of tertiary students are widespread across African institutions as well as the wider international context, and that many of these writing problems are similar across tertiary institutions globally.

5.1.1.1 Recommendation

A critical difficulty identified in both the literature review and survey analysis is students' serious challenges in applying English grammar accurately, including using the correct tenses, writing sentences with the correct subject/verb agreement, using suitable punctuation and spelling words correctly. Addressing these challenges is, therefore, essential in any targeted

writing intervention aimed at enhancing students' proficiency in academic writing. Detailed recommendations for supporting students in developing grammatical accuracy are presented in Section 5.1.2.3.1, which addresses the Research Question 2.

5.1.2 Research question 2 (Phases 1 & 2)

The second research question examined whether the Business Communication students at the ABCD experienced difficulties in writing business documents before and after the participation in the IBC course, and if so, whether this showed any similarity to the writing difficulties of tertiary students in Africa and the rest of the world. Additionally, the question aimed to determine the effectiveness of the IBC course in supporting students to improve their writing skills. Students, therefore, wrote a pre- and post-achievement test to answer this question. The pre-test was written during Phase 1 of the study, before the students were exposed to the Business Communication (IBC) course, and the post-test was conducted in Phase 2 after completing the course.

5.1.2.1 Phase 1

The analysis of the results of the general essay, as well as the business letter writing tests that were written as part of Phase 1, indicated numerous writing difficulties that students experienced. These included difficulties in providing an appropriate title, problem statement and solution, the construction of coherent sentences, the arrangement of sentences in logical paragraphs, the correct use of grammar and maintaining an appropriate style and tone.

The results for business letter writing similarly indicated that students encountered significant challenges in composing proper subject headings, salutations and complimentary closures for their letters. Additionally, they also struggled composing the content of the letter in a logical order, as well as choosing appropriate vocabulary to express their ideas. Furthermore, students demonstrated difficulties in constructing grammatically correct sentences and selecting the appropriate style and tone for professional business correspondence.

In summary, the results of the two pre-achievement tests confirmed that, as might reasonably expected, first-year students most of whom were new to the tertiary academic environment, experienced substantial writing difficulties. These challenges encompassed both general academic writing skills, as assessed through the essay and business writing abilities, evaluated via the business letter. Moreover, the students exhibited many difficulties that were consistent with those identified among tertiary students in Africa, as well as those in the wider international context, as discussed in Chapter 2.

5.1.2.2 Phase 2

Overall, the results of the two post-tests, the report and business letter assessments conducted in Phase 2, indicated that students' writing skills demonstrated minimal improvement following the completion of the IBC course at ABCD.

The report writing assessment highlighted the students' challenges in composing suitable titles, writing purpose statements and introductions, recording proceedings and findings, reporting the important matters discussed and writing an appropriate conclusion and recommendations. Additionally, the assessment revealed deficiencies in constructing meaningful sentences, using appropriate vocabulary, dividing the content into meaningful paragraphs, using correct grammatical constructions and adopting an appropriate style and tone for the report.

Students similarly experienced considerable difficulty with the business letter assessment. These included an inability to use the correct letter format, particularly in providing a suitable 'Subject heading' and 'Closure'. Additionally, students struggled to compose effective introductory sentences, provide purposeful content, and to present an appropriate and coherent summary. Ideas were frequently arranged in a disorganised manner, and students often employed incorrect grammatical constructions, inappropriate vocabulary and an unprofessional style and tone.

The results of the post-achievement tests revealed no significant improvement in students' business writing skills even after they had completed the IBC module. Students, therefore, continued to repeat the mistakes that had been evident in the pre-test. Since the IBC course did not include explicit teaching of English grammar (as was evident from the analysis of the syllabus of the IBC course), the grammatical difficulties that students continued to display after the intervention are understandable. However, students' persistent difficulty in applying an appropriate format to their documents was unexpected. The analysis of the learning outcomes of the IBC course (cf. Chapter 4, Table 4.53) demonstrated that the focus of one of the LOs was to develop students' skills in writing business-related documents, including letters, reports and memorandums. The analysis of the IBC study manual (cf. Chapter 4, Table 4.54) also indicated that Unit 2, "Types of Communication", included the sub-topic "Written Communication" with a focus on the writing of various business documents such as letters, memos, notices, advertisements, press releases and reports. A plausible explanation for students' ongoing difficulties in writing effective business documents could be a lack of writing practice with regard to the writing of such documents. Therefore, had they been provided with adequate practice opportunities for writing various kinds of business documents, such as

writing reports of different types, letters and memorandums, and accompanied by suitable and productive feedback from their lecturers, their writing difficulties could have been noticed and mitigated to a certain extent.

The test results also indicated students' difficulties using formal language, choosing appropriate words, writing the content clearly, providing required information to convince readers and structuring the documents into logical paragraphs. The following recommendations, therefore, address the prominent findings related to the second research question.

5.1.2.3 Recommendations

5.1.2.3.1 Incorporating fundamental aspects of English grammar

As previously discussed, the writing section of the current IBC course at the ABCD does not include any explicit instruction in English grammar. It is therefore recommended that a focus on essential English grammar be included in the IBC course as a separate study unit, entitled "Essential Aspects of English Grammar (EAEG)". It is further proposed that the EAEG address the following key grammatical areas: (a) Parts of speech; (b) Articles; (c) Tenses; (d) Subject and verb agreement; (e) Transitional words and phrases; (f) Active and passive voice; (g) Punctuation; and (h) Capitalisation.

The importance of providing adequate support to students in using correct grammar in their written work has been demonstrated through the analyses in Chapter 4, as well as in the literature review. It is therefore essential to identify a productive way to address this problematic aspect so that students develop their own ability to use English correctly. Part of this ability also includes students possessing knowledge of the specific grammatical rules, enabling them to notice the mistakes they make in their own writing and correct these when they revise and edit their own texts. With regard to whether grammar should be taught, Ellis (2006:101) asserts that grammar instruction is integral to developing learners' L2 proficiency. According to him, "Grammar has held and continues to hold a central place in language teaching. The zero-grammar approach was flirted with but never really took hold, as is evident in both the current textbook materials emanating from publishing houses and in current theories of L2 acquisition. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that teaching grammar works". Furthermore, Ellis (2006: 83-107) notes that "Grammar teaching involves any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it meta linguistically (the ability to think and

talk about rather than just using it to communicate) and/ or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalise it”.

Following Ellis (2006), the aim of grammar teaching should therefore also be that students should develop the knowledge about why specific features are used in specific ways in a language, which should improve their ability to notice mistakes in their own use of the language.

Although the impact of grammar teaching has long been debated, a study by Myhill *et al.* (2013:103) found “... a significant positive impact on writing outcomes when the grammar input is intrinsically linked to the demands of the writing being taught”. Musa (2021:27-39) likewise notes that teaching grammar ‘in context’ yields better results than teaching it ‘in isolation’. Ly (2020:189) further asserts that “if grammar is taught at the right time, at the right place, and in the right way, it can help students efficiently scaffold their language learning”. This supports the strategy of inserting grammar instruction into purposeful situations, rather than teaching grammar rules in isolation, in order to help students become efficient writers. The proposal for the new grammar unit will, therefore, consider the specific context in which the students have to produce written documents, i.e. producing various business documents. One way of accomplishing this would be to use of examples drawn from the business texts analysed in this study, particularly where specific language aspects have been used incorrectly by the students. This approach anchors grammar instruction within the authentic context of business writing. It is, therefore, envisaged that by contextualising grammar teaching, students would be able to improve their grammatical teaching in this manner. However, should lecturers note insufficient improvement in students’ use of English, they will need to be flexible and willing enough to adjust their instructional approach so that grammar teaching achieves the desired effect on enhancing students’ writing accuracy.

As previously discussed, students’ difficulties in using English grammar included identifying and correctly using different categories of nouns (especially common, proper, countable, uncountable and collective nouns) as well as different forms of verbs, adverbs, prepositions and conjunctions. Students also struggled with the correct tenses, concord rules and articles and with transforming sentences from active to passive voice to make their writing more impersonal and objective. Problems with appropriate punctuation and capital letters were also evident in the results of the study. Therefore, the new unit on English grammar will include a focus on all these problematic aspects.

A detailed description of the unit “Essential aspects of English Grammar”, which includes objectives, related learning outcomes, different topics and sub-topics, lecturer activities,

learner activities and assessment strategies, is provided below. All examples mentioned in the table below will be taken from the students' original writing of business documents analysed for this study, and the typical mistakes that occurred in this analysis.

Table 5.1: Syllabus for the unit: Essential Aspects of English Grammar

Topic: 1 Key elements in parts of speech				
Purpose: The purpose of the correct use of parts of speech as a topic would be to highlight the importance of the correct form of the word to reach clear and effective communication (to avoid misunderstanding) in business writing.				
Learning outcomes	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment Strategies
Understand the basic parts of speech in English and use them appropriately in written documents.	• Noun • Adjective • Pronoun • Verb • Adverb • Preposition • Conjunction	• Explains different parts of speech in the English language with respect to their function in a sentence. • A suggested activity would be to use the typical mistakes that the students made (identified in examples of student writing). Students will need to locate the mistakes and correct them.	• Students receive the example sentences with the parts of speech mistakes and must first identify the mistakes and then also give the correct form of the word (the word in the correct part of speech).	• The lecturer assesses the students' corrections and provides individual feedback.

Topic 2: Articles

Purpose: The purpose of the correct use of articles in business writing is twofold: on the one hand the omissions of articles should be addressed, on the other the correct use of articles should receive attention where article use in writing conveys a matter of specificity (how general or how specific is the reference to the noun) and with the correct use one can ensure that ambiguity is avoided and that the business writing is understood as intended.

Learning outcome:	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment Strategies
Use articles correctly in the writing of effective sentences.	• Definite article • Use of definite article • Indefinite articles • Use of indefinite articles	• Explains different types of articles and their uses. • Lecturers select examples of typical mistakes from the analysed texts in which articles have been omitted or where the wrong article has been used incorrectly. Students should again need to locate the mistakes and correct them.	• Students can work in pairs and discuss (peer learning) which articles have been omitted and used incorrectly, and which would be the most appropriate article to use in each case.	• For this task, students can assess their own work. The lecturer can give feedback to the class, and the pairs can assess their own work. •

Topic 3: Tenses

Purpose: Students must grasp the importance of using tenses correctly and consistently in business writing. Inconsistent tenses can be confusing and misleading to the reader (audience). A very clear, specific order of events (a chronological timeline) is important in the business context that avoids confusion and ensures accuracy.

Learning outcome:	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment Strategies
Identify the different tenses in English and use them correctly to produce grammatically correct sentences.	• Present tense • Past tense • Future tense • General functions of tenses • Logical sequence of tenses in texts	• Explains the application of different tenses, their functions and formation. • A suggested activity would be to use the typical mistakes that the students made (identified in examples of student writing). Students will need to locate the mistakes and correct them. • An alternative, further task could be to design an activity where a scrambled list of events is given to the students. Some of the events should be the cause (what happened), and others should be the subsequent results. Students should use all the given events to compose two written paragraphs that clearly communicate the flow of events. Students should also be encouraged to use at least two time-words/logical connectors to support the clarity of the flow of events.	• Students should look at the examples and identify the tense mistakes and correct them. • For the second task, students write two paragraphs using the given list of events. Students should reorder the bulleted list of events so that it makes logical and chronological sense.	• The lecturer corrects students' work and gives individual feedback.

Topic 4: Subject and verb agreement

Purpose: Develop the ability to use the correct form of the verb that agrees with a specific subject and produce meaningful sentences. Subject-verb agreement is important in business writing because it shows care and professionalism. Furthermore, well-composed language helps to convey the business message clearly.

Learning outcome:	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment Strategies
Understand how the form of an English verb changes according to a specific subject and use subject/verb agreement correctly in sentences.	• Agreement between singular subject and singular verb • Agreement between plural subject and plural verb • Agreement between a combination of two or more subjects with different conjunctions.	• The lecturer explains subject and verb agreement rules in all contexts with suitable examples. • The lecturer divides the students into smaller groups and gives each group a printout of a text drafted erroneously concerning concord rules.	• Each group has to underline the erroneous sentences and make corrections. Once this is over, the group leader presents the corrected text to the class.	The lecturer assesses students' work and provides feedback.

Topic: 5 Transitional words/phrases

Purpose: Identify and understand different types of transitional words and use them to link sentences in a logical and coherent way in a written document. Transitional words act as signposts that strengthens the readability of the text as they guide the reader. With appropriate transitional words/phrases the logical connections between ideas become clear.

Learning outcome:	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment Strategies
Identify different types of transitional words and use them to create logical unity in the document.	• Definition of transitional words • Functions of transitional words	• Define the meaning of transition words • Explain the functions of different types of transitional words. • Demonstrates how sentences could be connected using appropriate transitional words to create coherence. • Provide the students with sentences (from the examples in student writing) and ask them to improve the writing (make the writing clearer) by adding appropriate transitional words/phrases.	• Students combine and improve the ideas in the sentences by using appropriate transitional words/phrases.	The lecturer assesses students' work and gives feedback.

Topic 6: Active and passive voice

Purpose: Understand sentence structures in active and passive voice and produce sentences in active and passive voice according to specific contexts.

Students should understand when active voice is important in business writing. Active voice plays an important role in its directness and accountability, especially when a specific action is required from a specific person, or when clear instructions are given.

Students should also understand that the passive voice is an appropriate alternative to active sentences when the action or event (the result) is more important than naming the person who did it. It is usually important in business writing to keep objectivity and formality, and passive sentences can help one achieve just that.

Learning outcome:	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment Strategies
Identify sentence structures as active and passive voice and use both constructions correctly in sentences.	- Active and passive voice - Changing from active to passive voice.	- The lecturer explains the use of active and passive voice and demonstrates to the students how the verbs and sentence structure change from active to passive. - The lecturer provides a short paragraph written in the active voice and asks the students to identify the ideas in the paragraph that would be better stated in the passive voice. The students can first complete the task in class on their own, and then they can discuss it in pairs with peers to explain and justify why they have chosen the sentences they did to be better written in the passive voice.	Students change some sentences to the passive voice.	The lecturer assesses the students' work and provides feedback.

Topic 7: Punctuation and capitalisation

Purpose: Punctuation and capitalisation are stylistic features that are important in business writing.

Correct punctuation ensures clarity in the structure of the business document (in terms of sentences and paragraphs) and also avoids misunderstanding. A clear structure, in turn, also organises the ideas in the text and leads to overall clarity of the business communication.

Correct capitalisation reflects one's professionalism in writing. Capitalisation shows proper nouns and titles and therefore projects the care one takes with business writing.

Learning outcome:	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment Strategies
Identify different types of punctuation and use them in sentences correctly to convey the intended meaning.	• Full stop • Comma • Semicolon • Colon • Question Mark • Exclamation Mark • Inverted Commas	• Explain each type of punctuation and its uses. • Provides sentences (from the examples) with stylistic errors. Students have to identify and correct the punctuation and capitalisation issues.	• Students identify the punctuation and capitalisation errors and correct the sentences.	• The lecturer assesses the students' work and provides feedback.

5.1.2.3.2 Incorporating a unit “The characteristics of written Business Communication (CBC)”

The test results of Phases 1 and 2 revealed that, in addition to challenges with grammatically correct English, which could be addressed by the new grammar unit discussed above, students experienced considerable difficulties in writing business documents clearly and concisely, structuring content in the appropriate format, providing adequate details aligned with the purpose of the document, and presenting it in a professional style and tone. Considering students' difficulties in these areas, the inclusion of a second unit, “The characteristics of written Business Communication (CBC)”, in the IBC course, is recommended.

5.1.2.3.2.1 Proposed content of “The characteristics of written Business Communication”

It is proposed that the CBC unit include explicit attention on those aspects that define written business communication. Such a unit should therefore assist students in understanding the key characteristics of written business documents and in applying these characteristics in their own writing. In particular, the unit should address the specific areas of difficulty identified in this study, including clarity and conciseness, the correct use of specific documents formats, the inclusion of comprehensive and appropriate detail, as well as the courteous nature of business communication. A well-established model that identifies seven essential aspects of effective communication, referred to as the ‘7 Cs of Effective Communication’, is frequently used to highlight the characteristics considered important in professional business writing (cf. Porwal, 2023:517). It is therefore recommended that this model be adopted as the foundational framework for introducing students to the characteristics of business writing.

The 7 aspects of the model and how they could support students to become more efficient business writers are outlined below.

1. Clarity: According to Krishna (2018:37-46), “clarity in communication is created by careful paragraphing, that is, maintaining the rule of ‘one paragraph-one idea’, choosing simple, appropriate words, and avoiding complex vocabulary and jargon”. Therefore, although students’ performance in structuring the content of their written documents into meaningful paragraphs appeared to be slightly better than the other aspects that were assessed, their performance in making use of appropriate paragraphing was still inadequate. Addressing paragraphing as part of the clarity of documents could help students to better understand the concept and principles of paragraphing, towards structuring their documents logically. Therefore, it is, for

example, important for students to understand that a document becomes clearer for the reader if a paragraph contains a clear topic sentence with the remainder of the sentences of the same paragraph elaborating on the topic sentence. Furthermore, the clarity of a document is enhanced if the sentences (and ideas) follow a logical progression. One could, therefore, link this characteristic with the use of connecting devices that have already been introduced in the proposed new grammar unit to demonstrate to students how the different types of connecting devices create different kinds of logical relationships between sentences (ideas) and paragraphs in business documents. Another structural feature of business writing that could also be introduced here is the use of different formats for different documents. Making use of the generally accepted formats for different documents further enhances the clarity of such documents in the sense that readers expect certain aspects to be included in, for example, a business letter or report. Meeting the expectations of readers in this way could ensure that readers are not confused by the use of inappropriate formats when they expect something different.

2. **Correctness:** This characteristic mainly refers to the use of correct grammar, punctuation and spelling. Students would already have been made aware of the importance of the grammatical correctness of the documents they write through the proposed new unit on grammar discussed in the previous section. However, the specific reasons why documents should be accurate in terms of correctness could be reiterated here so that students understand the practical implications of writing documents that contain errors (such as miscommunication and damage to the image of the organisation). One could further discuss and demonstrate the use of various devices, such as spell and grammar checkers, here so that students could make practical use of such support in the writing of their documents.
3. **Conciseness:** Concise writing demands that the writer keep the message short, simple and to the point. This means that writers should attempt to convey an idea appropriately and meaningfully using fewer more effective words. Also, a document can be written in a manner that avoids repetition as well as irrelevant and unnecessary information. In this instance, the importance of writers making use of a process of writing that is discussed later in this section is paramount. One could, therefore, when this characteristic is discussed with students, emphasise the importance of reviewing one's own writing with a specific focus on removing redundancies such as repetition from their written documents. In the end, this should contribute towards the comprehensibility of students' documents.

4. **Concreteness:** The concreteness of writing suggests the need to make the message specific rather than general. In this case, a writer should therefore attempt to avoid general and vague words and terms (e.g. 'thing') that are not specific enough in nature for a reader to understand exactly what is referred to. That is, writers should focus on exactly what they want to say and select the most specific words to convey that specific message. Specificity in one's writing can be further enhanced by making use of factual evidence to support arguments, rather than vague statements that could be considered personal opinions.
5. **Completeness:** The completeness of the message refers to providing all the necessary information that the reader requires or expects so that a prompt and appropriate response can be elicited from the reader. The writer should, therefore, attempt to leave no doubt in the reader's mind about the information conveyed. A productive strategy that one could teach students in this instance is to, when they review their documents before sending them off, make use of a list of questions, such as "What happened?", "When", "Where", "Why", and "How" to check whether all information has been included in the document. This could ensure that they have included all the relevant information in the document in order to avoid the reader finding it necessary to ask a number of questions about the content of the document.
6. **Consideration:** This aspect refers to a writer's consideration of the reader in the writing of a document. In other words, it is an attempt to put oneself in the place of the reader while composing a message. For example, the writer could ask himself/herself, "How would I react if I received such a message?" Keeping the audience (reader) in mind in this way should help the writer regulate the message considering the needs, interests and emotions of the reader.
7. **Courtesy:** Courtesy in the context of business writing refers to a writer sending messages/documents that avoid words and expressions that can hurt the feelings of the reader. Courteous messages are much more likely to receive prompt and positive responses. The writer should therefore avoid an aggressive or accusing tone in what and how they write such documents. The inclusion of words such as "Thank you", "Please", "Kind regards" and "Yours sincerely" shows respect for the reader and creates a formal or friendly tone in the document, depending on what is required for the context. It is, therefore, also when one discusses this characteristic with students that the importance of the formality of business writing could be emphasised so that students understand the nature, significance and impact of formal language in business communication. The test results showed that a significant majority of the students failed to make use of a formal register for their business writing. Most of the

students wrote their business letters in a similar way to they wrote informal text messages. Informal language use was also evident in their formal reports. Since the current IBC course does not include a focus on this aspect, the inclusion of a focus on the appropriate use of formal language in business writing has the potential to improve this aspect of the students' writing. This aspect should, therefore, focus on the specific ways in which a business document could be written in a more formal register. It could include, for example, a focus on what kinds of language to avoid that generally detracts from the formality of a document. These include the avoidance of contractions, abbreviations, slang, colloquialisms and idioms, as well as, depending on the purpose of the document, avoiding making the text personal by limiting the use of personal pronouns. The inclusion of the new study unit that focuses on grammar (discussed in the previous section) should also assist in addressing the formality of student texts in the sense that using grammar correctly also enhances the formal tone of a document. The grammar unit further includes a specific focus on active and passive voice, which is another device students could use to make their writing more impersonal.

The syllabus of the proposed CBC unit, which contains the details of the topics and sub-topics, lecturer and learner activities and assessment methods, is provided below.

Table 5.2: Syllabus for the unit: The characteristics of written Business Communication (based on the 7 Cs of effective written communication)

Topic 1: Clarity				
Purpose: To understand the strategies for creating clarity in written texts				
Learning outcomes	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment strategies
To demonstrate the ability to write clear business documents	• Use of appropriate formats • Rules of paragraphing • Logical integration of sentences • Use of connectors/transitional words	• Explains the importance of using the correct format for specific business documents • Explains the importance of dividing the content into paragraphs • Demonstrates the rules of paragraphing • Demonstrates how to create logical integration in sentences • Provides an unstructured paragraph and asks the students to arrange the sentences into a logical paragraph • Provides a text in which the paragraphs have been scrambled and asks the students to sequence them logically • Gives the students several sentences where an incorrect (underlined) connecting word has been used and asks them to provide the appropriate connector in each instance that creates the intended logical relationship between the ideas	• Students arrange the sentences into meaningful paragraphs • Students provide a logical sequence for the paragraphs • Students connect the sentences logically by providing an appropriate connector	• The lecturer assesses the students' work and provides individual feedback

Topic 2: Correctness				
Purpose: To reiterate the importance of using correct grammar in business documents (and also establish a link with the previous unit on essential grammar)				
Learning outcomes	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment strategies
To understand the importance of writing grammatically correct business documents	- The significance of grammatically correct business documents - The use of spell and grammar checkers	- The lecturer refers back to the unit on essential English grammar and again reiterates the importance of grammatically correct documents - Demonstrates how spell and grammar checkers can support students in identifying spelling, punctuation and grammar errors in their documents - Provides a short text that contains grammar, spelling and punctuation errors.	Students should identify the grammar, spelling and punctuation mistakes in the text and correct them	The lecturer assesses the corrections provided by the students and provides them with individual feedback.

Topic 3: Conciseness				
Purpose: To understand the importance of language use that is concise and to the point				
Learning outcome:	Sub-topic	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment strategies
To demonstrate the ability to write concise business documents that provide only the essential information	- Avoidance of verbosity, redundancy and repetition - Avoidance of insignificant information	- The lecturer explains the importance of avoiding verbosity, redundancy, repetition, as well as insignificant information in texts, using examples of each - The lecturer provides a text with of instances of wordiness, redundant words and repetition, as well as unnecessary information and asks the students to identify such instances and write a concise version of the text	Students rewrite the text more concisely	The lecturer assesses the students' texts and provides individual feedback.
Topic 4: Concreteness				
Purpose: To emphasise the importance of conveying exact, factual information supported by evidence				
Learning outcome:	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment strategies
To demonstrate the ability to include exact, factual information that is supported by evidence in business documents	- Distinguishing between general and vague words and terms - The use of factual information - Avoidance of personal opinions	- The lecturer uses examples to explain the difference between vague and exact expressions - The lecturer explains the necessity of providing factual evidence when writing business documents - The lecturer provides a text in which claims are presented without supporting evidence, as well as a list of facts and asks students to incorporate the factual evidence at the correct place in the text to support the claims	The students integrate the factual evidence at the correct places so that the evidence provides factual support for the claims	The lecturer examines whether students provided the appropriate evidence for the claims in the text and provides individual feedback

Topic 5: Completeness				
Purpose: To understand the importance of including complete information in business texts				
Learning outcome:	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment strategies
To demonstrate an understanding of the importance of including complete information in business documents	- Complete vs incomplete messages - The 5 Ws and H questions	- Demonstrates the difference between complete and incomplete information - Explains the meaning of the checklist of questions including the 5 Ws and H ("What happened"; "When", "Where", "Why", and "How") that one could use to check for completeness - Provides a specific, complete scenario of a specific event as well as a text that is supposed to contain all the information in a summarised form (but with some crucial information that has been omitted). Ask students to assess the completeness of the summarised information, based on the complete scenario	Students assess the summarised documents in terms of the complete scenario and identify missing information	The lecturer assesses what students identified as omitted information and gives individual feedback

Topic 6: Consideration				
Purpose: To understand why consideration of the reader is important in the writing of business documents				
Learning outcome:	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment strategies
To show an understanding of considering the reader's background and needs when writing business documents	- Consideration of the reader in business writing - A focus on the reader (audience) - The needs, interests and background of the reader - Anticipating the reader's reaction	- Explains the importance of considering the audience when writing a business document - Explains what aspects to consider when composing a written text/message. - Demonstrates the relevance of trying to anticipate the reader's reaction before the text/message is sent to the reader - Provides examples of written texts as well as a list of envisaged readers of the texts that also contains important background information about the readers. Asks students then to match specific texts with specific readers based on the information provided about the readers	Learners match specific readers to specific texts based on the background information provided	The lecturer examines the students' choices and provides individual feedback

Topic 7: Courtesy				
Purpose: To understand the importance of writing business documents/messages in a professional and polite way				
Learning outcome:	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment strategies
To demonstrate an ability to write business documents/messages in a professional and courteous way	• Courtesy and politeness in business documents • Formality in business documents • Words and expressions that detracts from formality ▪ Contractions ▪ Abbreviations ▪ Slang ▪ Colloquialisms ▪ Idioms ▪ Personal pronouns	• Explains the need to write courteous and polite business documents • Provides examples of how documents are written in a courteous and polite manner • Explains the importance of using a formal register in business documents • Explains the following aspects that detract from the formality of a document and that should be avoided with appropriate examples ▪ Contractions ▪ Abbreviations ▪ Slang ▪ Colloquialisms ▪ Idioms ▪ Personal pronouns • Provides the learners with short examples of impolite use of language as well as informal language use (all underlined), and asks students to provide polite and formal alternatives	Students replace all instances of impolite and informal use in the examples with polite and formal alternatives.	The lecturer provides individual feedback on the options provided by the students.

Topic 7: Courtesy	
Sources/recommended texts for lecturers	• Porwal, D.P. 2023. Mastering the 7C's of effective communication: A comprehensive guide for successful communication in professional and personal settings. <i>International Journal of Scientific Development and Research (IJSDR)</i>, 8(5):517-517.

When discussing the characteristics of business writing with students, it is crucial to emphasise that their own documents should consistently demonstrate these characteristics. A productive strategy to support students in producing appropriate business documents is the systematic application of the writing process. Consequently, the writing process is discussed below as an additional recommendation that can help students develop greater efficiency and effectiveness as business writers.

5.1.2.3.3 Encourage students to make use of the writing process when they write business documents

One of the most common misconceptions leading to the production of inappropriate documents is the belief that a text can be written once and immediately be sent to a reader. Strunk and White (2000:59) note that: “Few writers are so expert that they can produce what they are after on the first try”. Consequently, most writers require several attempts to produce an acceptable final draft of a text. It is therefore important for students to understand that employing a structured writing process, in which multiple drafts are created, and each draft is carefully revised, can lead to a much stronger final draft of a document. Such a final written document, whether it is submitted for assessment in an educational context or should serve a very specific purpose in a workplace context, has more potential to have the desired effect on its readers. The writing process not only helps eliminate careless errors, but it also provides opportunities for refining ideas and the manner in which documents are written.

According to Al Bloushi and Al Shuraiaan (2024:7-22), an integration of the product and process approach to writing could be a productive approach in the teaching of writing that awards prominence to both and does not focus on the product of writing or the process of creating such a product in isolation. These researchers note that: “... the choice between product-process approaches of teaching depends on what the teacher is attempting to teach her/his students, that is, if the students are at a foundation level, teachers could utilise the product approach to teach them how to use, for example, the tenses or any grammatical lesson they are learning. When students learn their grammar and become capable of using English grammar, then they can commence composing a process paragraph.” (Al Bloushi & Al Shuraiaan, 2024:7-22). In that sense, the two approaches can be utilised together, starting with the product approach that focuses on important textual elements of an appropriate text and then moving on to the process approach that could culminate in an appropriate text being produced.

According to Guffey and Loewy (2015:36), there are three main stages involved in the process of writing: prewriting, drafting and revising. The activities in each stage of writing are explained further below.

1. Prewriting (analysing, anticipating and adapting): This is the first phase of writing that involves analysing the audience and determining the purpose of writing. During this phase, understanding the audience (reader), including their nature and status in the organisation, deciding about the reason for writing the document and anticipating the reader's reaction (whether it may be negative or positive) are important issues to consider. The writer should also plan to adopt an appropriate style and tone, focusing on the nature, status and professional relationship with the reader(s).
2. Drafting (research, organise and draft): During this stage, the writer has to search for and gather relevant data/information. The writer, therefore, has to decide what information should be included in a text to inform or convince the target audience. Once the information has been gathered, the writer must decide on the best way in which to integrate such information logically in the written document (depending on the purpose of the document). The last step in this stage is writing an initial draft of the document.
3. Revising: This stage consists of the process of editing (making the document clear, concise and readable by eliminating unwanted information or details), proofreading (reading the document carefully and correcting errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation and ensuring that the elements of the format of the document are correct) and evaluating (that relates to the process of assuring the appropriateness of the content about the achievement of the purpose and ensuring the appropriateness of the style and tone of writing). This process of revision can be repeated a number of times, which would produce a number of drafts of the document until the writer is satisfied with a final draft of the document that could be sent to the reader(s).

Placing emphasis on students making use of the writing process when composing business documents should provide learners with the opportunity to engage more deeply with the texts they produce. Through guided written practice and the creation of multiple drafts, students can reinforce their knowledge and skills, gradually producing documents that are increasingly more appropriate as business documents.

In addition to introducing the two new units in the IBC module, a number of additional recommendations are proposed to ensure students receive adequate writing support, also addressing research question 2. These recommendations include (1) providing the students

with relevant opportunities for writing practice in the IBC module, (2) introducing a new, second semester module that focuses exclusively on the writing of specific business documents, and (3) facilitating written corrective feedback for students with regard to their written documents. The relevance of these recommendations is discussed below.

5.1.2.3.4 Provide relevant opportunities for writing practice in the IBC module

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that students were not provided with sufficient opportunities to practise their writing. That is, students lacked adequate occasions to apply the skills and knowledge presented during lectures. The absence of individualised feedback from lecturers meant that students did not know which aspects of their writing required improved. As a result, students completed their final examination for the IBC course and, in the case of the fourth-year students, produced documents in the workplace without benefitting from a writing intervention that effectively addressed the development of their writing skills. It is therefore, recommended that lecturers provide students with structured opportunities to practice writing two business documents identified as most important for employers in Chapter 4. Due to the limited time allocated to the writing component of the IBC module, it is proposed that this module focus specifically on the preparation of a general business letter (such as a letter that shares information) and a business report. Furthermore, it is advisable that the writing of these documents be approached in successive stages, for example, dealing with the format of a letter as the first stage, then have students write the introduction, body and conclusion, all focused on separately at first, but then culminating in the writing of the complete letter. A similar strategy should be employed for the writing of the report. At each stage, the lecturer should evaluate the students' texts and provide individual developmental feedback. The lecturer's feedback, if delivered constructively, should contribute to building student confidence as writers and improve their writing skills. Consequently, the IBC module would focus on developing proficiency in two key business documents required in the workplace. It is further proposed that the other document types identified in Chapter 4 be included in a dedicated, second-semester module, also to be offered in the first year of study. The structure and content of this new module are discussed below.

5.1.2.3.5 Introducing a new, second-semester module called Written Business Communication (WBC)

The introduction of a new module in the second semester of the first year, providing further opportunities for writing practice, represents an additional recommendation for improving the students' writing skills at the ABCD. This new module, referenced to as WBC, would function as a continuation of the IBC module by focussing on the types of business documents included

in the IBC curriculum. It is further recommended that, in order to create a tangible connection with the business writing in the IBC module, the new module starts with a revision of business letter and report writing to which students have already been exposed in the first semester. A productive strategy for this revision could include a discussion on the specific difficulties that lecturers identified in the students' writing in the first semester. The remainder of the module should then focus on the actual writing of documents, making use of the writing process. Such documents include other important types of business letters, reports, such as internship reports, and email messages.

It is important to note that the implementation of such a new module (as well as the proposed amendments to the IBC module) would need approval from the education authorities in Botswana before they can be implemented. Therefore, the addition of such a module, as the proposed WBC, or the incorporation of additional learning outcomes to the syllabus of a module, for example the addition of the two new units, 'Essential Aspects of English Grammar' and 'Characteristics of Written Business Communication' to the syllabus of the IBC module, may not be implemented without approval. Such changes should be implemented through consultation with the qualifications regulatory authority of Botswana, the Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA). According to the Botswana Qualifications Authority (BQA, 2021:7), the minimum number of credits required for a degree program (level 7) is 480 credits if students enter into a program directly after their final secondary schooling, after having been awarded the Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE). Most degree qualifications at the ABCD have a minimum of 480 credits, but some also exceed this credit limit. This is also the case with other degree programmes offered by various colleges and universities in Botswana. For example, degree programmes such as the BBA in Tourism Management at the ABCD (registration number - Q0041) has 493 credits, the BSc in Forensic Financial Accounting (Q0035) offered by Logan Business College has 525 credits, and the BCom in Risk Management (Q0057) offered by Botho University stands at 480 credits. All the examples mentioned above appear on the BQA website (<https://www.bqa.org.bw>) for public reference. These examples demonstrate that, if necessary, a slight increase in the total credits for qualifications is possible, provided the authority, BQA, gives its consent. That is, the proposed additions to the IBC module as well as the inclusion of the new WBC module may only be implemented once the necessary permission has been granted by the BQA.

The duration, content, method of teaching and learning, as well as the method of assessment of the new WBC module are discussed in more detail below.

5.1.2.3.5.1 Proposed topics and sub-topics for the WBC module

The suggested credit weighting of the module will be 12 credits, comprised of 80-90 guided learning hours. Since the module would be dedicated exclusively to the writing of business documents, the notional hours should allow for adequate time in order to cover the writing of the different types of business documents mentioned below.

a. Types of business letter writing

- General business letters (revision of the work already done in the IBC module)
- Cover letters
- 'Thank you' letters
- Letters of enquiry
- Complaint letters
- Acknowledgement letters
- Letters of request

b. Writing memos

c. Writing minutes of meetings

d. Writing reports (also to start with a revision of the report written in the IBC module)

e. Drafting E-mails

5.1.2.3.5.2 Delivery method of the WBC module

The proposed content of the syllabus of the WBC module will be facilitated by means of lectures, class discussions, lecturer-student consultations and practice opportunities in the writing of the business documents mentioned above. In this module, the actual writing of the documents would be the most important aspect, with students making use of the writing process when producing these documents and lecturers providing appropriate feedback on each draft of a document that students write.

5.1.2.3.5.3 Assessment method of the WBC module

The assessment of the WBC module will consist of both continuous assessment (CA) and summative assessment (SA). The continuous assessment will contribute 50% to the final mark/result, and another 50% from the final examination will enable students to pass the WBC module.

a. Continuous assessment

The continuous assessment in the module will comprise a series of smaller writing tasks alongside the final drafts of the documents produced during the course. In alignment with the approach recommended for two documents covered in the IBC module, students will be expected to focus on the writing of smaller parts of business documents before they produce a complete draft of such documents. For example, lecturers would discuss the format of a letter of complaint with students first and then require that they write the introductory part of the letter, followed by the other sections of the letter. All the smaller sections of documents students produce, as well as the final drafts, will be assessed by the lecturers, and students will be provided with constructive feedback on all the writing they do for the module. They will also receive a score/grade for all their writing. A selection of these scores would then be used to make up the 100 marks required for the continuous assessment mark (students must achieve a minimum of 50% for the continuous assessment to pass the module).

b. Summative assessment - final examination

The writing of a final examination is mandatory for all modules offered at the ABCD. Although students will not have all the support instruments available that they could use in real-life situations for the writing of business documents, the examination will still indicate various aspects of students' writing ability at the point when they write the examination. A productive strategy when setting the examination may include that students are provided with different scenarios for the writing of different kinds of documents, a few days before the examination, from which they will have to choose one on which to write during the examination. This strategy will provide students with greater opportunity to reflect carefully on the content they wish to include in such a document, determine their thoughts logically, as well as identify the appropriate format to use. Similar to the mark for the continuous assessment, the final examination will be worth 100 marks, and students must achieve a minimum of 50% to pass the WBC module. In terms of the assessment policy at the ABCD, students are required to achieve a minimum 50% from the CA and 50% from the SA to "pass" a module.

Table 5.3 Syllabus for Written Business Communication module

Topic 1: General business letter writing				
Purpose: Revision of writing general business letters				
Learning outcomes	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment strategies
Write effective business letters	• Format • Introduction • Body of the letter • Conclusion • Language	• Revises the sub-topics pertaining to a general business letter that were introduced in the IBC module • Gives a scenario/topic and asks the students to write a general letter in successive stages • Assesses the different sections of the letter and provides constructive feedback, as well as invites discussions/consultations with students	• Students write the different parts of the letter and submit them to the lecturer • Students revise the different sections of the letter based on the lecturer's feedback and combine them into a complete letter that is submitted to the lecturer	• The lecturer makes use of a predetermined rubric (which is also provided to and discussed with the students before they submit the final draft) and examines the completed letter of each student and provides marks.

Topic 2: Business report				
Purpose: Revision of writing a business report				
Learning outcomes	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment strategies
Compose efficient business reports	• Basic format ▪ Title ▪ Purpose ▪ Introduction ▪ Proceedings ▪ Matters discussed ▪ Conclusion ▪ Recommendation • Logical integration of ideas • Choice of words • Paragraphing • Grammar/Mechanics • Professional style and tone	• Reviews the different aspects of the sub-topics of a business report • Provides a scenario-based assignment to the students to be used in the writing of a business letter • Evaluates the different sections of the report and provides feedback as well as invites discussions/consultations with students	• Students write and submit different sections of the business report to the lecturer • Students revise the different sections of the report based on the lecturer's feedback and combine them into a complete report • Submit the final report to the lecturer	• The lecturer makes use of a predetermined rubric (which is also provided to and discussed with the students before they submit the final draft) to assess the final report and award a mark

Topic 3: Types of Business letter writing				
Purpose: To identify and understand different types of business letters and their specific characteristics, as well as to write appropriate business letters				
Learning outcomes	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment strategies
Write different types of business letters	• Cover letters • 'Thank you' letters • Letters of enquiry • Complaint letters • Acknowledgement letters • Letters of request	• Introduces different types of letters • Explains the types of letters with respect to their purposes and characteristic features • Presents examples of different types of letters • Provides topics/scenarios for writing each type of letter • Assesses the students' first draft of the letter and provides them with feedback, as well as invites discussions/consultations with students	• Because students already have experience in writing business letters, they need to select one of the topics and write a first draft of the complete letter • Students revise the first draft of the letter based on the lecturer's feedback and submit the revised letter for evaluation	• The lecturer makes use of a predetermined rubric (which is also provided to and discussed with the students before they submit the final draft) to examine the completed letter and award a mark

Topic 4: Types of report writing				
Purpose: To understand the nature of different types of reports, as well as to write appropriate reports				
Learning outcomes	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment strategies
Compose different types of reports	- Regular reports - Daily reports - Weekly reports - Monthly reports - Annual reports - Reports on business meetings, meetings with clients - Internship reports	- Introduces different types of reports and their characteristics - Provides the learners with scenarios for writing business/client meeting reports - Gives students a scenario for writing internship reports - Assesses the students' first draft of the report and provides them with feedback, as well as invites discussions/consultations with students	- Since students already have experience in writing reports, they need to select one of scenarios and write a full first draft of the report - Students revise their reports based on the lecturer's feedback and submit the final report	The lecturer uses a predetermined rubric (which is also provided to and discussed with the students before they submit the final draft) to assess the final report and award a mark

Topic 5: Writing memos				
Purpose: To understand the characteristics of effective memos, as well as to write appropriate memos.				
Learning outcomes	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment strategies
Write effective memos based on different contexts.	• Characteristics of memos • Difference between memos and letters • Format of memos	• Explains the format and the characteristics of memos • Differentiates between memos and letters, focusing on their purposes and formats • Gives different contexts to the students to create memos • Assesses the students' layout and first draft of the report and provides them with feedback, as well as invites discussions/consultations with students	• Students select one of the scenarios and prepare the layout for the memo • Students write the first draft of the memo • Students revise their memos based on the lecturer's feedback and submit the final draft	The lecturer uses a predetermined rubric (which is also provided to and discussed with the students before they submit the final draft) to examine the students' memos and provide a final grade.

Topic 6: Writing minutes of the meetings				
Purpose: To prepare the students to become efficient writers of minutes				
Learning outcomes	Sub-topics	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment Strategies
Understand the essentials of the minutes of a meeting	- Purpose of the minutes of a meeting - Essential aspects of minutes. - Language - Minutes writing	- Explains the purpose of writing minutes - Demonstrates the essentials of the minutes of a meeting - Provides a context of a meeting and asks the students to write minutes based on the context - Assesses the students' layout and first draft of the minutes and provides them with feedback, as well as invites discussions/ consultations with students	- Students use the meeting context to prepare the layout of the minutes - Students write the first draft of the minutes - Students revise the minutes based on the lecturer's feedback and submit the final draft	The lecturer uses a predetermined rubric (which is also provided to and discussed with the students before they submit the final draft) to examine the students' minutes and provide a final grade

Topic:7: Drafting E-mails				
Purpose: To develop students' ability to become effective Email writers				
Learning outcome:	Sub-topic	Lecturer activities	Learner activities	Assessment Strategies
Understand the nature of the different parts of formal Emails	E-mail etiquette Essential parts of an Email	- Explains the norms and procedures that should be followed in E-mail communication - Explains the different parts of a formal E-mail message - Provides different contexts for the writing of a formal e-mail - Assesses the students' first drafts of their e-mails and provides them with feedback, as well as invites discussions/consultations with students	- Students select one of the contexts provided by the lecturer and write a first draft of the E-mail message - Students revise their first drafts according to the feedback by the lecturer and submits a final, revised draft	The lecturer uses a predetermined rubric (which is also provided to and discussed with the students before they submit the final draft) to examine the students' e-mails and provide a final grade

5.1.2.3.6 Provide written corrective feedback to students

As noted in Chapter 4, it was found that lecturers did not offer students individual written feedback on the texts produced. Since students need clear opportunities to identify their writing mistakes and understand why some aspects of their texts are incorrect, developmental feedback from the lecturers is required. Karim and Nassaji (2019:30), for example, assert that “feedback leads to improvement of grammatical accuracy on L2 writing”.

As part of the feedback, labelling of specific errors and providing corrective feedback may assist students in producing texts that contain fewer errors. This is supported by a study conducted by Quible (2006:17), who found that: “Error labelling in the remediation exercise appeared to enable the students to significantly reduce the number of punctuation and grammar errors they made on their final draft of the business letter compared with the first”. These findings indicate that error labelling may be a productive feedback strategy that could assist students in avoiding repeating similar mistakes to what they made previously. Such corrective feedback can be both “indirect” and “direct”. In the former, errors are labelled to invite the attention of the writer, but the correct form that should be used is not provided. Conversely, with direct feedback, the lecturer provides the correct answers after labelling the errors. Therefore, it is recommended that students receive direct feedback, including a brief explanation of errors.

The following is an example of how direct feedback could be provided on student writing.

According to Coanstable (1.SP) Mrs Mosiane (2.P) Said (3.CAP) they catch(4.T) an orphan stealing (5.ART) neighbours (6.P) food in (7.PREP) the house, when they went to that orphane's (8.SP) house they find (9.T) an empty house without food (10.P) so then (11. RED), they found out the reason why (12.WC) he commit (13.T) crime.

After labelling the writing error (for example, underlining the incorrect wrong/phrase), lecturers could insert specific error codes and number them for easy identification. Lecturers can develop their own error codes (as long as they are explained clearly to the students). For example, in the extract above, SP stands for spelling mistakes. Students' mistakes must then be further supported with how their mistakes can be corrected.

The following example illustrates the various error codes; their meanings and the explanations associated with the students' mistakes.

1. SP (spelling mistake): The word **Coanstable** is spelt incorrectly. The correct form is *Constable*.

2. P (punctuation error): The sentence starts with an introductory phrase **“According to”** followed by **Mrs Mosiane**, hence a comma is required after the word **“Mrs Mosiane”**. For example, the beginning of the sentence should be written as follows: *“According to Constable Mrs Mosiane, ...”*
3. CAPS (capital letter/upper case): The sentence does not start with the word **“Said”**, so the first letter **“S”** in the word **“Said”** should not be capitalised. The correct usage is **“said”**.
4. T (tense): The usage of the present form of the word **“catch”** is incorrect in the above context. It should be in the past tense, **“caught”**, because it was a narration of a past event.
5. ART (article): Here, an article is missing. That is, the article **“the”** is required before the word **“neighbours”** in the above sentence, because the reference is to a specific neighbour.
6. P (punctuation): An apostrophe is required after the letter **“r”** to express possession if one neighbour (*neighbour’s*) was robbed or after the word **“s”** (*neighbours’*), if it happened to more than one neighbour.
7. PREPS (preposition): The preposition **“in”** after the word **“food”** is incorrect. The correct preposition is **“from”** (... *food from* ...).
8. SP (spelling): The spelling of the word **“orphan”** is incorrect and should be *orphan*.
9. T (tense): The tense of the word **“find”** is incorrect. The past form **“found”** should be used as it refers to a past event.
10. P: For clarity, a “full stop” is recommended after the words **“without food”**.
11. RED (redundancy): The inclusion of both the words **“so”** and **“then”** is unnecessary and must be reduced to one word, **“then”**. That is, in the context of the sentence, there is no need for the word **“so”**.
12. WC (word choice): The usage of **“reason why”** is an example of the wrong word choice. This part of the sentence could be corrected to: *“They found/understood the reason...”*
13. T: The verb **“commit”** must be changed to the past tense form **“committed”**, because reference is made to a past event.

- One could then also provide the student with a complete, corrected version of the text:
- “According to Constable Mosiane, the police had recently caught an orphan stealing food from the neighbours’ houses. When visiting the thief’s home, they found an empty house without food. The police then understood why he had committed the crime”.

The example above serves as an illustration of how direct feedback could be provided to students in producing grammatically accurate texts. Although it is suggested here that lecturers make use of direct feedback on their students’ texts, they will need to be flexible in their provision of feedback in terms of constantly monitoring whether the kind of feedback they provide leads to uptake by the students, in other words, whether the feedback is effective in reducing the number of errors the students make in their writing.

5.1.3 Research question 3 (Phase 3)

The results of the mentor and intern survey corroborated the findings of the pre- and post-tests, particularly in relation to students’ writing difficulties. Both groups expressed similar concerns regarding the specific writing difficulties experienced by the interns. Based on these findings, it was concluded that the interns did not meet the expectations of the employers regarding producing effective business documents.

Furthermore, the mentors and the interns agreed that effective business writing documents is critical workplace requirement, especially business letters, different types of reports formal e-mails. Both groups further recommended that the ABCD provide the students with more practice in writing business documents to improve the appropriateness and correctness of such documents.

5.1.3.1 Recommendations

As noted above, the necessity of providing more practice opportunities towards students to produce more effective business document writing is confirmed by the survey results, the results of the pre- and post-achievement tests, as well as the interview results. Meeting the expectations of employers would therefore firstly involve students producing more grammatically correct business documents. This aspect is already addressed in the earlier recommendation to include a unit on English grammar in the 1BC module (see Section 5.1.2.3.1). Furthermore, the recommendation in Section 5.1.2.3.6 that focuses on providing students with constructive and supportive feedback for their written texts will further address the aspect of the accuracy and appropriateness of students’ business documents. The recommendations mentioned in Section 5.1.2.3.4 (Provide relevant opportunities for writing

practice in the IBC module), as well as those in Section 5.1.2.3.5 (Introducing a new, second-semester module called Written Business Communication (WBC) should create ample opportunities for learners to practice the writing of important business documents used in the workplace.

5.1.4 Research question 4 (Phase 4)

This research question sought to benchmark the Learning Outcomes (LOs) of the IBC course at the ABCD with similar courses offered at other institutions.

The results (cf. Chapter 4, Table 4.53) showed that there were no major differences between the LOs of other institutions compared to the LOs of the IBC course at ABCD. However, considering the findings of the pre-and post-achievement tests that demonstrated the students' difficulties with various aspects of writing business documents that are not reflected in the LOs of the current IBC course, certain amendments to the LOs of the IBC course are necessary.

5.1.4.1 Recommendations:

Again, the earlier recommendations proposing the inclusion of two new units in the IBC course, namely a unit on English grammar (cf. Section 5.1.2.3.1) and a unit addressing the characteristics of Business Communication (cf. Section 5.1.2.3.2), will require the addition of corresponding learning outcomes to the IBC course.

5.1.5 Research question 5 (Phase 5)

The results of the post-achievement tests, which were conducted after the students completed the IBC module, showed little improvement in the business writing skills of the students. Students still experienced many of the same writing difficulties that were identified in the pre-tests (which was understandable because the IBC course did not focus on the development of many of these aspects). The mentor and intern surveys also confirmed the results of the post-tests.

The results of the data analyses of the previous research questions, therefore, also informed the recommendations for the fifth research question that focused on whether the current IBC course at the ABCD required revision in order to better prepare the learners to write appropriate business documents.

Several additional analyses, such as the comparative analysis of the IBC study guides with guides from other tertiary institutions offering IBC programmes, of past question papers used in the IBC module, and the observations of the lecturers in lectures focused on writing and semi-structured interviews with the IBC lecturers at the ABCD, all contributed towards answering this question.

The results of Phase 5 of the study indicated that a number of specific changes to the IBC module could result in the offering of more appropriate writing support to students towards becoming more efficient business writers. These results and the recommendations pertaining to them are discussed below.

5.1.5.1 Analysis of the IBC study manual

The comparative analysis of the IBC study manual at the ABCD with similar courses at the ABE, BOU and BA ISAGO revealed no significant differences between the study manuals of these institutions. However, based again on the pre-and post-achievement test results, the results of the two surveys as well as the perceptions of the IBC lecturers regarding the writing skills of the ABCD students, certain changes were already recommended earlier in this chapter towards possible productive adjustments to the IBC module that may lead to more adequate support for students in the development of their business writing skills.

5.1.5.1.1 Recommendations

5.1.5.1.1.1 Revising the content (and study manual) of the IBC course at the ABCD

Currently, the IBC course at the ABCD is a 12-credit module offered over one semester, specifically the first semester of the first year. The module comprises eight units that include: (1) The Process of Communication; (2) Types of Communication; (3) Meetings and Groups; (4) Interviews; (5) Research; (6) Graphic Communication; (7) Projects and Communication Tools; and (8) Multimedia Communication Equipment.

The recommendation is that, as mentioned in Sections 5.1.2.3.1 and 5.1.2.3.2, two new units (the EFG and CBC units), should be incorporated into the current IBC course. The additional two units will carry three credits (30 GLH) and thus add to the total credits of the IBC module to make it a 15-credit module. This requires an additional 1 hour and 30 minutes per week over five months in order to cover the inclusion of the two units mentioned above in the syllabus. As discussed earlier in Section 5.1.2.3.4, this adjustment is feasible with the support of the BQA.

5.1.5.1.1.2 Restructuring the content of the IBC module at the ABCD

The writing of business documents is first introduced in Unit 2 of the module, “Types of Communication”, which comprises the sub-units (a) Written communication, (b) Letters, (c) Memos, (d) Notices, (e) Advertisements, (f) Press release and (f) Reports. Therefore, it is recommended that the new unit on English grammar be placed before Unit 2 in the module. By adopting this sequence, students will be sensitised to the importance of using grammar correctly from the outset of the course. Furthermore, lecturers will be able to evaluate their students’ grammatical proficiency before they begin the actual writing of business documents in the IBC course.

The second additional unit, the ‘Characteristics of Business Communication’ should then follow directly after the unit on grammar, also before the students start with the unit that requires the actual writing of business documents. Therefore, the arrangements of the units in the IBC module will be as follows: Unit 2, Essentials of Fundamental Grammar; Unit 3, Characteristics of Business Communication; and Unit 4, Types of Communication. The revised and restructured module should then also provide a sound foundation for the writing activities in the new WBC module which will be introduced in the second semester.

5.1.5.2 Analysis of the past examination question papers of the IBC course

The analysis of the past question papers of the IBC course at the ABCD indicated that all the question papers were designed to assess students’ knowledge and understanding of the concepts and principles of business communication (see Chapter 4, Tables 4.56, 4.57 & 4.58). That is, these question papers did not assess students’ actual writing ability in terms of the production of business documents.

5.1.5.2.1 Recommendation

5.1.5.2.1.1 Amend the assessment instruments (AI) of the IBC module

Because the purpose of making use of specific assessment instruments (AI) is to ensure that a learner acquires the expected knowledge and skills regarding the specific learning outcome of a topic or unit, the AIs should be appropriate for the assessment of those learning outcomes. The AIs should, hence, be appropriate for testing learners’ knowledge about specific concepts or principles of a field of study on the one hand, or, on the other, if learners have developed specific skills or abilities that enable the learner to do or accomplish something. In this respect, the IBC course aims to prepare the students to communicate (speak and write) effectively in the context of business communication. Appropriate assessment instruments should therefore

be used to test the students' knowledge and skills in both oral and written communication. In the context of this study, it is therefore essential that students' practical ability to write appropriate business documents is assessed. However, as indicated above, the analysis of the IBC question papers in Chapter 4 showed that none of the question papers tested the students' writing ability. Therefore, it is recommended that future assessment instruments (with specific reference to the final question papers) used for the IBC module include questions that assess both knowledge about business communication and students' ability to produce appropriate business documents. It is therefore proposed that questions for testing students' business writing skills must be included in the examination papers. Such questions may be approached in the same way as what has been suggested for the final examination paper for the new WBC module (cf. Section 5.1.2.3.5.3 b, specifically the discussion about summative assessment).

5.1.5.3 Lesson observations

Similarly, the results of the writing class observations (see Chapter 4, Table 4.58) indicated that students were not provided with individual feedback on their writing tasks that could assist them in improving their texts. Students were further not provided with written practice opportunities during normal class time. Please refer to Section 5.1.2.3.2 for recommendations already made with regard to this aspect.

5.1.5.4 Semi-structured interviews

The data from the semi-structured interviews with the IBC lecturers at the ABCD again confirmed students' difficulties in writing business documents with specific reference to the correct use of grammar, choice of words, format of business documents and writing in a suitable style and tone. The lecturers also recommended that students needed more practice in writing professional documents. Similarly, recommendations have already been made earlier in the chapter that address these aspects (cf. Sections 5.1.2.3.1, 5.1.2.3.2, 5.1.2.3.3 and 5.1.2.3.4).

5.1.5.5 Conclusion

The implementation of all the recommendations in this Chapter has the potential to align the business writing support that is offered at the ABCD more closely with the writing difficulties experienced by students as well as with the requirements of future employers. There is, therefore, also an expectation that the revised writing intervention may contribute to the improved writing ability of students which should enable them to produce more appropriate written business documents.

All recommendations from the results of the investigation in all five phases are summarised below. These include:

1. Introducing a new unit on fundamental aspects of English grammar in the IBC module;
2. Including another new unit in the module that focuses on the characteristics of business communication;
3. Encouraging students to make use of the writing process when they write business documents;
4. Providing learners with opportunities for writing practice in the IBC module;
5. Introducing a new module, Written Business Communication, that will serve as an extension of the business writing addressed in the IBC module;
6. Providing students with written corrective feedback;
7. Revising the content of the IBC course at the ABCD by positioning the two new units (the Essentials of Fundamental Grammar and Characteristics of Business Communication) to precede the unit, Types of Business Communication, which includes a focus on written business communication; and
8. Amending the assessment instruments of the IBC module by including questions that will assess students' ability to write business documents.
9. Establishing a dedicated Writing Centre: The possible establishment of a Writing Centre at the ABCD is another recommendation that may lead to an improvement of students' business writing skills. Upon completion of the WBC module, students could enrol on the writing centre portal in their Student Learning Management System (SLM) where they could receive writing support until they reach their fourth year. This would create continuity in their learning and practice of business writing and could also be utilised at the workplace during their internship. Students can register at the Centre any time after the completion of their WBC module and get assistance in the form of tutorials and individual feedback on their written texts. As indicated in the process writing approach, students will be provided with continuous individual feedback on different drafts of their texts towards creating increasingly more appropriate business texts.

5.1.6 Recommendations for future research

As co-ordinator of the IBC module at the ABCD, the researcher will share the findings of the study with the management of the College and discuss the recommendations with them towards their possible implementation. Then, if management agrees to the implementation of the recommendations, permission has to be sought from the authorities (BQA) so that the curriculum could be changed to accommodate the new WBC module as well as the two new units in the IBC module. If this can be accomplished, there will be ample opportunity for future research that investigates various aspects of the implementation of this study's recommendations. In essence, therefore, it would be important to investigate the impact of these recommendations on the business writing ability of the students in terms of whether there is a marked improvement in the business documents produced by the students as a result of the implementation of the recommendations.

5.1.7 Limitations of the study

Perhaps the most significant limitation of the study is that, at this stage, it constitutes a proposal for how more effective writing support can be provided to students at the ABCD. Accordingly, it was not within the scope of this study to evaluate the effectiveness of implementing the recommendations proposed here. Most of these recommendations will require considerable time regarding the various approvals that would be necessary before curriculum and syllabus changes may be made. However, depending on the approval of such changes, the implementation of the revised curriculum and syllabus will provide excellent opportunities for further research (as indicated above) in assessing the effectiveness of these changes towards providing adequate support to students in their writing of business documents.

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Annexure 1: Phase 1 - Essay test question

PRE-ACHIEVEMENT TEST FOR 1st YEAR DEGREE STUDENTS

ESSAY WRITING

Question 1

There has been an increase in crime in our society. Why do you think this is so? Write an essay exploring three factors which might account for more crime.

Instructions to the candidates:

- Write an essay in not more than 800 words based on the above topic
- Total marks: 60
- Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes
- You will be given an extra 15 minutes (including 5 minutes for reading the instruction and 10 minutes for revising the text)

Annexure 2: Phase 1 - Sample essay test analytical table

			Student												
	Assessment criteria	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Poor	Average	Good
NO:1	Introduction: [10 marks]														
1.1	Title-(3)	Poor (0-1), Average (2), Good (3)	1	1	1	3	1	2	3	1	1	1	6	2	2
1.2	Statement of the problem (3)	Poor (0-1), Average (2), Good (3)	1	2	1		1			1	1	2	5	3	2
1.3	Solution (4)	Poor (0-1), Average (2), Good (3-4)											7	3	0
NO:2	Body of the essay: [25 marks]														
2.1	Unity, order and construction of coherent sentences [20]	Poor (1-6), Average (7-14), Good (15-20)	5	5	7	5	4	4	2	6	4	10	8	2	0
2.2	Paragraphing [5]	Poor (0-1), Average (2-3), Good (4-5)	2	1	4	3	2	3	2	2	2	5	5	2	3
No:3	Conclusion: [5 marks]	Poor (0-1), Average (2-3), Good (4-5)											10	0	0
No:4	Language use [20 marks]														
4.1	Style, register and tone:[10]	Poor (0-2), Average (3-6), Good (7-10)											6	4	0
4.2	Grammatical accuracy [10]	Poor (0-2), Average (3-6), Good (7-10)											7	3	0
	Total [60]														

Annexure 3: Phase 1- Business letter test question

PRE-ACHIEVEMENT TEST FOR 1st YEAR DEGREE STUDENTS

BUSINESS LETTER WRITING

Question 2

You are the Senior Accounts Clerk for Johnson and Hickocks, Forster House, Plot 61598/3f, Maru-a-pula, Gaborone, Botswana. When you arrive at work you find the following instruction from your Manager for your attention:

Instruction from the Manager:

Christy,

Received a letter from G.Johnson of Johnson Stationery, Plot.835, Nelson Mandela Road, Old Naledi, Gaborone. They wanted to discuss our stationery requirements at any time in the next fortnight. Write a letter confirming an appointment as per your convenience.

Instructions to the candidates:

- Write a letter in an e-mail format in not more than 500 words on the instruction above.
- Total marks: 60
- Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes.
- You will be given an extra 15 minutes (including 5 minutes for reading the instruction and 10 minutes for revising the text)

Annexure 4: Phase 1 - Sample business letter test analytical table

			Student												
	Assessment criteria	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Poor	Average	Good
NO:1	Format of the letter: [10 marks]														
1.1	Address [2]	Poor (0-0.5), Average (1), Good (2)	0.5	0.5	2	2	2	2	2	2	0.5	0.5	4	0	6
1.2	Subject heading [3]	Poor (0), Average (1-1.5), Good (2-3)	0	1	0	0	0	1.5	2	2	1.5	1.5	4	5	1
1.3	Salutation [2]	Poor (0-0.5), Average (1), Good (2)	0.5		0.5	0	0	1	1	1.5	2	2	4	4	2
1.4	Closure: [3]	Poor (0), Average (1-1.5), Good (2-3)	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	2	7	0	3
NO:2	Body of the letter: [30 marks]														
2.1	Introduction [5]	Poor (0-2), Average (3-4), Good (5)	2	1	4	3	2	3	1	1	2	5	8	2	0
2.2	Content [10]	Poor (0-3), Average (4-7), Good (8-10)	3	4	3	2	2	1	1	5	2	5	5	5	0
2.3	Unity, order and coherence [10]	Poor (0-3), Average (4-7), Good (8-10)	2	1	4	3	2	3	2	2	2	5	8	2	0
2.4	Summary/conclusion [5]	Poor (0-2), Average (3-4), Good (5)	2	1	3	3	2	1	1	3	3	3	5	5	0
No:3	Language use [20 marks]														
3.1	Style, register and tone:[10]	Poor (1-3), Average (4-6), Good (7-10)	1	2	1	4	4	4	4	5	1	7	4	5	1
3.2	Grammatical accuracy [10]	Poor (1-3), Average (4-6), Good (7-10)	4	4	4	4	1	1	2	1	4	4	3	7	0
	Total [60]														

Annexure 5: Phase 2 - Report test question

POST-ACHIEVEMENT TEST FOR 1st AND 4th YEAR DEGREE STUDENTS

REPORT WRITING

Situation:

The students' welfare officer from the Department of Tertiary Education Financing (DTEF) in Botswana visited your college recently. The main agenda of his meeting was to talk about students' absenteeism from their lessons and drug abuse. You were one of the attendees in the meeting as the representative of your class. After the welfare officer's visit, the Student Support Officer (SSO) of your college asked you to compile a short report regarding the meeting that you attended.

Instructions to the candidates:

- The length of your report should not be more than 800 words.
- Your report should include the following information:
 - The time of the meeting and number of people who attended
 - Main agenda
 - Matters discussed
 - Decisions taken
 - Conclusions and recommendations
- Total marks: 80
- Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes
- You will be given an extra 15 minutes for reading the question (5 minutes) and 10 minutes for revising your text.

Annexure 6: Phase 2 sample report test analytical table

			Student														
	Assessment criteria	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Poor	Average	Good		
NO:1	Basic format : [50 marks]																
1.1	Title [3]	Poor (0-1), Average (2), Good (3)	1	1	1	3	1	2	3	1	1	1	6	4	0		
1.2	Purpose [7]	Poor (0-3), Average (4-5), Good (6-7)	1	2	3	2	1		3	1	1	4	7	3	0		
1.3	Introduction [5]	Poor (0-1), Average (2-3), Good (4-5)	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	8	2	0		
1.4	Proceedings [10]	Poor (0-3), Average (4-7), Good (8-10)	1	4	2	1	4	4	3	2	2	4	6	4	0		
1.5	Matters discussed [10]	Poor (0-3), Average (4-7), Good (8-10)	3	2	1	3	1	5	3	3	2	5	8	2	0		
1.6	Conclusion [7]	Poor (0-3), Average (4-5), Good (6-7)	2	2	1	3	2	4	2	2	2	4	8	2	0		
1.7	Recommendation(s) [8]	Poor (0-3), Average (4-6), Good (7-8)	2	1	2	1	2	4	1	2	1	4	8	2	0		
NO:2	Construction of coherent sentences: [30marks]																
2.1	Logical Integration of ideas [4]	Poor (0-1), Average (2-3), Good (4)	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	8	2	0		
2.2	Appropriate vocabulary/choice of words [4]	Poor (0-1), Average (2-3), Good (4)	3	1	3	1	1	1	1	5	3	4	6	3	1		
2.3	Paragraph division [4]	Poor (0-1), Average (2-3), Good (4)	1	1	3	3	1	1	1	4	4	4	5	2	3		
2.4	Grammatical errors [10]	Poor (1-3), Average (4-6), Good (7-10)	1	2	5	4	3	3	1	2	1	2	7	3	0		
2.5	Professional style and tone [8]	Poor (1-2), Average (3-5), Good (6-8)	1	2	3	3	2	1	1	1	3	1	7	3	0		
	Total [80]																

Annexure 7: Phase 2 - Business letter test question

**POST-ACHIEVEMENT TEST FOR 1st AND 4th YEAR DEGREE
STUDENTS**

BUSINESS LETTER WRITING

Situation:

You are the Administrative Assistant (AA) to Magnus Atherton, Managing Director of Pendle Electricals, Unit 17, Malton Industrial Estate, Gaborone, Botswana. Tel: + 44 (0) 1200 37 2493, Email. magnusa@pendleinteriors.com.

Pendle Electricals is a new company selling high quality domestic electric appliances. Mr. Atherton is out of the office until mid-afternoon and has left a message for you.

Message:

Stock from S.A. has not yet arrived. I reported the matter last week, but there was no response. The payment has been made. The marketing manager is out of reach. Please write a letter and raise our complaint. The Marketing Manager's visiting card is attached below.

Arnold. C. Reginald. (.MBA)

Marketing Manager.

Pagoda Home Interiors, 36 Fort Line, S.A.

Tel. +287 3873486343, Email. Reginald@hotmail.com

Instructions to the candidates:

- Write a letter in an e-mail format in not more than 500 words.
- Total marks: 60
- Time: 1 hour and 30 minutes.
- You will be given an extra 15 minutes (including 5 minutes for reading the instruction and 10 minutes for revising the text)

Annexure 8: Phase 2 - Business letter analytical table

			Student												
	Assessment criteria	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Poor	Average	Good
NO:1	Format of the letter: [10 marks]														
1.1	Address [2]	Poor (0-0.5), Average (1), Good (2)	0.5	0.5	2	2	2	2	2	2	0.5	0.5	4	0	6
1.2	Subject heading [3]	Poor (0), Average (1-1.5), Good (2-3)	0	1	0	0	0	1.5	2	2	1.5	1.5	4	5	1
1.3	Salutation [2]	Poor (0-0.5), Average (1), Good (2)	0.5		0.5	0	0	1	1	1.5	2	2	4	4	2
1.4	Closure: [3]	Poor (0), Average (1-1.5), Good (2-3)	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	2	7	0	3
NO:2	Body of the letter: [30 marks]														
2.1	Introduction [5]	Poor (0-2), Average (3-4), Good (5)	2	1	4	3	2	3	1	1	2	5	8	2	0
2.2	Content [10]	Poor (0-3), Average (4-7), Good (8-10)	3	4	3	2	2	1	1	5	2	5	5	5	0
2.3	Unity, order and coherence [10]	Poor (0-3), Average (4-7), Good (8-10)	2	1	4	3	2	3	2	2	2	5	8	2	0
2.4	Summary/conclusion [5]	Poor (0-2), Average (3-4), Good (5)	2	1	3	3	2	1	1	3	3	3	5	5	0
No:3	Language use: [20 marks]														
3.1	Style, register and tone:[10]	Poor (1-3), Average (4-6), Good (7-10)	1	2	1	4	4	4	4	5	1	7	4	5	1
3.2	Grammatical accuracy [10]	Poor (1-3), Average (4-6), Good (7-10)	4	4	4	4	1	1	2	1	4	4	3	7	0
	Total [60]														

Annexure 9: Phase 3 - Workplace mentor survey questions

WORKPLACE MENTOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Researcher's declaration:

Your personal details and responses to this form will be kept completely anonymous. The data collected will only be used for research purposes.

Workplace mentor surname: -----

Workplace mentor name: -----

Signature:

Name of the Company: -----

1. Please mark your choice with an 'X' in the table below. If you mark Column '5', it means your interns have to produce 2 or more written, business-related documents per day during their internship.

	1 Not at all	2 Once a week	3 Twice or more a week	4 Once a day	5 Twice or more a day
1. On average, how often do your interns have to produce written business-related documents during their internship?					

2. Please indicate the kinds of business-related documents your interns have to produce during their internship with regard to how frequently they must produce each document. Mark your choice with an 'X' in the table below.

Types of documents	1 Not at all	2 Once a week	3 Twice or more a week	4 Once a day	5 Twice or more a day
1. Business letters					
2. Business reports					
3. Weekly internship reports					
4. Reports on meetings with clients					
5. E-mail messages					
6. Any other kinds of documents. Please specify:					

3. Please rate the following types of business documents produced by your interns with respect to their effectiveness in the context of your organisation. Mark your choice with an 'X' in the table below.

Types of documents	1 Not effective at all	2 Slightly effective	3 Fairly effective	4 Effective	5 Very effective
1. Business letters					
2. Business reports					
3. Weekly internship reports					
4. Reports on meetings with clients					
5. E-mail messages					
6. Any other kinds of documents. Please specify:					

4. What aspects/areas of business documents in general do you find your interns have most difficulty with (related to their committing of errors) when they write business documents? Mark your choice with an 'X' in the table below.

Aspects/areas of difficulty	1 Not difficult at all	2 Slightly difficult	3 Fairly difficult	4 Difficult	5 Very difficult
1. Appropriate use of punctuation					
2. Grammar usage					
3. Choice of appropriate words					
4. Organisation of ideas					
5. Using the appropriate format for the specific document					
6. Appropriate use of tone/style					

5.1 Mark your choice with an 'X' in the table below

	1 Very poor	2 Below average	3 Average	4 Above average	5 Excellent
1. How do you rate the writing skills of your interns related to producing business-related documents?					

5.2 If you marked options 1-3 for question 5 and you think about the business documents that your interns have to produce, what recommendations would you like to make to the management of the ABCD to improve your interns' writing skills so that they may produce more appropriate business-related documents in the workplace? Please write your recommendations below.

- -----

Annexure 10: Phase 3 - Intern survey questions

INTERN QUESTIONNAIRE

Researcher's declaration:

Your personal details and responses to this form will be kept completely anonymous. The data collected will only be used for research purposes.

Student's surname: -----

Student's name: -----

Signature: _____

Course: -----

Name of the Company where the internship is located: -----

Name of the work-place mentor: -----

1. Please mark your choice with an 'X' in the table below. If you mark Column '5', it means you have to produce 2 or more written, business-related documents per day during your internship.

	1 Not at all	2 Once a week	3 Twice or more a week	4 Once a day	5 Twice or more a day
1. On average, how often do you have to produce business-related written documents during your internship?					

2. Please indicate the kinds of business documents you have to produce during your internship with regard to how frequently you must produce each document. Please mark your choice with an 'X' in the table below.

Types of documents	1 Not at all	2 Once a week	3 Twice or more a week	4 Once a day	5 Twice or more a day
1. Business letters					
2. Business reports					
3. Weekly internship reports					
4. Reports on meetings with clients					
5. E-mail messages					
6. Any other kinds of documents. Please specify:					

3. Please rate the following types of business documents according to how difficult you find them to produce. Mark your choice with an 'X' in the table below.

Types of documents	1 Not difficult at all	2 Slightly difficult	3 Fairly difficult	4 Difficult	5 Very difficult
1. Business letters					
2. Business reports					
3. Weekly internship reports					
4. Reports on meetings with clients					
5. E-mail messages					
6. Any other kinds of documents. Please specify:					

4. What aspects/areas of business documents in general do you have most difficulty with when you write such documents? Mark your choice with an 'X' in the table below.

Aspects/areas of difficulty	1 Not difficult at all	2 Slightly difficult	3 Fairly difficult	4 Difficult	5 Very difficult
1.Appropriate use of punctuation					
2.Grammar usage					
3. Choice of appropriate words					
4. Organisation of ideas					
5.Using the appropriate format for the specific document					
6.Appropriate use of tone/style					

5.1 How well do you think did the Business Communication course that you completed in your first year prepare you to produce business-related documents? Mark your choice with an 'X' in the table below.

	1 Not well at all	2 Slightly well	3 Fairly well	4 Well	5 Very well
Business Communication course preparation for writing business documents.					

5.2 If you marked options 1-3 for question 5 and you think about the business documents that you have to produce now during the internship, how do you suggest could the Business Communication course be adjusted so that it would prepare students better for writing such documents in the workplace? Please write your suggestions below.

Annexure 11: Sample workplace mentor analytical table

		Options	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10	Total
Q1	On average, how often do your interns have to produce written business-related documents during their internship	Not at all											0
		Once a week			1					1		1	3
		Twice or more a week									1		1
		Once a day	1	1									2
		Twice or more a day				1	1	1	1				4
Q2	Please indicate the kinds of business-related documents your interns have to produce during their internship with regard to how frequently they must produce each document	Options	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10	
2.1	Business Letter	Not at all											0
		Once a week	1		1				1				3
		Twice or more a week		1		1	1	1		1	1	1	7
		Once a day											
		Twice or more a day											

		Options	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10	Total
2.2	Business Reports	Not at all											0
		Once a week						1	1	1	1		4
		Twice or more a week	1		1	1	1					1	5
		Once a day		1									1
		Twice or more a day											
2.3	Weekly Internship Reports	Not at all	1										1
		Once a week				1	1	1	1	1	1		6
		Twice or more a week										1	1
		Once a day			1								1
		Twice or more a week		1									1
2.4	Reports on meeting with clients	Not at all	1			1					1		3
		Once a week								1			1

		Options	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10	Total
		Twice or more a week			1							1	2
		Once a day					1		1				2
		Twice or more a week		1				1					2
2.5	E-mail messages	Not at all						1		1	1		3
		Once a week		1	1	1							3
		Twice or more a week											2
		Once a day	1										1
		Twice or more a day					1		1			1	3
2.6	Any other kinds of documents	Not at all											0
		Once a week											0
		Twice or more a week											0
		Once a day											0

		Options	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10	Total
		Twice or more a day											0
Q3	Please rate the following types of business documents produced by your interns with respect to their effectiveness in the context of your organisation	Options	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10	
3.1	Business Letter	Not effective at all											0
		Slightly effective		1	1	1		1		1		1	6
		Fairly effective	1				1						2
		Effective							1		1		2
		Very effective											
3.2	Business Reports	Not effective at all				1					1		2
		Slightly effective		1		1	1	1	1	1		1	7
		Fairly effective	1										1
		Effective											
		Very effective											
3.3	Weekly Internship Reports	Not effective at all	1			1				1			3

		Options	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10	Total
		Slightly effective					1	1			1	1	4
		Fairly effective		1	1								2
		Effective											2
		Very effective							1				2
3.4	Reports on meeting with clients	Not effective at all	1					1					2
		Slightly effective			1	1	1		1	1	1		6
		Fairly effective		1								1	2
		Effective											3
		Very effective											
3.5	E-mail messages	Not effective at all						1	1				2
		Slightly effective	1	1							1		3
		Fairly effective					1			1		1	3
		Effective			1	1							2
		Very effective											

		Options	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10	Total
3.6	Any Other kinds of documents	Not effective at all											0
		Slightly effective											0
		Fairly effective											0
		Effective											0
		Very effective											0

Annexure 12: Phase 3 - Sample intern survey analytical table

Interns

		Options	IN 1	IN 2	IN 3	IN 4	IN 5	IN 6	IN 7	IN 8	IN 9	IN 10	Total
Q1	On average, how often do you have to produce written business-related documents during your internship	Not at all											
		Once a week	1	1		1	1		1		1	1	7
		Twice or more a week			1								1
		Once a day						1					1
		Twice or more a day								1			1
Q2	Please indicate the kinds of business-related documents you have to produce during your internship with regard to how frequently you must produce each document	Options	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10	
2.1	Business Letter	Not at all											0
		Once a week	1		1				1				3
		Twice or more a week		1		1	1	1		1	1	1	7
		Once a day											

Interns

		Options	IN 1	IN 2	IN 3	IN 4	IN 5	IN 6	IN 7	IN 8	IN 9	IN 10	Total
		Twice or more a day											
2.2	Business Reports	Not at all											0
		Once a week						1	1	1	1		4
		Twice or more a week			1	1	1					1	4
		Once a day		1									1
		Twice or more a day	1										1
2.3	Weekly Internship Reports	Not at all	1										1
		Once a week				1	1	1	1	1	1		6
		Twice or more a week										1	1
		Once a day			1								1
		Twice or more a week		1									1

Interns

		Options	IN 1	IN 2	IN 3	IN 4	IN 5	IN 6	IN 7	IN 8	IN 9	IN 10	Total
2.4	Reports on meeting with clients	Not at all	1			1					1		3
		Once a week								1			1
		Twice or more a week			1							1	2
		Once a day					1		1				2
		Twice or more a week		1				1					2
2.5	E-mail messages	Not at all						1		1	1		3
		Once a week		1	1	1							3
		Twice or more a week											
		Once a day	1										1
		Twice or more a day					1		1			1	3
2.6	Any Other kinds of Documents	Not at all											0
		Once a week											0
		Twice or more a week											0

Interns

		Options	IN 1	IN 2	IN 3	IN 4	IN 5	IN 6	IN 7	IN 8	IN 9	IN 10	Total
		Once a day											0
		Twice or more a day											0
Q3	Please rate the following types of business documents according to how difficult you find them to produce	Options	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10	
3.1	Business Letter	Not difficult at all											0
		Slightly difficult		1	1	1		1		1		1	6
		Fairly difficult	1				1						2
		Difficult							1		1		2
		Very difficult											
3.2	Business Reports	Not difficult at all				1					1		2
		Slightly difficult		1		1	1	1	1	1		1	7
		Fairly difficult	1										1
		Difficult											
		Very difficult											

Interns

		Options	IN 1	IN 2	IN 3	IN 4	IN 5	IN 6	IN 7	IN 8	IN 9	IN 10	Total
3.3	Weekly Internship Reports	Not difficult at all	1			1				1			3
		Slightly difficult					1	1			1	1	4
		Fairly difficult		1	1								2
		Difficult											
		Very difficult							1				1
3.4	Reports on meeting with clients	Not difficult at all	1					1					2
		Slightly difficult			1	1	1		1	1	1		6
		Fairly difficult		1								1	2
		Difficult											
		Very difficult											
3.5	Email messages	Not difficult at all						1	1				2

Interns

		Options	IN 1	IN 2	IN 3	IN 4	IN 5	IN 6	IN 7	IN 8	IN 9	IN 10	Total
		Slightly difficult	1	1							1		3
		Fairly difficult					1			1		1	3
		Difficult			1	1							2
		Very difficult											
3.6	Any other kinds of documents	Not difficult at all											0
		Slightly difficult											0
		Fairly difficult											0
		Difficult											0
		Very difficult											0

Annexure 13: Phase 4, ABCD IBC LOs analytical table

Title of the programme: IBC NCQF Level: 7 Credit: 12 Name of the university, Country: ABCD, Botswana	Title of the programme: IBC NCQF Level: 7 Credit: 12 Name of the university, Country: BOU, Botswana	Title of the programme: IBC NCQF Level: 7 Credit: 12 Name of the university, Country: BA ISAGO Botswana
Learning outcomes	Learning outcomes	Learning outcomes
Develop advanced knowledge and skills to communicate business matters effectively in an organisation.	Demonstrate the use of basic and advanced business writing skills.	Improve students' communication skills, making them more effective at managing internal and external business relationships.
Understand different types of communication.	Produce clear and concise written business documents.	Maximise the company-customer interface by deploying effective communication skills.
Demonstrate skills in writing business-related documents, including letters, reports and memorandums.	Develop the interpersonal communication skills required for social and business transactions.	Write reports and other company communications.
Execute advanced skills in oral communication.	Plan and conduct effective meetings.	Appreciate and employ various communication methods and media.
Demonstrate broad skills in communicating with large audiences through electronic media.	Employ proper public speaking techniques.	Grasp the latest trends and technological advances in communication.
Execute skills to conduct academic research.	Develop and deliver a formal presentation.	
Develop advanced knowledge in applying skills in integrating appropriate techniques for effective communication.	Employ proper telephone etiquette.	
	Communicate effectively in the online environment.	

Annexure 14: Phase 5, ABCD IBC study manual analytical table

Title of the programme: IBC NCQF Level: 7 Credit: 12 Name of the university, Country: ABCD, Botswana	Title of the programme: IBC RQF Level: 6 Credit: 12 Name of the university, Country: ABE, U.K.	Title of the programme: IBC NCQF Level: 7 Credit: 12 Name of the university, Country: BOU, Botswana	Title of the programme: IBC NCQF Level: 7 Credit: 12 Name of the university, Country: BA ISAGO Botswana
Units	Units	Units	Units
Unit 1: Process of Communication	Unit 1: The Process of Communication	Unit 1: Communication Basics	Unit 1: Introduction
Unit 2: Types of Communication	Unit 2: Principles of Effective Communication	Unit 2: Business Correspondence	Unit 2: Written Communication
Unit 3: Meetings and Groups	Unit 3: Written Communication	Unit 3: Business Meetings, Reports and Presentations	Unit 3: Oral Communication
Unit 4: Interviews	Unit 4: Oral and Non-Verbal Communication		Unit 4: Visual Communication
Unit 5: Research	Unit 5: Communication with Customers		Unit 5: Formal Meetings
Unit 6: Graphic Communication	Unit 6: Communication within Organisations		Unit 6: Interpersonal Effectiveness
Unit 7: Projects and Communication Tools	Unit 7: Technology and Communication		Unit 7: Technology and Communication
Unit 8: Multimedia Communication Equipment			

Annexure 15: ABCD past question paper analytical table

Year:2018	Section	Questions 1	Area of focus	Marks	%	Focus area (Practical)	Marks	%
	A	1x20=20 marks						
		A 1	Knowledge and understanding	10	10%	Nil		
		A2	Knowledge and understanding	10	10%	Nil		
	B (Any four)	4x20=80 marks						
		Questions 2	Knowledge and understanding	20	20%	Nil		
		OR						
		Question 3.1	Knowledge and understanding	10	10%	Nil		
		Question 3.2	Knowledge and understanding	10	10%	Nil		
		OR						
		Question 4.1	Knowledge and understanding	10	10%	Nil		
		Question 4.2	Knowledge and understanding	10	10%	Nil		
		OR						
		Question 5.1	Knowledge and understanding	10	10%	Nil		
		Question 5.2	Knowledge and understanding	10	10%	Nil		
		OR						
		Question 6.1	Knowledge and understanding	10	10%	Nil		

		Question 6.2	Knowledge and understanding	10	10%	Nil		
Year:2019	Section	Questions 1-20						
	A	1x20=20 marks	Knowledge and understanding	20	20%	Nil		
	B	Question 2	Knowledge and understanding	10	10%	Nil		
		Question 3	Knowledge and understanding	10	10%	Nil		
		Question 4	Knowledge and understanding	10	10%	Nil		
	C (Any two)	Question 5.1	Knowledge and understanding	15	15%	Nil		
		Question 5.2	Knowledge and understanding	10	10%	Nil		
		OR						
		Question 6	Knowledge and understanding	25	25%	Nil		
		OR						
		Question 7.1	Knowledge and understanding	15	15%	Nil		
		Question 7.2	Knowledge and understanding	10	10%	Nil		
Year:2020	Section							
	A (Any two)	Question 1	Knowledge and understanding	25	25%	Nil		
		OR						
		Question 2	Knowledge and understanding	25	25%	Nil		
		Question 3	Knowledge and understanding	25	25%	Nil		

	B (Any two)	Question 1	Knowledge and understanding	25	25%	Nil		
		OR						
		Question 2	Knowledge and understanding	25	25%	Nil		
		OR						
		Question 3	Knowledge and understanding	25	25%	Nil		

Annexure 16: Phase 5, Sample interview analytical table

Interview Questions	IBC lecturer 1's responses	IBC lecturer 2's responses	Conclusion
In what type of communication do your students perform best, oral or written?			
What could be the reason for your answer in the previous question?			
What do you propose could be done to improve their weakest area of communication?			
How long have you been working at the ABCD?			
How long have you been teaching the IBC course at the ABCD?			
Based on your experience as a lecturer, what is your opinion about the proficiency of tertiary students at the ABCD in English writing?			
What might be the reason for that?			
What is your primary method of teaching the IBC course? For instance, do you employ a teacher-centred or learner-centred methodology?			
Is there any specific reason for the particular methodology you chose?			
Is there any other method or strategy you would like to implement in your IBC classes?			
Is there any specific reason for wanting to implement other methods or strategies?			
Do you think the resources for teaching business communication are useful and effective?			
Are the IBC lecturers allowed to use any other teaching resources apart from what is provided by the ABCD? If so, what additional resources do you use to teach the IBC module?			
What is your opinion concerning the adequacy of the total learning hours provided for the IBC module?			
Do you think that the learning outcomes for written communication are appropriate and sufficient?			
How do you assess students' knowledge, skills and abilities in the IBC module?			
Have you noticed any difficulties in your students' ability to write professional documents?			
If so, what are the difficulties that you have noticed in your students concerning writing professional documents?			
What are your recommendations for improving your students' writing skills?			

Annexure 17: Phase 1, Sample pre-test comparison matrix

Essay writing						Letter writing					
Sections		Students grade			Total	Sections		Students grade			Total
S-1	INTRO	P	A	G		S-1	FOR	P	A	G	
	T						ADD				
	SOP						SH				
	SOL						SAL				
S-2	BOE						CLO				
	LII					S-2	BOD				
	UOC						I				
	FDP						CON				
S-3	CON						UOC				
							SUM				
S-4	LAN						L&S				
	S/T						S/T				
						S-3					
	G						G				
Total	60					Total	60				

Annexure 18: IBC lesson observation analytical table

	Criterion	Observer's comments on L1's lesson	Observer's comments on L2's lesson
C1	Lesson plan	The lecturer provided lesson plans.	The lecturer provided lesson plans.
C2	Objectives	The lesson's objectives were shared with the students.	The lecturer discussed the lesson objectives with the students.
C3	Teaching resources	Lesson plan, whiteboard marker, projector, handouts on letter writing.	Lesson plan, whiteboard marker, projector, handouts on "notice" and "agenda" for a meeting.
		The duration of the lesson was 1 hour 30 minutes. The lecturer randomly examined a few students' homework on writing a memorandum. The common errors in spelling, content, grammar, format and the choice of words were explained to the class. Once this was done, the lecturer began discussing a new topic, namely 'letter writing'. The lecturer explained the following facets: - the difference between a memorandum and a letter; - various types of letters; - each type of letter's purpose; - the format of a letter; - the characteristics of a business letter; and - the various parts of a business letter. Once this was over, the lecturer asked the students a few questions to test their understanding of the concept of a business letter. During the concluding session, the lecturer gave the students a homework assignment, which was to write a business letter.	The duration of the lesson was 1 hour 30 minutes. The lesson was divided into three sessions. In the first 30 minutes, the lecturer randomly examined a few students' homework concerning writing a business letter. The common errors, specifically in grammar, choice of words, content and format, were explained in the class. The second session was on a new topic: the preparation of a notice and agenda for a meeting. This session was approximately 45 minutes. The lecturer spoke about the purpose and characteristics of notices and agendas for a meeting. Later, the lecturer asked the students questions to assess their understanding of the purpose and characteristics of notices and agendas. During the concluding session, the students were presented with a scenario and asked to draft a notice and agenda for a meeting as homework.
C4	Teaching strategies	Teacher- and Learner-centred strategies were used that included, lecturing, discussions, question and answer sessions, assignments for students to do as homework and providing general feedback on their written work.	Teacher- and learner-centred strategies were used that included, lecturing, discussions, question and answer sessions, assignments for students to do as homework and providing general feedback on their written work.

	Criterion	Observer's comments on L1's lesson	Observer's comments on L2's lesson
C5	Language of instruction	English	English
C6	Learners' activities	Listening, participating in discussions and presenting their written work.	Listening, participating in discussions and presenting their written work.

Annexure 19: Proofreading Certificate



Proofreading Certificate

It is hereby certified that this thesis has been proofread and edited for spelling, grammar and punctuation by a professional English language editor from www.OneStopSolution.co.za

Client

Sivaraj Babu P.N.

An investigation of the specific writing difficulties of tertiary level Business Communication students in Botswana

Editor

Johan Roth

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Name

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Signature

03 December 2025

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Date

I cannot guarantee that the changes that I have suggested have been implemented nor do I take responsibility for any other changes or additions that may have been made subsequently. The track changes of the language editing will be available for inspection upon enquiry, for a period of one year.

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