

# **The effect of an academic literacy course on first-year student writing: A case study**

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I keep six honest serving men  
They taught me all I knew;  
Their names are What and Why and When,  
and How and Where and Who

*Just so stories* 1902 Rudyard Kipling

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## SUMMARY

**Key words:** literacy, academic literacy, writing, academic writing, academic argument, argumentative essay, effect, student success, self-directed, self-regulated, self-efficacy

Worldwide and in South Africa it seems that various perceptions exist regarding first-year university students who are not academically literate and struggle to produce acceptable forms of academic writing. Standardized testing in higher education appears to support these perceptions that students' academic literacy is not on par. Countless sources in the realm of academic literature also support the perceptions that students, and specifically first-year students, have difficulties in writing due to a number of variables. Many universities therefore have begun to realise their responsibilities in supporting students with academic literacy courses to address their general academic literacy and writing needs. The purpose and nature of these courses often vary due to the different requirements and expectations of the students, subject groups, faculties and universities.

This study investigated the effect that the compulsory academic literacy course (AGLA 121) at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University (NWU) offered to all first-year students had on first-year nursing students' academic writing. A mixed-methods evaluation case study with nursing students and lecturers as research participants formed the basis of the empirical investigation. In order to provide a broad description of the case, the research was conducted from multiple perspectives in various phases, with various participants at various times and from a range of relevant documents and literature.

From the empirical research conducted, it became clear that AGLA 121 indeed did have a positive effect on the nursing students' academic writing. Both nursing students (first-years and third-years) and lecturers also realised the need for and value of AGLA 121. The document analysis also confirmed that what is covered in AGLA 121 mostly correlates with what nursing students need in order to write effectively at university. Some gaps have been identified in the evaluation that could be addressed in course redesign through the recommendations provided.

The original contribution to knowledge is that an overview of the academic writing needs and requirements of nursing students at the NWU's Potchefstroom Campus. The information that was gathered could potentially be used for course redesign. A blueprint checklist was designed so that the effect of the academic literacy course on first-year students' general academic literacy and more importantly academic writing can be evaluated across all disciplines, subject groups, schools and faculties. Continuous evaluations are necessary in order to provide in the needs of all the stakeholders and especially in the most important stakeholders' needs: the students. Being academically literate and demonstrating it through good academic writing is

necessary for students' academic and professional success. The proposed synthesised generic and subject-specific academic literacy course should lay the foundation for nursing and other students to move out of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and to have self-efficacy attributes and to become self-directed and self-regulated students.

First-year students should also be exposed to a variety of academic writing genres so that they are able to produce, manage and control all the writing required from them in order for them to eventually become part of their own discourse communities.

## OPSOMMING

**Sleutelwoorde:** geletterdheid, akademiese geletterdheid, skryf, akademiese skryfwerk, akademiese argument, argumentatiewe opstel, effek, studentesukses, selfgerig, selfregulerend, selfdoeltreffendheid

Wêreldwyd en in Suid-Afrika bestaan daar verskillende persepsies met betrekking tot eerstejaarstudente wat nie akademies geletterd is nie en sukkel om aanvaarbare akademiese skryfwerk te produseer. Gestandaardiseerde toetse in hoër onderwys ondersteun hierdie persepsies dat studente se akademiese geletterdheid nie op standaard is nie. Velerlei bronne in die veld van akademiese geletterdheid ondersteun die persepsies dat studente, spesifiek eerstejaarstudente, sukkel met skryfwerk weens 'n aantal veranderlikes. Baie universiteite het dus begin om hul verantwoordelikheid te aanvaar om studente met akademiese geletterdhedskursusse te ondersteun deur behoeftes ten opsigte van algemene akademiese geletterdheid en skryf aan te spreek. Die doel en aard van hierdie kursusse wissel dikwels weens die verskillende vereistes en verwagtings van die studente, vakgroepe, fakulteite en universiteite.

Hierdie studie ondersoek die effek van die verpligte akademiese geletterdhedskursus (AGLA 121), wat op die Noordwes-Universiteit (NWU) se Potchefstroomkampus aan alle eerstejaarstudente aangebied word, op eerstejaarstudente se akademiese skryfwerk. 'n Gemengde-metode evalueringsevallestudie met verpleegkundestudente as navorsingspopulasie het die basis vir dié empiriese ondersoek gevorm. Ten einde 'n breë beskrywing van die gevallestudie te bied is die navorsing vanuit verskillende perspektiewe en fases, met verskeie deelnemers en op verskillende tye asook met behulp van 'n reeks relevante dokumente en literatuur gedoen.

Vanuit die empiriese navorsing wat gedoen is, is dit duidelik dat AGLA 121 wel 'n positiewe effek op die verpleegkundestudente se akademiese skryfwerk gehad het. Beide groepe verpleegkundestudente (eerstejaars en derdejaars) sowel as dosente het die behoefte aan en waarde van AGLA 121 besef. Die dokumentanalise het ook bevestig dat dit wat deur AGLA 121 gedek word ooreenstem met wat van verpleegkundestudente vereis word om effektief op universiteit te kan skryf. Sekere leemtes is in die evaluering geïdentifiseer en kan deur middel van kursuserontwerp aangespreek word aan die hand van die voorstelle wat gemaak is.

Die oorspronklike bydrae tot die vakkennis is dat 'n grondige oorsig van die behoeftes en vereistes van akademiese skryfwerk van verpleegkundestudente aan die NWU se Potchefstroomkampus gegee is. Die inligting wat ingewin is, kan moontlik vir kursuserontwerp gebruik word. 'n Konsepkontrolelys is ontwikkel sodat die effek van die kursus vir akademiese

geletterdheid op eerstejaarstudente se algemene akademiese geletterdheid en, belangriker, hul akademiese skryfwerk oor dissiplines, vakgroepe, skole en fakulteite geëvalueer kan word. Hierdie evaluering is noodsaaklik ten einde aan al die behoeftes van die belanghebbers te voldoen, veral dié van die belangrikste belanghebbers: die studente. Om akademies geletterd te wees en dit veral deur goeie akademiese skryfwerk te toon, is belangrik vir studente se akademiese en professionele sukses. Die voorgestelde vervlegte generiese en vakspesifieke kursus vir akademiese geletterdheid moet die grondslag lê vir verpleegkunde- en ander studente om uit die sone van proksimale ontwikkeling (SPO) te beweeg en om selfdoeltreffendheidseienskappe te bekom sowel as om selfgerigte en selfregulerende leerders te word.

Eerstejaarstudente moet ook aan 'n verskeidenheid van akademiese geskrewe genres blootgestel word sodat hulle in staat sal wees om al die skryfwerk wat van hulle verwag word te kan produseer, hanteer en kontroleer ten einde deel te kan word van hul diskoersgemeenskappe.

## TSHOBOKANYO

**Mafoko a konokono:** puisokwalo, puisokwalo ya akatemi, go kwala, go kwala dikabelotiro tsa akatemi, go bontshana dintlha tsa patlisiso le go di tshegetsang ka mabaka, tlhamo ya go tlhagisa tshedimosetso le go e tshegetsang ka mabaka mmogo le tshedimosetso e e thulanang le yone le mabaka a a e tshegetsang, matswela, katlego ya baithuti, go ikaela, go itaola, go itshepa

Go bonala e kete lefatshe ka bophara le mo Aforikaborwa batho ba na le maikutlo a a farologanengka baithuti ba ngwaga wa ntlha ba yunibesiti ba ba senang kitso ka puisokwalo ya akatemi bile ba na le bothata jwa go kwala dikabelotiro tsa akatemi. Go bonala mofuta o o tshwanang wa teko mo ditheong tsa thutogodimo o tshegetsang maikutlo ano a gore puisokwalo ya akatemi ya baithuti ga e fitlhelele ditekanyetso tse di batlegang. Metswedi e e seng kana ka sepe ya tshedimosetso ya puisokwalo ya akatemi le yone e tshegetsang maikutlo a gore baithuti, mme segolobogololo baithuti ba ngwaga wa ntlha, ba na le mathata a go kwala ka ntlha ya dithuso tse di farologaneng tsa go ithuta. Ka jalo diyunibesiti di le dintsi di simolotse go lemoga maikarabelo a tsone a go tshegetsang baithuti ka dikhoso tsa puisokwalo ya akatemi go rarabolola bothata jwa bone jwa ka kakaretso jwa puisokwalo ya akatemi le jwa go kwala. Boikaelelo jwa dikhoso tseno le mofuta ya tsone gantsi di a farologana ka ntlha ya dipatlafalo tse di sa tshwaneng le se se lebeletsweng ke baithuti, ditlhopho tsa serutwa, magoro le ke diyunibesiti.

Patlisiso eno e ne ya batlisisa matswela a khoso e botlhe ba e patelediwang ya puisokwalo ya akatemi (AGLA 121) kwa Khamphaseng ya Potchefstroom ya Yunibesiti ya Bokone-Bophirima (YBB) e e rutwang baithuti ba ngwaga wa ntlha botlhe e nnileng le one mo baithuting ba ngwaga wa ntlha ba ba kwalang dikabelotiro tsa akatemi. Boemo jo go dirwang patlisiso ka jone jwa mekgwa e e tswakantsweng ya patlisiso ka baithuti ba ba ithutelang booki ba go dirwang patlisiso ka bone bo ne jwa bopa patliso ka maitemogelo a ba nnileng le one. Gore go fiwe tlhaloso ka botlalo ya boemo jono jo go dirwang patlisiso ka jone, go ne ga dirwa patlisiso go tswa go dipono tse di farologaneng ya dikgato tse di farologaneng, ka batsayakarolo ba ba farologaneng ka dinako tse di farologaneng le ka mofuta ya ditokomane tse di farologaneng tse di maleba le puisokwalo.

Go tswa go patlisiso ka maitemogelo a ba nnileng le one, go ne ga bonala sentle gore AGLA 121 e nnileng le matswela a a siameng mo tirong ya go kwala dikabelotiro tsa akatemi tsa baithuti ba ba ithutelang booki. Ka bobedi baithuti ba ba ithutelang booki (ba ngwaga wa ntlha le ba ngwaga wa boraro) le batlhatlheledi le bone ba ne ba lemoga botlhokwa jwa AGLA 121. Tshekatsheko ya tokomane le yone e ne ya netefatsa gore se se akarediwang go AGLA 121 gantsi se tsamaisana le se se tlhokwang ke baithuti ba ba ithutelang booki gore ba kwale ka tsela e e nang le matswela kwa kwa yunibesiting. Fa go ne go dirwa tshekatsheko, go ne ga

lemogwa ditlhaelo dingwe tse di ka baakanngwang ka khoso e e tshamilweng boša ka ditshitshinyo tse go tlametsweng ka tsone.

Tsela ya kwa tshimologong ya go thusa ka kitso ke gore go ne ga bonwa tsela ya go leba ka tsela e e tseneletseng ditlhoko tsa go kwala dikabelotiro tsa akatemi le dipatlafalo tsa baithuti ba ba ithutelang booki kwa YBB. Go ka direga gore tshedimosetso e e neng e kokoantswe e dirisediwe go tlhama khoso boša. Go ne ga gatsiwa lenaane-tlhatlhobo gore tsela e khoso ya puisokwalo ya akatemi e neng ya ama puisokwalo ya akatemi ka kakaretso ya baithuti ba ngwaga wa ntlha ka gone, mme sa botlhokwa le go feta, ka fa e neng ya ama ka gone go kwala dikabelotiro ga bone tsa akatemi e ka tlhatlhabiwa mo dirutweng tsotlhe, mo ditlhopheng tsotlhe tsa serutwa, dikolo le magoro. Ditshekatsheko tseno di a tlhokega gore di tlamele ka ditlhoko tsa baamegi botlhe segolobogolo ditlhoko tse di leng botlhokwa go feta tsa baamegi: baithuti. Go nna le bokgoni jwa puisokwalo ya akatemi le go bo bontsha ka tsela e e siameng ya go kwala dikabelotiro tsa akatemi go a tlhokega gore go nne le katlego ya baithuti ya seporofešenale le ya akatemi. Khoso e go tshitshintsweng gore e nne gone e e tshamilweng le puisokwalo ya akatemi e e amanang le dirutwa tse di kgethegileng e tshwanetse go thaya motheo wa go dira gore baithuti ba ba ithutelang booki le baithuti ba bangwe ba tswe mo zone of proximal development (ZPD) mme ba nne le bokgoni jwa go sa inyatse le go ikaela le go itaola. Gore e atlege ka botlalo, mokgele o mogolo wa go kwala lenaneothuto leno la AGLA 121 ke gore le remelele mo baithuting le go nna leo ka mo go kgethegileng le diretsweng baithuti. Go botlhokwa go tlhoma mogopolo mo kgatelopele ya moithuti mongwe le mongwe le katlego ya gagwe, segolobogolo mo motlheng ono wa go tokafatsa dithuto tsa bone. Seno se ka fitlhelelwa ka go tsenya tirisong didirisiwa tse di oketsegileng tsa thekenoloji tse di ka amogelang mekgwa e e farologaneng.

Baithuti ba ngwaga wa ntlha gape ba tshwanetse go dirisiwa mefuta e e farologaneng ya go kwala dikabelotiro tsa akatemi gore ba kgone go tlhagisa le go laola ditsela tsothe tsa go kwala tse di tlhokwang mo go bone gore kwa bofelong ba nne karolo ya baagi ba ba nang le bokgoni jwa go kwala.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

AARP – Alternative Admission Research Project

BICS – Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills

CALP – Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

CALPL – Centre for Academic Literacy and Professional Language Practice

CAM – Context-Adaptive Model

CAPS – Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement

CBI – Computer-Based Instruction

CBLT – Content-based Language Teaching

CLT – Communicative Language Teaching

DoE – Department of Education

EAP – English for Academic Purposes

EBP – Evidence-Based Practice

EGAP – English for General Academic Purposes

ESAP – English for Specific Academic Purposes

ESP – English for Specific Purposes

HESA – Higher Education South Africa

ICELDA – Centre for Language Development and Assessment

IMRAD – Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion

LAC – Language Across the Curriculum

LoLT – Language of Learning and Teaching

LSP – Language for Specific Purposes

NBTP – National Benchmark Tests Project

NWU – North-West University

NWU-RERC – North-West University’s Research Ethics Regulatory Committee

OBE – Outcomes-Based Education

PTEEP – Placement Test in English for Educational Purposes

RNCS – Revised National Curriculum Statement

SATAP – Standardised Assessment Test for Access and Placement

SFL – Systemic Functional Linguistics

TAG – Toets van Akademiese Geletterdheidsvlakke

TAL – Test of Academic Literacy

TALL – English Test of Academic Literacy Levels

TBLT – Task-based Language Teaching

UNESCO – United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

WWW – World Wide Web

ZPD – Zone of Proximal Development

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*"I sit at my window and the words fly past me like birds – with God's help I catch some."*

(Rhys, 1966)

## 1.1 Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information of the current state of first-year students' academic writing by situating academic writing as one of the main practices of student academic literacy within the complex South African university context. This is done to emphasize the important influence that academic writing has on overall student academic development and success. A contextualisation for the study is provided and the rationale for using nursing students as a case study in this study is explained (§1.2). Subsequently, the problem statement is indicated (§1.3), followed by the research questions and aims (§1.4). Thereafter, the research design and methodology (§1.5), the ethical aspects pertaining to this study (§1.6), and the relevance and purpose of the study are stated (§1.7). A clarification of key terms used in the study is given (§1.8) and to conclude an outline of the chapters of this study is given (§1.9).

## 1.2 Contextualisation

The academic underpreparedness of especially first-year students is an important issue that many universities have to manage (Carstens, 2009:2; Dreyer & Nel, 2003:349; Gallagher *et al.*, 2001:134; Nel *et al.*, 2004:95; Van Dyk & Van de Poel, 2013:44; Van Rooy & Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2015:1; Weideman, 2003:2). There are many factors that contribute to students' poor performance levels and the ability to adapt to the university context (Fraser & Killen, 2003:254). In the following section, some of these main factors are discussed.

With the massification of higher education worldwide and in South Africa, where tertiary education is no longer only a privilege for a select few, the profile of university student populations has become quite diverse with students from a range of language, cultural and social backgrounds with varied needs and academic potential (Fraser & Killen, 2003:254; Hamilton & Pitt, 2009:70; Herman, 1995:261; Hirst *et al.*, 2004:66; Jones *et al.*, 1999:xv; Larrivee & Cooper, 2006:1; Msila, 2006:82; Nel *et al.*, 2004; Street, 2004:9; Thesen, 1997:488; Williams, 2005:158; Yeld, 2010:26). Even though massification provides more students the opportunity for further studies, it does create potential problems for universities as they are dealing with large heterogeneous groups of students with mixed abilities.

Many students entering universities in South Africa have experienced unequal and poor primary and secondary schooling (Butler, 2007a:3; McMillan, 2000:149; Mouton *et al.*, 2013:285; Schaap & Luwes, 2013:185; Scott, 2009:23; Williams, 2005:158, 288; Yeld, 2010:27). Granville and Dison (2005:102) also mention that due to difficult social, financial and educational circumstances, many students struggle to finish their schooling within twelve years. It is important to note that not only previously disadvantaged students are at risk, but also an increasing number of students from supposedly advantaged (former Model-C schools) backgrounds are at risk of not completing their undergraduate studies successfully or in time (Van Dyk, 2005:48).

In 1997, a common curriculum was introduced namely outcomes-based education (OBE) (Murray, 2012:88). Van Dyk (2005:38) states that OBE might have been another reason for the lack of academic proficiency among South African undergraduate students, as its purpose was to prepare secondary school learners for the real world and not necessarily for university study. Also, it became evident that the implementation of OBE was problematic, especially as teachers struggled with the responsibility of deciding how to achieve the outcomes. The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) was introduced in 2001. Even though the curriculum provided a common set of standards for assessing and teaching, many teachers still continued to struggle. In 2011, for each phase of the curriculum a single Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) was implemented. Being highly prescriptive, these statements state precisely what should be assessed and taught for every term (Murray, 2012:88-89). Whether the CAPS will enable teachers to better prepare students for university studies still needs to be determined.

Even though universities attempt to support students and prepare them for successful studies, institutions across the world and in South Africa are concerned about the through-put rates of especially first-year students (Marais & Van Dyk, 2010:1). According to Van Dyk (2005:45), “about one third of first-year students at the Universities of North-West (Potchefstroom and Vaal Triangle Campuses), Pretoria and Stellenbosch are at risk of not completing their studies in the prescribed time”. Results from the pilot National Benchmark Tests Project (NBTP) that tested the three main areas believed to cause academic success (quantitative literacy, academic literacy and mathematics), indicated that about half of all students entering universities would need some support if they were to graduate within the required time (Yeld, 2010:28).

A reason why many first-year students struggle at university is because it is difficult to “inculcate themselves into a new culture” (Van Dyk & Van de Poel, 2013:46) and adapt to and integrate into the new environment (Mouton *et al.*, 2013:285). Bojuwoye (2002:277) mentions that “when students come into the university and become members of the institution for the first time they usually face a number of adjustment problems, the result of stressful experiences they are subjected to by the conditions, events, or situations in their new environment”.

It is clear that students need help with academic “integration or acculturation” (Van Dyk & Van de Poel, 2013:43). The Education White Paper 3 (Department of Education, 1997:29) underlines the importance of this type of assistance:

The higher education system is required to respond comprehensively to the articulation gap between learners’ school attainment and the intellectual demands of higher education programmes. It will be necessary to accelerate the provision of bridging and access programmes within further education. It is of utmost importance that the political transformation of a university does not just result in the admission of unprepared students to the university without giving them a reasonable chance to succeed.

It is important to note that even though universities must support students, there are some factors such as poverty and unequal schooling that are beyond their control (Scott, 2009:23-24). Issues such as poverty and poor schooling will not be eradicated soon and this forces universities to pragmatically “identify factors affecting student performance that are within its control, and to act on these to the best of its ability” (Scott, 2009:24).

It is evident that there are numerous aspects that play a role in the poor performance of many first-year students. Even though all these factors could possibly contribute to students struggling at university, for the purpose of this study the focus will be on language and literacy issues (specifically academic writing) that have an effect on student performance and success and how universities can assist in addressing these issues.

Albeit not the only hindrance to first-year student success, poor language knowledge and skills (Mouton *et al.*, 2013:288; Weideman, 2006a:82; Weideman, 2007:vi) and low literacy levels in the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) (Bojuwoye, 2002:280; Van Dyk *et al.*, 2009:333; Van Dyk, 2010:3) could contribute to South African students not completing their studies in time. Many first-year students are fluent in spoken English and may have mastered Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) (Cummins, 1999) but “may not have the kind of language needed for developing conceptual understanding at the university level” (Granville & Dison, 2005:102). Parkinson *et al.* (2008:39) point out that the “development of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in either English or the mother tongue is difficult, and this leaves “a high proportion of South African students (who) enter tertiary study with inadequately developed reading and writing skills in any language”.

The issue as to whether BICS and CALP can be used in higher education settings in South Africa is questioned by Coetzee-Van Rooy (2010). The Cummins framework was originally designed to improve “the educational success of minority language children (immigrants) in bilingual education” (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2010:25). This framework is extensively used for research and educational purposes worldwide. In the South African context, the framework is

also widely applied, especially in school contexts. Furthermore, many researchers also use the framework for research projects in higher education at South African universities. Claims about South African tertiary students' CALP cannot really be made as it is used in a context that it was not designed for. Many students at South African universities have to use English as LoLT, even if it is not their mother tongue. It is therefore not really fair to determine their CALP with academic literacy tests that are not available in their mother tongues.

However, in this study, only mother-tongue Afrikaans-speaking students serve as research participants and their academic literacy levels are tested in their mother tongue. Therefore, the Cummins framework could be applied in this context, especially as academic literacy can be seen as a foreign or second language (cf. §3.3.6; Gee, 1989:7; Olivier & Olivier, 2014; Van de Poel & Van Dyk, 2015:164; Van Dyk, 2010:5).

From the literature described, it seems that there are many reasons why many first-year students are unable to employ coping strategies to meet the literacy expectations at university. Universities therefore need to provide first-year students with academic literacy support to help students mitigate the transition from high school literacy to the literacy expectations at university level (Skillen, 2006:140; Strachan, 2002:136; Townsend, 2010:28) as "there is no guarantee that students have been equipped by their previous life experiences to cope with the academic or tertiary literacies required of them" (Hirst *et al.*, 2004:66). The transition from high school to university is not easy and the acquisition of academic literacy can also be quite difficult for some students.

To identify and support students who could possibly be at risk of not completing their studies in the required time due to literacy issues, some universities use admission, selection and placement tests to determine the types of academic literacy interventions considered necessary (Schaap & Luwes, 2013:186). These tests vary in purpose to suit the requirements and needs of the universities. For example, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) uses the Standardised Assessment Test for Access and Placement (SATAP). The Placement Test in English for Educational Purposes (PTEEP) developed by the Alternative Admission Research Project (AARP) is used by the University of Cape Town (Schaap & Luwes, 2013:186). The National Benchmark Tests (NBTs), mentioned earlier, were designed for Higher Education South Africa (HESA) to assess the academic readiness of first-year students. At the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), only the Faculty of Health Sciences compels their students to write the NBTs for consideration for admission to their degree programme (Wits, 2015). For placement purposes, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), students may be required to write the NBTs. The universities of Fort Hare, Western Cape and Johannesburg do not use the NBTs for admission, but for placement purposes as well as for course content planning purposes (Masondo, 2014a). At the universities of the Free State, Pretoria, Stellenbosch and

the NWU, first-year students write the *Test of Academic Literacy Levels* (TALL) in English or the *Toets van Akademiese Geletterdheidsvlakke* (TAG) in Afrikaans developed by the Inter-Institutional Centre for Language Development and Assessment ICELDA (ICELDA, 2014). The differences between the various academic literacy tests and the reasons why the NWU prefers and administers the TAG / TALL are explained in Chapter 5 (§5.2).

One of the reasons why tertiary institutions have had to import academic literacy tests as both admission and placement tests is to be found in the fact that the standards and the results from the Grade 12 exit examinations are sometimes questionable (cf. Erasmus, 1999:104-105; Legg, 2014; Schaap & Luwes, 2013:182) and “not a convincing predictor of academic success” (Schaap & Luwes, 2013:181). One of the causes is the process of adjustment implemented by Umalusi (the body that assures quality assurance in general and further education). During the process of adjustment, due to various reasons such as politically motivated influences and quality of examination papers, amendments are made to the Grade 12 results (Mouton *et al.*, 2013:287). In addition, Mouton *et al.* (2013:287) mention that “Umalusi, therefore uses the process to correct problems at a late stage which makes it very difficult for anyone to understand what candidates actually achieved”.

However, some research does indicate that there is a significant relationship between Grade 12 results and academic success. In a recent study, Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2015:12) found that achievement in the TAG/TALL, NBT and Grade 12 language results did not indicate student academic success at university, though, the general Grade 12 results seemed to be a stronger predictor for academic success. Furthermore, Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2015:12) found that the strongest predictor for academic success in students’ first and second years at university was achievement in academic literacy support modules. The importance of academic literacy support interventions is thus evident. Schaap and Luwes (2013:185) mention that both academic literacy tests and intervention courses are significant as they could have “far-reaching positive and financial implications for individual students (in enabling them to become economically productive), for institutions (in improving throughput rates and gaining subsidies), and for the country as a whole (in contributing to economic advancement in South Africa)”.

In both nature and purpose, the academic literacy courses that universities offer to students vary from university to university. The debate regarding whether academic literacy courses should be generic, common-core and wide-angled vs subject-specific narrow-angled (Curry, 2004:57; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998:41; Huckin, 2003:5-6; Hyland, 2006:9; Jordan, 1997:6-9; Waters & Waters, 1992:264-267; Weideman, 2013:11; Widdowson, 1983:6) is an important issue that needs to be addressed and is therefore also discussed in this study (cf. §2.7).

Studies evaluating undergraduate academic literacy tests and intervention courses (both generic and subject-specific) have been conducted at a number of universities in South Africa. For example, the University of Pretoria has established the effect of an academic literacy intervention by using the Test of Academic Literacy Levels (TALL) before and after intervention, and found that there was a noteworthy improvement (Van Dyk, 2005:46). However, Van Dyk's (2005:38-51) study is not comprehensive or longitudinal and only data from the TALL are used. In a first step as part of a longitudinal study, Van Dyk *et al.* (2009:333) researched the impact of a writing module on first-year Health Sciences students' writing at Stellenbosch University. The results from the study indicated that the writing development of the students was positively influenced by the intervention. Both students and lecturers were optimistic about the progress made with the students' written work. In 2011, Van Dyk *et al.* (2011:487) conducted another intervention study at Stellenbosch University with a Natural Sciences module as a case study. The findings from this study indicated a definite impact regarding the students' linguistic skills. However, the intervention alone could not be viewed as the only variable responsible for the increase in the students' linguistic skills. At the University of KwaZulu-Natal, pre- and post-tests were conducted and questionnaires distributed to determine the effectiveness of an academic literacy course (Parkinson *et al.*, 2008:16). Parkinson *et al.* (2008:11) found that students' academic reading and writing skills improved. However, the study of Parkinson *et al.* (2008:11-28) only focused on students who followed a science degree programme through alternative routes, and their analysis of data involved no indication of statistically significant improvement (cf. Cohen, 1988). The University of KwaZulu-Natal also did a study on whether instruction in academic literacy resulted in the transferring of practices and knowledge learned from the academic literacy module to degree modules, and found that "transfer did happen to a certain extent, especially in the modules that use similar writing practices to those taught in AL" (Hosking *et al.*, 2008:4). Carstens (2009) explored the effectiveness of genre-based approaches in teaching academic writing. The main finding of the study was "that narrow-angled interventions seem to be more beneficial than wide-angled interventions" but that such interventions "may be less feasible in that few tertiary institutions have the resources for offering dedicated writing modules – one for each discipline" (Carstens, 2009:230). In a recent study at the NWU, at the Vaal Triangle Campus, Mhlongo (2014:vi) highlighted the poor academic literacy levels of first-year students in South Africa and at the NWU. The main purpose of the study was to determine whether the academic literacy intervention had an impact on students' academic literacy levels. To determine the impact, Mhlongo (2014:vi) made use of the TALL results, student questionnaires and lecturer surveys. The main finding of the study was that the intervention did have a definite effect on improving students' academic literacy levels. However, as a result of inconclusive data, the improvement could not be attributed to only the intervention

as there are numerous (controlled and uncontrolled) factors that could potentially have influenced the students' academic literacy levels.

### **1.2.1 Academic literacy at the NWU Potchefstroom Campus**

Much research regarding English Second Language academic literacy teaching and learning has been conducted (cf. Leki, 2007; McKenna, 2004; Mponda, 2010; Vergie, 2010). However, not much research has been done on Afrikaans first-language academic literacy, and in particular on Afrikaans-speaking students' academic writing skills at the NWU. Here, all first-year students write a compulsory academic literacy test (TAG/TALL) that establishes their level of academic literacy. Students below a cut-off point must enrol in an introductory academic literacy course, AGLA 111, for Afrikaans students and AGLE 111 for students taking the course in English. All first-year students are enrolled in a compulsory academic literacy course (AGLA 121, with Afrikaans as medium of instruction, or AGLE 121, with English as medium of instruction). The AGLA 121 course consists of three components, viz. a computer and information skills programme, a reading programme and an academic literacy lecture programme. The compulsory academic literacy course mainly focuses on core generic academic reading, writing, listening and seminar "skills" (Van Graan *et al.*, 2014:vii). The writing programme is the central focus in the course. The writing programme concentrates on aspects such as sentence and paragraph structure, logical argument structure, style, voice and register, and the integration of sources and compiling of bibliographies. A more thorough description of the course follows in Chapter 5.

### **1.2.2 Contextualisation of academic writing**

Even though being academically literate entails more than just academic writing, the reason why the focus is on writing in this study is because writing is considered by many universities as a high-stakes activity, as writing remains one of the main forms of assessment (Archer, 2008:248; Van der Walt, 1981:263) and if students struggle with writing the potential is there that they might be less likely to succeed at university (Granville & Dison, 2005:102; Lillis & Scott, 2007:9). Archer (2008:248) mentions that "writing is one of the main means of assessment in tertiary institutions and helping students with writing could improve their overall academic performance".

Another reason why the focus is on writing is because one of the issues that lecturers complain the most about is that undergraduate students cannot write (Boughey, 2000:282; Jackson *et al.*,

2006:266; Lillis & Turner, 2001:57). Many lecturers assume that students have the necessary basic language skills and knowledge of academic conventions required for tertiary studies and believe that students can cope with any literacy demands and expect them to produce academically correct written assignments (Hirst *et al.*, 2004:66; Lea & Stierer, 2000:6; Read *et al.*, 2001:388). Van Schalkwyk (2010:204) states that, when students enter university, they are expected to adopt “university-speak” and that many students struggle to immerse themselves in the academic community. Similarly, Pardoe (2000:126) mentions that for first-year students as “novices” or “outsiders”, it is quite difficult to work out what is expected of them. Subject lecturers also do not always explicitly provide students with “ground rules” for academic writing in their subject areas (Lea & Stierer, 2000:4) and believe that “part of the challenge is that students should work out what is required” (Pardoe, 2000:126).

Van Schalkwyk (2010:205) summarises the issue quite clearly:

Academic communities often find it difficult to make explicit that which to them may be self-evident, and are often unaware of the need to do so. There is an implicit expectation that students should pick up what is expected of them as they go along. However, many students, notably the weaker students, often find it difficult to discern the different discipline-specific codes or conventions, especially if they have not been exposed to the implicit rules of mainstream, powerful cultures such as may be found in academe.

The need for academic writing interventions is therefore apparent. The focus of this study is then to examine the effect that the academic writing intervention conducted for this study had on the students from the case study. The students from the Subject Group Nursing in the Faculty of Health Sciences served as a convenience sample because of their accessibility to the researcher. During the time the research was conducted, the nursing students were the only homogenous group and were therefore chosen to be part of the case study for this thesis. The following quote summarises one of the reasons why the nursing students were identified to be studied as a case study in this thesis: “[f]irst language writing is inextricably linked to formal education and that in first-language settings, the ability to write well has a very close relationship to academic and professional success” (Weigle, 2002:4). In order to be successful in their careers and as university students, nursing students need to be proficient writers. An answer to a fundamental question “[w]hy can’t students write?” frequently asked by nursing staff who lecture nursing students and by professional nurses who practise (Silva *et al.*, 1999:142) is also attempted with this study.

### 1.3 Problem statement

From the above contextualisation (§1.2) one can deduce that first-year students face many difficulties when they enter higher education. Some of these issues can be addressed through the support of the universities themselves. Others are beyond the control of higher education. Of those issues that are within the control of higher education, assisting students with their academic literacy development and particularly their academic writing is achievable. The question one needs to ask, however, is whether interventions addressing these issues are actually to the benefit of students.

The main issue addressed in this study is therefore to determine how **effective** the writing component of the AGLA 121 course (an academic literacy intervention, focusing among others on writing development) at North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus is in achieving its aims and objectives, and whether it contributes to the overall **academic writing proficiency** of first-year nursing students, as a case in point.

Since the course is compulsory, with financial and time implications, it is the responsibility of the University and course designers to ensure that the course is evaluated in order to reassure all the stakeholders that the course is effective, necessary and valuable. These stakeholders include the students, their parents, the subject specialists, the NWU's management, the students' future employers and even patients. Another important stakeholder is the academic literacy lecturer, who as reflective practitioner, have to continuously evaluate the content and practices provided to the first-year students.

### 1.4 Research questions and aims

Based on the above contextualisation and problem statement, the following **research questions** are raised:

- What are the current views and definitions of *literacy* and *academic literacy*?
- What are the characteristics of academic writing at university?
- What are the current trends and views regarding the teaching and learning of academic writing at first-year level?
- What are the nature and characteristics of academic writing practices of nursing students?

- Is the academic literacy course (AGLA 121) effective in assisting and developing first-year nursing students' writing?
- What proposals can be made regarding the content, teaching and learning methods, materials and assessment of student writing in the writing programme in the academic literacy course in general and specifically for nursing students?

The **aims** of this study are to:

- explore the terms *literacy* and *academic literacy* as contextualisation for the study;
- define academic writing;
- determine 'best practice' in the teaching and learning of academic writing at first-year level;
- describe the writing practices of nursing students;
- ascertain the effectiveness of the AGLA 121 course in assisting and developing first-year nursing students' writing; and
- propose a redesigned or adapted writing programme regarding the content, teaching and learning methods, materials and assessment of student writing in the academic literacy course.

## **1.5 Research design and methodology**

This course evaluation is situated within the context of Applied Linguistics (Lynch, 1996:1) because one of the main functions of Applied Linguistics is to design and suggest solutions to language problems (Van de Poel, 2006:11; Van de Poel & Van Dyk, 2015:162; Weideman, 2006b:71). The context-adaptive model (CAM) of Lynch (1996:3) serves as a framework for the evaluation as it draws upon "the historical development of program evaluation in applied linguistics". The findings from applying the framework resulted in a blueprint (cf. §9.2.6; Weideman, 2014) checklist from which not only the NWU could benefit, but also any writing programme that needs to evaluate whether their programme is effective in assisting students with academic writing (Appendix H). This blueprint is only a starting point for future evaluations and further research is necessary to determine its effect and worth.

The research is also founded on the principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), where language is viewed as being an inherently social phenomenon that cannot be separated from social contexts and emphasises that language is seen as a system of syntactic and lexical choices (Carstens, 2009:33; Halliday, 1978, 1985). Regarding academic literacy, students need to learn when to use what types of language for different social literacy purposes and contexts. Skillen (2006:142) perfectly summarises the relevance of using this approach:

One important theory informing our teaching is SFL, a grammar of English that is descriptive of the structure and function of language at a number of levels, including that of genre. It allows us to ensure not only that writing instruction is contextualised, but that it also provides students with awareness of the linguistic devices that are characteristic of academic writing and enables them to have conscious control over their use such as modality, nominalisation, thematic development and the passive voice.

A case study research design was utilised, as Stake (1995:95) mentions that “all evaluation studies are case studies”. Henning (2004:41) defines case studies as “intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system such as an individual, a programme, event, group, intervention or community”. Patton (1990:101) also states that case studies have become the foundation for evaluation and educational research. In a case study, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data-collection methods can be used to “present a full picture of the phenomenon” (Henning, 2004:33). In this study, a mixed-method approach was followed. According to Ross (2009:776), such an approach “is more likely to provide evidence that there has been a programme effect”. De Vos (2002:363) also specifies that “programme evaluation, interventive research and participatory action research are three types of research where a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is imperative”. The findings of this study were validated through such *triangulation*<sup>1</sup> in order to obtain a holistic picture.

### 1.5.1 Literature review

As foundation for this study, an in-depth literature survey was conducted on approaches to academic literacy and the teaching and learning of academic writing. Furthermore, literature on the literacy and writing needs of nursing students was examined.

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<sup>1</sup> Patton (1990:187) states that “[o]ne important way to strengthen a study design is through triangulation, or the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomena or programs. This can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches”.

### 1.5.2 Research participants

The participants from the Subject Group Nursing served as a *convenience sample* because of their accessibility to the researcher (Teddlie & Yu, 2008:201). *Purposeful sampling* was also used as the participants had to fit the purpose of the study (Krueger & Casey, 2009:204). In purposeful sampling, participants are chosen based on what type of people can give the researcher the type of information needed for the research (Krueger & Casey, 2009:7). As this study has a small population (n=24), it is important to note that with purposeful sampling the number of participants is not as important as Wilmot (2005) explains: "... it does not aim to produce a statistically representative sample or draw statistical inference. Indeed, a phenomenon need only appear once in the sample". Though it is admittedly a small sample, the whole population was used. No generalisations can be made from data generated from this sample. However, the findings could well contribute to the body of knowledge of the researched phenomenon.

The following participants took part in this study during the various phases (cf. §1.5.4) that the research was conducted:

- The first-year facilitator (n=1) of the nursing subject group (Phase 1).
- Nursing lecturers (n=5) identified by the first-year facilitator to assist with the online questionnaire (Phase 2).
- First-year students (n=6) from the Subject Group Nursing, who formed part of the focus group for the pilot study (Phase 3).
- All the first-year nursing students (n=24) that formed part of the main study (Phases 4 and 5).
- First-year students from the Subject Group Nursing, who formed three focus groups (n=24) as part of the main study (Phase 6).
- Third-year nursing students (n=3) who formed part of the pilot study (Phase 7).

### 1.5.3 Research hypotheses

For this study, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H<sub>0</sub> The implementation of an intervention in a first-year academic literacy module with nursing students will not lead to a significant change in academic writing performance.

- H<sub>1</sub> The implementation of an intervention in a first-year academic literacy module with nursing students will lead to a significant change in academic writing performance.

#### **1.5.4 Data collection**

Data were collected from various sources and at different times during the study. This was done in phases with varying participants in order to conduct a broad overview of AGLA 121 and academic writing needs and requirements of nursing students. Though the main focus is on first-year students, third-year students were also used as research participants. This was mainly done as no control group was available, to be able to determine whether any of the issues that arose were once-off or recurring. Moreover, the evaluation included the views of the lecturers from the Subject Group Nursing. Literature and related documents were also incorporated to give a holistic overview of the academic writing requirements and needs of nursing students.

The following data collection strategies and measuring instruments were used:

- An open-ended interview was conducted with the first-year facilitator for the nursing students (Phase 1).
- An online questionnaire was completed by nursing lecturers to determine and describe their expectations, experience and perceptions of student writing and the overall effect of the course on the students' writing (Phase 2).
- A pilot study with nursing students was conducted to determine what the nursing students thought about the academic literacy course in general as well as what they thought about the academic writing component and the effect thereof on their academic writing. This was done by means of a focus group interview in order to explore the research context and refine the question schedule (Phase 3).
- A closed and open-ended questionnaire was completed by the participants in order to get an overall impression of the research participants (Phase 4).
- All the first-year nursing students' performance in argumentative written assignments (cf. Lynch, 2003:120) was assessed. The assignments included a pre-intervention written assignment (AGLA 121) and a post-intervention written assignment at the end of the AGLA 121 course. To ensure reliability, the same assessment criteria were used for all the assignments. The following aspects were assessed by means of a rating scale: logical organisation, voice, language use and source referencing. These criteria were used in order to establish whether any progress had been made in the students' writing skills. To ensure the validity of the assessment, the assignments were marked by the researcher as well as an experienced colleague. The nursing students' general

academic literacy performance was analysed and included results of the TAG test (before and during the intervention), LEES and RINL results (Phase 5).

- Combinations of structured and open-ended questions were conducted with the focus groups to establish their perceptions of their academic writing ability and their expectations and experiences of the AGLA 121 writing course. These included their perceptions of the writing course. The focus groups convened at the end of the module. Focus groups should be composed of homogeneous groups of people (Krueger & Casey, 2009:204). In this case, the focus group participants had in common that they were all students from the School of Nursing Sciences in the Faculty of Health Sciences taking AGLA 121 during the first semester in 2012 (Phase 6).
- A follow-up questionnaire was administered to the students who formed part of the pilot study in order to establish whether the course had had any long-term effect on their academic writing (Phase 7).
- A document analysis (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:102) of the study guides and AGLA 121 workbook was done (Phases 8 and 9).

### **1.5.5 Data analysis**

Regarding data analysis, the following general steps were followed in Chapters 6 and 7: collecting and recording data; managing data; reading and memoing; describing, classifying and interpreting; and representing and visualising (De Vos, 2002:11).

The qualitative data were analysed by utilizing Lynch's (2003:134) "generalised framework for interpretivist analysis" (cf. §7.2; §7.3; §7.4; §7.5; §7.7; §7.8; §7.9; §7.10). The steps in the framework include: organizing the data, coding the data, classifying and reducing the data and interpreting the data (Lynch, 2003:135-144). *Atlas.ti* qualitative data analysis software was used to code, identify and analyse the data in order to present findings visually and facilitate effective interpretation (cf. §7.7; Saldaña, 2009:23).

The quantitative data obtained from the writing assignments were analysed in order to determine the difference between pre- and post-test essay ratings (cf. §7.6). In addition, the results of the pre- and post-TAG tests, reading scores, essay assessments, spelling error count, Flesch Reading Ease scores, Flesch-Kincaid Grade Levels, personal pronoun and discourse marker use were compared by means of t-tests (cf. §7.6). This analysis was done in consultation with the Statistical Consultation Services of North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus). The results were not generalised.

## **1.6 Ethical aspects**

The research was conducted by adhering to normal ethical procedures. An ethical clearance certificate and number were obtained through the NWU's Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-RERC): NWU-00330-14-A7.

Informed consent was obtained from all parties concerned before the commencement of the research (cf. Appendices A and B). Participation was completely voluntary and the participants' right to privacy was respected and their anonymity ensured during all stages of the study. The research participants were not disadvantaged in any way. The findings of the evaluation will be made available to participants as requested after the study has been completed.

## **1.7 Relevance of the study**

No study evaluating the effect of a generic academic literacy course on first-year nursing students' academic writing has been conducted internationally or in South Africa. It is our role as reflective practitioners (cf. Van Dyk *et al.*, 2009:333) to continuously determine whether the courses we teach actually do have an effect. At the NWU Potchefstroom Campus no study regarding nursing students' academic writing requirements, skills, abilities, and needs has been done. Though it is only one case with a small research population, as a case in point the lessons learned from this study could inform and strengthen future evaluations and curriculum design.

It is the responsibility of the academic literacy lecturers and course designers at the NWU to determine whether the AGLA 121 course has any real effect on students' writing. Therefore, empirical evidence was needed to establish this effect of the academic literacy intervention on the nursing students' writing.

The relevance of this study thus lies in establishing whether the writing programme of the AGLA 121 course has had any effect and to determine whether the academic writing needs of all stakeholders as part of this case study were met. This will afford the opportunity to re-plan and adapt the writing intervention if necessary.

## **1.8 Clarification of key terms**

In this section, some of the key terms, as found in the thesis title, are defined in order to provide the context on which the rest of the study will be built.

The term **effect** is defined by the *South African Concise Oxford Dictionary* (2002:370) as “a change which is a result or consequence of an action”. In the *American Heritage Dictionary* (1996:586) **effect** is also seen as a “result”. The NWU indeed takes action to address any issues regarding academic literacy and provides all students with the opportunity to become academically literate so that they can survive tertiary education especially the written requirements. However, it is the responsibility of the course lecturers and course designers to ensure that a change has indeed taken place and that all stakeholders are satisfied with the result of the compulsory course. It is important to note that the terms **effect** and **impact** are often used as synonyms in evaluation studies. For the purpose of this study, the term **effect** will be used.

What actually constitutes **academic literacy** and how it is defined is particularly complex and difficult (cf. Bartholomae, 1986; Elbow, 1991; McKenna, 2004; Van Dyk & Van de Poel, 2013:47; Van Schalkwyk, 2008). For the purposes of this study academic literacy can be defined as the “reading, speaking, listening and thinking skills, dispositions, and habits of mind that students need for academic success and it includes the ability to critically read and interpret a wide range of texts, to write competently in scholarly genres, and to engage in and contribute to sophisticated academic discussions” (Warschauer *et al.*, 2004:526). Even though the above definition includes all the aspects regarding the outcomes of the AGLA 121 course, viewing academic literacy as only skills-based has become progressively contested in the academic literacy research (Archer, 2008:250; Bachman & Palmer, 1996:75; Butler, 2013:74; Van Dyk & Van de Poel, 2013:55; Weideman, 2013:13).

For the purpose of this study, academic literacy was examined from the point of view that it is the “accessing, processing and producing of information” (Weideman, 2003:xi) that is needed by nursing students to succeed in their written assignments both in AGLA 121 and in their other nursing subjects. Many first-year (nursing) students struggle with accessing, processing and producing information to complete writing assignments. To address this issue, academic literacy can be viewed in relation to the information gap theory. The information gap theory refers to the idea that anyone who lacks information should be assisted with information in order to solve a common problem or complete a problem-based task so that effective communication can take place (cf. Doughty & Pica, 1986; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013; Walz, 1996; Weideman, 2002). The theory is usually used in foreign language learning contexts, but is applicable for this study as academic literacy can be seen as a foreign language (Gee, 2000; Van de Poel & Van Dyk, 2015:164). The theory is developed from the idea that language learning occurs best through interaction with more competent peers which is in line with Vygotsky’s ZPD theory (cf. §3.4.3). The information gap theory is relevant in this study as first-year (nursing) students need information on how to write effectively in the tertiary context. The application of the information

gap theory can be done through academic literacy courses such as AGLA 121 where more knowledgeable others (such as literacy and content lecturers) can support (nursing) students with enough information to bridge the “information gap” to become self-directed students and writers (cf. §3.4.3; Figure 8.4). In turn, these students can become the “competent peers” (Walz, 1996:482) and so enlarge and support the academic writing community (cf. §2.5). The potential gap that could also exist between what literacy and content lecturers think what the academic writing needs of (nursing) students are, could also potentially be bridged with this theory. Together, both content and literacy lecturers can solve the “problem” of the academic writing needs of (nursing) students through effective communication and continuous evaluations such as this study.

There are various approaches to follow when designing an academic literacy course. Within the context of language development and literacy teaching, the following approaches have been quite influential: Content-based Language Teaching (CBLT) (cf. Cenoz, 2015; Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Kong & Hoare, 2011; Lyster & Ballinger, 2011), Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) (cf. Long & Crookes, 1992; Robinson, 2011; Skehan, 1996), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (cf. Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005; Littlewood, 1981; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999; Savignon, 1991), English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (cf. Hyland, 2006; Jordan, 1997; Wingate & Tribble, 2012), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (cf. Belcher, 2006; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991), Language Across the Curriculum (LAC) (cf. Coelho, 1982; Fillion, 1979; Kołodziejska & Simpson, 2000), and Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) (cf. Douglas, 2001; Savignon, 2002).

Though not always directly associated with academic literacy, the above-mentioned approaches share many commonalities with academic literacy. As a possible solution in dealing with academic literacy issues at various universities, an eclectic approach (cf. § 2.7.3) seems to be a potential answer in order to address specific needs. In this study, the above-mentioned approaches were summarised and discussed under the two central headings namely, generic and subject-specific approaches (cf. §2.7; §2.7.1; §2.7.2).

Whether academic literacy is taught as a generic course, a subject-specific course or an academic literacy course taught in symbiosis with subject content (Van de Poel & Van Dyk, 2015:169-171), the most important aspect that should be taken into consideration when lecturers decide on a certain approach is summarised effectively by Carstens (2013:123): “the critical characteristics that both content and language lecturers need to demonstrate are a collective commitment to student success and willingness to change”. Both content and literacy lecturers need to communicate regularly and effectively and work together and adapt content and pedagogy if necessary to adhere to students’ writing needs.

Within the context of this study it should be mentioned that nursing students potentially experience difficulties in figuring out how they must write and what to focus on as academic literacy (and by implication academic writing) often functions on a continuum that is fit for a specific learning context. Thus, at times the focus will be more on content and at other times more on how the content is presented rhetorically (Van de Poel & Van Dyk, 2015:171). Students need to be made aware of this continuum so that they are able to place themselves within it and know exactly what is expected of them within certain writing contexts.

The *South African Concise Oxford Dictionary* (2002:265) defines **course** as “a series of lectures or lessons in a particular subject”. In this study the course is AGLA 121. However, within the context of this study, alternative definitions of the term course can also apply. **Course** can also be defined as “the way in which something progresses or develops”. Therefore, it is important that the course designers have to continually evaluate courses to ensure that first-year students are on course in their academic career regarding their writing needs to ensure that inadequate academic literacy does not create a “barrier” on their road to academic success (Schaap & Luwes, 2013:187). According to Weideman (2013:20), a language course “undoubtedly has to be effective or valid, consistent, differentiated, appealing, theoretically defensible, yield meaningful results, be accessible, efficient and accountable”.

As difficult to define as **literacy** and **academic literacy** is **writing** in an academic context. In this study, writing will not only be viewed and evaluated as a text or product, or as a process, but also as “a social act influenced by a variety of linguistic, physical, cognitive, cultural, interpersonal and political factors” (Candlin & Hyland, 1999:2) needed for academic writing purposes that vary from context to context, discipline to discipline, subject to subject, lecturer to lecturer and student to student. The academic writing of the nursing students is measured against this definition. It is also important to note that writing does not exist in isolation (Butler, 2007a:18) and is not a “separate ability” (Weideman, 2013:13). Therefore, the other components of the AGLA 121 course, the computer literacy component (RINL) and the reading component (LEES) also need to be evaluated as they could have an effect on the writing produced by the nursing students.

## 1.9 Chapter outline

This thesis consists of eight chapters.

In **Chapter 2**, definitions and descriptions of literacy serve as contextualisation to describe academic literacy. Various definitions, approaches to and models of academic literacy are explored.

Academic writing as a vehicle to indicate that students are academically literate is explored in **Chapter 3**. The importance of academic writing and the acquisition thereof in tertiary education is described. Possible influences on academic writing such as schooling, background, language education, aptitude, and affective variables (such as attitude, motivation and writing apprehension) are investigated. The teaching of academic writing (the academic argument in particular) is examined. General conventions of academic writing are provided and discussed.

As the nursing students serve as a case study, **Chapter 4** is a description of the academic writing requirements of nursing students.

In **Chapter 5**, an in-depth overview of the academic literacy practices and writing course content at the NWU Potchefstroom Campus is presented.

**Chapter 6** reports on the research approach, design and methodology used in this study. The research is embedded in pragmatist, constructivist, interpretivist and positivist paradigms. A mixed-methods evaluation case study approach as well as design is used.

In **Chapter 7**, the quantitative and qualitative data and results are presented. A comparative evaluation of the content of the AGLA 121 course and a literature review of what nursing students require is also reported on to indicate whether nursing students' writing needs are met.

Based on the findings gathered from the previous chapter, a personal reflection of the entire study is provided in **Chapter 8**. A synthesis of all the findings will form the basis for course re-design recommendations. Proposals to improve the course in general, but more specifically for nursing students are presented.

**Chapter 9** concludes the thesis by means of a summary. In addition, this chapter provides the limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research are made.

## **1.10 Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of the main problem addressed in this thesis. Due to students being under-prepared, a need has been identified by universities to support students with supplementary, and in certain cases with compulsory, academic literacy courses. The question is whether the NWU's compulsory course, AGLA 121, is effective in assisting nursing students with their writing needs.

Universities' academic literacy courses differ in content and nature, as they are based on diverse theories and approaches to literacy and academic literacy teaching and learning. The next chapter defines and explores the terms, *literacy* and *academic literacy* as contextualisation for the rest of the study.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERACY AND ACADEMIC LITERACY

*“We are all apprentices in a craft where no-one ever becomes a master.” (Hemingway, 1961)*

### 2.1 Introduction

As already mentioned in Chapter 1 (§1.7), the terms **literacy** and especially **academic literacy** are particularly difficult to define. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the terms **literacy** and **academic literacy** in order to provide a platform from which the evaluation of the case study can be performed. The chapter is divided into six main sections. Firstly, a contextualisation is provided to summarise the issues that necessitate the exploration of the key terms in this chapter, viz. literacy and academic literacy (§2.3 and §2.4). A description and broad overview of literacy (§2.3) is included as basis for defining academic literacy. Students need to be “literate” and have basic literacy skills before they can acquire academic literacy at tertiary level. Within this section, distinctions are made between the “old” or traditional views of literacy (§2.3.1) and “modern” views of literacy (§2.3.2). The new views of literacy are further surveyed where literacies as social practices are discussed (§2.3.2.1) and an outline of multiliteracies is provided (§2.3.2.2). This chapter then proceeds to attempt to define and contextualise the multifaceted concept that is **academic literacy** (§2.4). Subsequently, academic discourse and academic discourse communities are examined (§2.5). A brief overview is provided of some of the various models (§2.6) and approaches (§2.7) that the acquisition of academic literacy is based on. Lastly, the relevance of the literature for this study (§2.8) is stated.

### 2.2 Contextualisation

In the problem statement (§1.2) it was established that poor academic literacy skills is one of countless possible predictors of academic success (cf. Holder *et al.*, 2006:19; Van Dyk *et al.*, 2011:487; Van Schalkwyk *et al.*, 2009:189; Weideman, 2006a:82; Weideman, 2007:vi). Various metaphors have been used to describe the literacy obstacles and difficulties that first-year students face during their journey towards becoming academically literate. Curry (2004:52) is of the opinion that for many students, academic literacy is a “hidden barrier that stymies their educational efforts”. Many students, when they arrive at university, get what Nevile (1996:38) calls a “literacy culture shock” as the literacy skills and practices acquired and needed at school level are no longer always appropriate in higher education. The academic literacy “difficulties” (as mentioned in Chapter 1) that many first-year students face are summarised by Nightingale (1988:65) where it is noted that lecturers rarely explain the “Geneva Conventions of academic battle”. The “Great Divide” as mentioned by Geisler (1994a:35) that exists between lecturers as

“experts” and students as “lay persons” further enhances the literacy problems encountered by first-year students when they are trying to gain entrance to their various academic discourse communities by trying to learn the “rules” of the academic game (Read *et al.*, 2001:390). The varying opinions of both lecturers and students are discussed in Chapter 7.

As stated in Chapter 1, many universities have realised that they need to intervene and support students with the literacy difficulties mentioned above by providing first-year students with academic literacy courses to help students mitigate the transition from high school to the literacy expectations at university level (Strachan, 2002:136; Skillen, 2006:140; Townsend, 2010:28) as it is only through exposure, experience and practice that first-year students can grasp and realise what the requirements of tertiary literacy tasks are (Amos, 1998:27). Similarly, Craig (1989:169) declares that “we have to make explicit and teach the nature and knowledge and the limits of these in order to allow for the adaptation of the learner to typical university tasks”.

There is currently no universal academic literacy intervention as a solution or “single method” (Luke & Freebody, 1999) to address all the literacy issues, as universities’ academic literacy courses differ in content and nature, as they are based on diverse theories, models and approaches to literacy and academic literacy teaching and learning. In some cases institutional support and interest ranges from being “supportive” to “indifferent” (McWilliams & Allan, 2014). Academic literacy support is also not always considered to be a high priority for management. There are, however, many reasons why institutional support seems lacking, such as institutional, financial and logistical constraints as well as student demographics and academic disciplinary needs and considerations (McWilliams & Allan, 2014).

In the following section, the complex and versatile term **literacy** is explored as basis for the discussion of the even more complex term, **academic literacy**.

### 2.3 Literacy

The term **literacy** is a contested term that is not easily definable and can be viewed as “problematic” (Hirst *et al.*, 2004:66; Wolhuter, 2002:125). The SACOD (2002:676) defines literacy as “the ability to read and write”. Reading and writing are traditionally acknowledged as the “core concepts” of literacy (cf. Crouch, 2006:18; Gee, 2003; Hugo, 2003:46; Picard, 2006:127; Pillay, 2010:771; Street, 2005; Wolhuter, 2002:125). However, being literate is far more than just being able to read and write (Kern, 2000:40; Tardy, 2005:326). Kern (2000:23) mentions that “[l]iteracy is an elastic concept: its meaning varies according to the disciplinary lens through which one examines it”. Baynham (1995:2) supports Kern’s view by stating that

literacy is not easy to define and does not mean the same thing to everyone. Hawkins (2004:20) states that literacy is not only the ability to “encode and decode print”. Luke and Freebody (1999) mention that there is “no single definitive, truthful, scientific, universally effective, or culturally appropriate way of teaching or even defining literacy”.

Another important aspect to highlight is that a continuum exists from total illiteracy to very highly literate people, with many grey areas of semi-literate people in-between (Wolhuter, 2002:125). Even though it is generally accepted and expected that first-year students have appropriate literacy levels for university studies, this statement could be problematic for higher education institutions that have to provide literacy courses to students with such a wide range of literacies.

More recently, there have been many changes in the ways that literacy is approached (Street, 2005). Literacy is not viewed as a single concept and is rather seen to encompass the idea of multiple literacies (Carstens, 2012:12; Hugo, 2003:46; Richmond *et al.*, 2008:17). This issue is discussed in detail later in this chapter (§2.3.2.2). Even though it is difficult to define literacy (as mentioned earlier), according to Cunningham *et al.* (2000:64), most definitions of literacy share three commonalities, which are “the ability to engage in some of the unique aspects of reading and writing; contextualisation to some extent within the broad demands of the society; and some minimal level of practical proficiency”.

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2005:21) defines literacy as follows: “Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential and participate fully in community and wider society.”

Street (2005) views literacy in a broader manner than the traditional way. According to him, the focus should not only be on reading, but also on cognition and the social and sociocultural approaches to literacy.

In terms of the South African context it is essential to take note of how the concept of literacy is interpreted by the Department of Basic Education. According to the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (DoBE, 2011:84), literacy can be defined as “[t]he capacity to read and write” or as “the ability to process and use information for a variety of purposes and contexts and to write for different purposes; the ability to decode texts, allowing one to make sense of one’s world”. Though this definition is relevant for most school children, doubts are

raised whether this definition is relevant for universities as first-year students struggle so much with literacy-related issues at universities (cf. §1.2).

An important question that must be answered is what the characteristics associated with literate students are. An attempt to answer this question is provided by firstly looking at the characteristics of what is deemed as being literate in today's world.

It has become evident that there is no universal definition for literacy. Previously, being literate just meant being able to read and write (cf. §2.3). Literacy has evolved and developed into a much broader concept. According to Anstey and Bull (2006:19) a literate person:

- is flexible—is positive and strategically responsive to changing literacies;
- is able to sustain mastery—knows enough to be able to reformulate current knowledge or access and learn new literate practices;
- has a repertoire of practices—has a range of knowledge, skills, and strategies to use when appropriate;
- is able to use traditional texts—uses print and paper, and face-to-face oral encounters; and
- is able to use new communications technologies—uses digital and electronic texts that have multiple modes (e.g., spoken and written), often simultaneously.

It is evident from Anstey and Bull's definition that a range of abilities are necessary to be regarded literate in today's world. Furthermore, it is clear that any definition of literacy must include some type of technological literacy. In this regard, Leu *et al.* (2004:1570) state that technologically literate people must be able to:

- use a search engine effectively to locate information;
- evaluate the accuracy and utility of information that is located on a webpage in relation to one's purpose;
- use a word processor effectively, including functions such as checking spelling accuracy, inserting graphics, and formatting text;
- know how to e-mail effectively; and
- infer correctly the information that may be found at a hyperlink on a webpage.

When first-year students arrive at universities, they are expected to have acquired all the literacies mentioned by Anstey and Bull (2006:19) and Leu *et al.* (2004:1570). First-year students are then expected to build on the already acquired literacies and become academically literate. This can be problematic for South African students as they might not have acquired all the necessary literacies needed for higher education purposes. Murray (2010:58; 2011:5)

proposes the following three literacy components that first-year students need in order to be academically literate: Firstly, students need language proficiency where they are able to control the functional and formal language needed in appropriate contexts. Students must also be fluent in the linguistic practices of their disciplines and finally, students must be able to communicate in a wide range of modes applicable to their disciplines.

From the various descriptions of literacy and literate students above, it is evident that today's university students must be able to do more than basic reading and writing. Bearing the definitions of literacy in mind, it is important for literacy programme designers to take into consideration how today's students learn, what the students already know and can do, and what is expected of them in society. These considerations might have repercussions for literacy policy planning, how literacy is measured and assessed as well as the types of provision of literacy programmes (Street, 2005). These issues are discussed further in Chapters 6 to 8.

To further illustrate the debate regarding what actually constitutes the multifaceted concept of literacy, an overview of the various ways in which literacy is viewed will be provided. In the subsequent sections, the 'old' and more 'modern' views of literacy are described and analysed. Even though these views are discussed separately, they must not be interpreted as one being superior over the other but rather as complementary to one another.

### **2.3.1 Traditional view of literacy**

As mentioned earlier (§2.1), literacy was historically (and still is in many cases) mostly seen as simply the ability to read and write. Kelder (1996) mentions that literacy is mostly associated with abstract writing and reading abilities and skills that are independent of context. Furthermore, there "is still a tendency to consider literacy as an abstraction associated with decontextualized reading and writing skills, and as an isolated cognitive entity".

Within the "autonomous" model of literacy (Street, 1984, 2003, 2006), literacy is regarded as reading and writing uninfluenced by the social context (Winchester, 1990:21-24; Wolhuter, 2002:126). With this model, literacy is viewed as a **neutral technology** where literacy practices are seen as being socially, culturally and politically neutral (Rampton, 1995; Townsend, 2010:25). Also, within this model, literacy practices are viewed as being generic, technical, transferable and unitary (Kelder, 1996; Picard, 2006:135; Street, 2005; Townsend, 2010:24-25). Consequently, Townsend (2010:25) states that this model "promotes a set of technical, a-cultural, a-social skills and fails to acknowledge how meaning is dependent on the knowledge which the learner brings to a text".

Furthermore, the autonomous model does not take into consideration the fact that in practice literacy differs from culture to culture and from context to context. It is challenged by Street (2003:77) when he states that the autonomous approach is “simply imposing western conceptions of literacy onto other cultures”. In South Africa, with such an array of cultures and people with various levels of literacy, this statement by Street could have serious implications for the way we view potential students at universities as being “literate” or not when they are measured by western standards. Geisler (1994b:9) expands on this view and mentions that autonomous views of literacy can affect educational access: “... the use of the more autonomous code was both socially relevant to the exercise of political power and cognitively relatively difficult to master. As a consequence, the more formal discourse effectively served a gatekeeping function even in forums where participation was nominally open to all.” The autonomous model is also not completely neutral as it is inclined to favour students who have had exposure and access to autonomous literacy practices from an early age (Geisler, 1994:48; Townsend, 2010:25). These previous literacy experiences that some students bring from home and schools Bourdieu and Passeron (1977:32) call “cultural capital” that not all students equally have when they start university. Geisler (1994a:35) summarises this idea by stating that “reading and writing practices which on the surface look open and easily available to all, may actually have become arcane practices restricted to just a few”. Within the South African context, this statement is true as many students are still exposed to unequal schooling.

In addition, Townsend (2010:26) mentions that many students entering higher education in South Africa are not considered to be literate enough for university studies and are, therefore, consequently “often marginalised by the institutional practices in their lack of familiarity with the literacy”. According to the autonomous model, many students are scrutinised as having literacy “deficits” that need to be fixed through remediation. Baynham (1995:14), for example, mentions that “deficit-model thinking constructs the literacy learner as an empty vessel, a jug that needs filling with knowledge”. The remark made by Baynham can be seen as problematic, as some South African students are literate in some way and do have multiple literacies; they only need to adapt the knowledge and skills they already have to fit the literacies of the university contexts they are exposed to. Therefore, students need to be guided (with courses such as AGLA 121) to adapt to the literacies required at university and build on the skills that they already possess. If they do not have these skills, the relevance of compulsory academic literacy courses becomes even more important. Amos (1998:1) also mentions that students should not be seen as having literacy problems or lacking the necessary cognitive structures to successfully complete university tasks and that these deficits or problems can rather be interpreted as “problems of access to and mastery of the cognitive processes entailed in the groundrules of

the specific academic disciplines within the higher education context". Beasley (1988:50) proposes a solution to address the perception that students need to be remediated and suggests that what students need is "initiation, not remediation" into the academy. This solution reminds of Van Dyk and Van de Poel's (2013) "acculturation" process mentioned in Chapter 1 (§1.2).

In the following section, an extensive overview of the 'modern' (which now seems dated) way(s) literacy can be seen is provided.

### 2.3.2 Contemporary views of literacy

Contrary to the autonomous model of literacy, literacy is approached differently according to the ideological model of literacy which is mostly linked to the **new literacies** phenomenon (Street, 2003). Kress (2003:1) mentions that one cannot conceptualise literacy by separating it from the broad range of social, economic and technological factors. In contrast to the traditional view of literacy, **new literacies** can be seen as the "requisite knowledge and skills to send and interpret messages through multiple media and modes in (rapidly changing) local and global contexts, and to align meanings within situated social practices" (Hawkins, 2004:20). According to Leu *et al.* (2007:6), new literacies are highly contested and "the construct means many different things to many different people". The New London Group (1996:60) mentions that "the multiplicity of communication channels and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the world today call for a much broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches".

It must be noted that this term is being viewed as "new" for it was a novel perspective on literacy at the time; however, much of it is now dated. The term "new literacies" was first used by Buckingham (1993) as part of the New Literacy Studies (NLS) movement. Street (1984, 1995, 2003, 2005) sees literacies as new social practices. Literacy as multiliteracies and as multimodal contexts are differentiated by The New London Group (1996) and Cope and Kalantzis (2000). New literacies are often influenced by technological developments and Coiro *et al.* (2008:10) provide a range of terms used when referring to new literacies: computer literacy, ICT literacies, information literacy, multiliteracies, new media literacies, 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies, digital literacies and Internet literacies.

In the following section, literacy(ies) will firstly be viewed as (a) social practice(s). Subsequently, the plural view of literacy in the form of multiliteracies (as part of new literacies) will be surveyed.

### **2.3.2.1 Literacy(ies) as social practices**

In contrast to the autonomous model, Drackle (2006) points out that the new literacy studies view literacy as a social practice that depends on power relations, dependent on context, and on the relationships that people form with each other when literacy comes into play. Street (2005) also observes that the ideological model of literacy presents a cultural sensitivity towards literacy as literacy contexts vary and mentions that “the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being”.

New literacies can thus be seen as socially located, diverse and flexible (Andrews, 2001:9). Archer (2006:450) is of the opinion that “to be ‘literate’ then does not simply mean having acquired the technical skills to decode and encode signs, but having mastered a set of social practices related to a set of signs which are inevitably plural and diverse”. Thus, literacies must not only focus on reading and writing as basic skills, but also take into consideration the social and cultural milieu of the students as well as the context and culture of the university in which they find themselves. The social and cultural sides of literacy are mentioned in this study even though these variables are not applicable to the specific case study participants. However, it is important to take note of these variables as it is necessary to conduct similar evaluations with all types of students where these contextual factors might play a role.

### **2.3.2.2 Multiliteracy**

In order to be successful at university, students need to be multiliterate. According to Carstens (2012:12) being “multiliterate” involves “having the capacity to move between discourses and across genres, to switch practices between one setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting, to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes, and to make meaning for different audiences”. Carstens (2012:13) also mentions that in being multiliterate, one must be flexible to adapt to and use “a combination of semiotic modes, including image, gesture, oral performance, artistic, linguistic, digital, electronic and graphic”. These definitions of multiliteracy of Carstens are important for this study as they describe some of the literacy characteristics that the nursing students need to have to be successful academically and professionally.

For the purpose of this study, it is also important to look further than only paper-based, print-based and language-based literacies (Leu *et al.*, 2004; Marsh, 2004:52; Prinsloo, 2005:88), as students are growing up in the digital age (Leu *et al.*, 2004) and are assumed to be bringing an abundance of technological literacies with them to universities. These literacies need to be guided so that students can benefit from what they already know and apply it academically and

professionally. In the following section these types of multiple technological literacies are discussed.

Regarding **multiliteracy**, in the digital sense, Hugo (2003:46-47) is of the opinion that in the new millennium, literacy should not only be viewed and defined as the reading and writing of printed materials, but should also include computer-based texts and multimedia. Williamson (2005) supports this broader and expanded definition of literacy and states that instead of only having text-driven definitions of literacy and spoken and written forms as the principal ways of communication, the concept of literacy should include computer-based texts and multimedia such as a variety of aural and visual forms of communication such as the Internet, film and computer games. Furthermore, Williamson (2005) mentions that being multiliterate is being able to read all available media and being able to ultimately produce the media in various modes too. This new view of literacy has implications for the way information is accessed and produced at tertiary level. Some of these implications that are relevant to this study are discussed in Chapters 7 to 9.

Pillay (2010:779) is of the opinion that “it is imperative that lecturers at institutions of higher education not just embrace multiliteracy for teaching and learning, but embrace and affirm the many literacies that their students bring with them to the lecture room”. Lecturers must thus utilise the technological literacies that students have and build on them to support students to use these skills in an academic context.

Warschauer *et al.* (2004:529-535) proclaim that technology can be used to “complement and enrich the instructional experience” and can be used “to apprentice students into academic literacy through promotion of independent reading, support for language scaffolding, involvement in cognitively engaging projects, and student analysis and creation of purposeful texts in a variety of media and genres”. Furthermore, Warschauer *et al.* (2004:535) state that “[t]echnology will not magically transform education. Rather, new technologies serve as an amplifier that can magnify pre-existing strengths and weaknesses”.

Street (2005) also states that there is often a discrepancy between what programme designers think that students know and must be able to know and that it is frequently the opposite of what students know and want / should know. Students enter higher education institutions with a wide range of skills and knowledge of digital technologies such as cell phones and computers and can function efficiently in various contexts and are quite used to crossing back and forth between genres. Another characteristic of students today is that they are literate in being able to communicate effectively (BICS) for social purposes, for example text messaging, but often fail university literacy competency tests (CALP).

Concerning all the “new” views of literacy, one issue that has to be raised is the matter of the “digital divide”. The digital divide exists between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not have access. This is due to disadvantages in cultural, financial and/or educational resources (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007:671). People who have grown up since the appearance of the World Wide Web (WWW) and various other types of digital technologies such as television, movies, cell phones, video and computer games and text and instant messaging are referred to as the ‘Digital natives’, ‘Generation Y’, ‘Generation Z’, ‘iGeneration’, ‘Net generation’, ‘Millennials’, and ‘Google generation’ (Considine *et al.*, 2009:475; Kennedy *et al.*, 2006:413; Prensky, 2001:1; Weiler, 2005:47). In contrast, people, including lecturers, who were not born into the digital world, but have adopted new technologies, are called “Digital Immigrants” (cf. Prensky, 2001).

Characteristics of “Digital Natives” include being able to multi-task, relying on communication technologies to gain information, favouring active rather than passive learning, having a low tolerance for lectures, preferring receiving information quickly and processing information quickly. However, not all students have these characteristics as the students entering universities are not homogeneous, have not been equally schooled and exposed to digital technologies and are not equally apt in creating and using digital technologies for learning purposes (Kennedy *et al.*, 2006:413). Within the South African context, Thinyane (2010:406) mentions that South African first-year students are heterogeneous in terms of technology and some may be considered digital natives. This statement could have implications for the ways in which academic literacy courses such as AGLA 121 are developed and presented.

The majority of students worldwide and in South Africa are often falsely perceived as being “media savvy” and competent users and developers of digital technologies. However, “hands on is not the same as heads-on”. These students are often “self-taught” but not “well-taught”. They are able to access media but are quite limited in their ability to process the media (Considine, 2009:472). These types of students struggle to develop Internet search strategies and to evaluate information for authority, accuracy, reliability and relevance (Fudin, 2012; Joint Information Systems Committee, 2008:12). One solution Considine *et al.* (2009:472) propose is that students should be taught to “access, analyze, evaluate, and effectively communicate in a variety of forms including print and nonprint texts”.

As mentioned earlier (cf. §2.3.1), there is often a perception that there has been a decline in the quality of education worldwide and in South Africa students entering universities are often seen as ‘underprepared’ and having ‘deficits’ in need of remediation. Regarding these views, Prensky (2001:1) makes an interesting observation: “[o]ur students have changed radically. Today’s

students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach.” Thus the ‘deficit’ may not only lie with the students, but possibly with the lecturers too. This statement, however, elicits even more assumptions. Some lecturers do not want to acknowledge that some students bring a wide array of literacies with them. Some lecturers assume that, as students are able to use certain technologies, they too should use technologies in their classes. However, not all students have an advanced understanding and knowledge of digital technologies and “[i]t is not clear that students want their ‘everyday technologies’ to be adopted or appropriated as ‘learning technologies.’” (Kennedy *et al.*, 2006:414). Furthermore, not all lecturers as “Digital Immigrants” are technologically illiterate. Just as there is a variety of student populations so there are vast lecturer populations with mixed knowledge, skills and abilities.

It has become clear that whether students are digitally literate or not and want digital technologies in their learning milieu or whether lecturers are themselves digitally literate and can or rather want to use technology for pedagogical purposes, literacy has truly changed from only being able to read and write. These same principles can be transposed to tertiary level where students have to be academically literate to successfully complete their studies. However, even though multiliteracies and digital technologies are beginning to influence teaching, learning, and the assessment thereof, at tertiary level “textbooks, seminars and lectures remain the key forms of knowledge transfer and writing with its various forms continues to be the way in which students both consolidate and demonstrate their understanding of their subjects” (Hyland, 2009:5). One of the reasons why this study was conducted was indeed to address the issue that the academic literacy course being evaluated is still based on textbooks, seminars and lectures. Therefore, the lessons learnt from the case study will afford the researcher an opportunity to redesign the course specifically for nursing students so that many of their literacy needs are met.

In this section, autonomous and ideological views of literacy were discussed separately. After looking at the merits and demerits of both views, it is evident that both contribute significant value to literacy acquisition and development. Therefore, these views should not be applied and implemented in isolation. The best-of-both could be incorporated in university literacy courses to assist students with their various literacy needs (Van de Poel & Van Dyk, 2015:174).

## **2.4 Academic literacy(ies)**

In the following section the term **academic literacy** is defined and contextualised.

#### 2.4.1 Definitions, contextualization and acquisition of academic literacy(-ies)

What actually constitutes academic literacy is not straightforward and how it is defined is notoriously complex and difficult (cf. Bartholomae, 1986; Elbow, 1991; McKenna, 2004; McWilliams & Allan, 2014; Van Dyk & Van de Poel, 2013; Van Schalkwyk, 2008). Parkinson *et al.* (2008:12) state: “[e]ven academic literacy, which is a more restricted notion than literacy as a whole, and might thus be expected to be clearly one thing is ... interpreted differently by different groups”. Academic literacy as a field of study has, over the past 20 years, drawn “on a number of disciplinary fields and subfields such as applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, anthropology, sociocultural theories of learning, discourse studies and new literacy studies” (Lillis & Scott, 2007:5). Academic literacy can be used as an adjective and noun and other terms associated with academic literacy include literacy in the university (cf. Ballard & Clanchy, 1988) and academic discourses (cf. Boughey, 2000; Gee, 1990; Van Schalkwyk, 2008).

McKenna (2004:23) mentions that due to the variety of expectations, norms and conventions across various disciplines, the plural term **academic literacies** should be used rather than just **academic literacy**. The singular, traditional and implicit view of the term **academic literacy** is quite restrictive where academic literacy is seen as a set of generic, neutral and unitary skills and practices usually associated with literacy and communication at tertiary level mostly focusing on types of writing (Henderson & Hirst, 2006; Lillis & Scott, 2007:5; Van Schalkwyk, 2010:203).

Academic literacy is frequently related to learning support and “discourses of deficit and remediation” (Henderson & Hirst, 2006; McWilliams & Allan, 2014). In many universities, the term **academic literacy** is often associated with learning support services and academic skills consultants in some kind of central support centres. These types of centres are sometimes seen as “quick fix” services that are often marginalised (McWilliams & Allan, 2014) and is viewed by management as being “on the periphery of higher education” (Turner, 2011:29). Within these contexts, the autonomous view of literacy (cf. §2.3.1) and academic literacy is used as a basis for academic support courses and academic literacy is seen as basic communication practices and language skills that can be acquired by students as they enter universities (Henderson & Hirst, 2006). It is, however, important to note that many universities are moving away from the learning support-services centres approach (cf. Gunn *et al.*, 2011). For instance, at the Potchefstroom Campus of the NWU where this study is situated, the academic literacy modules currently form part of the Centre for Academic and Professional Language Practice (CAPLP).

As with literacy, academic literacy is viewed by some not only from a linguistic perspective, but also from socially constructed practices involving “sociocultural values, beliefs and power

relations” (Scott & Turner, 2009:152). Also in relation to the ideological model of literacy, Hyland (2006:8) mentions that “communication practices are not uniform across academic disciplines but reflect different ways of constructing knowledge and engaging in teaching and learning”. Taking into account both the autonomous and ideological models of literacy, in this study academic literacy can broadly be defined as being able to communicate appropriately in various academic contexts by employing an array of skills and knowledge. Students must also demonstrate their academic literacy in multiple genres and modes (Henderson & Hirst, 2006; Hirst *et al.*, 2004:68; The New London Group, 1996).

Moreover, students are deemed academically literate when they are able to read and write critically and analytically, are able to distinguish between opinions and facts, are able to follow the rules to construct arguments, define terms, provide evidence for statements they make, use appropriate styles and are able to use the discourse of their specific disciplines (Van Schalkwyk *et al.*, 2009:189; Van Schalkwyk, 2010:203). Koch (2007:88) argues that “[t]he competence to infer, deduct, apply and identify main ideas of passages, also called academic literacy, is a skill that can be taught and acquired in any language”. The degree to which this statement is true will be evaluated against the academic writing of the study population of this study (cf. Chapters 6 to 9).

Weideman (2007:xi), provides a more extensive list of skills that a student who is academically literate should control. A student should:

- understand a range of academic vocabulary in context;
- interpret the use of metaphor and idiom in academic usage, and perceive connotation, word play and ambiguity;
- understand relations between different parts of a text, be aware of the logical development of an academic text, via introductions to conclusions, and know how to use language that serves to make the different parts of a text hang together;
- interpret different kinds of text types (genre), and have a sensitivity for the meaning they convey, as well as the audience they are aimed at;
- interpret, use and produce information presented in graphic or visual format;
- distinguish between essential and non-essential information, fact and opinion, propositions and arguments, cause and effect, and classify, categorise and handle data that make comparisons;
- see sequence and order, and do simple numerical estimations and computations that are relevant to academic information, that allow comparisons to be made, and can be applied for the purposes of construing an argument;

- know what counts as evidence for an argument, extrapolate from information by making inferences, and apply the information or its implications to other cases than the one at hand;
- understand the communicative function of various ways of expression in academic language (such as defining, providing examples, arguing); and
- make meaning (e.g. of an academic text) beyond the level of the sentence.

The list provided by Weideman offers a valuable basis that academic literacy courses such as AGLA 121 can build learning outcomes on. Similarly, Van Dyk and Van de Poel (2013) provide an extended and comprehensive list of what students should be able to do with written academic assignments:

- analyse and interpret the instruction and set up a realistic work plan;
- manage responsibilities effectively;
- perform (online) searches and locate, evaluate and use relevant and applicable information for the task at hand;
- manage the acquired information effectively and efficiently;
- construct knowledge and negotiate meaning appropriately and adequately by analysing, synthesising and evaluating (written and visual) material and applying it to other cases;
- employ appropriate study techniques;
- handle, and produce, numerical data;
- interpret tables and graphs and make inferences, or draw a flow chart;
- employ critical thinking strategies in evaluating a case, study or thesis;
- argue a case, by also providing relevant and appropriate evidence (steering clear of plagiarism);
- come to informed conclusions;
- write up an essay using relevant terminology, style and register;
- improve computer skills to write an appropriate and acceptable essay;
- design and present data at seminars (practising beforehand);
- manage time effectively and meet the deadline;
- manage stress effectively and keep a realistic perspective on academic life;
- engage in teamwork and peer review; and
- enjoy the result and draw from it the motivation to do well the next time.

From the above descriptions of an academically literate person, it is evident that students today must be able to cope with more than just basic language knowledge such as spelling and grammar. Even though some lecturers expect them to acquire academic literacy through “osmosis” (Brady, 2015), students, however, cannot acquire/develop these academic literacy

skills by themselves as most first-year students have never had any exposure to tertiary academic literacy and writing. Some type of intervention is required to assist students to make the transition from the type of literacy required from them at school level to that which is required from them at university level.

According to Parkinson *et al.* (2008:12), there are various types of academic literacy interventions in South Africa and this variety is mirrored in three aspects: what the intervention focuses on, for example grammatical correctness, reading and writing, the nature of the intervention (whether mediated by consultants or courses of various kinds), and thirdly, how discipline-specific the intervention is with regard to content and genre. These aspects are addressed in the evaluation of the academic literacy course in this study (cf. Chapters 7 to 9) as it is important to determine if a generic or subject-specific course should be used. In addition, Van de Poel and Van Dyk (2015:169-173) provide an overview of the different approaches that could be followed to develop academic literacy courses (cf. Table 2.3).

When acquiring academic literacy, students are required to join the “literacy club” (Street, 1996), function and produce in “academic tribes” (Becher, 1993:24), acquire “disciplinary dialects” (Crouch, 2006:19), model themselves on the “insiders” (Jacobs, 2005:477), learn how to function in “academic” (Crouch, 2006:21), “knowledge” (Van Schalkwyk, 2010:201) and “discourse” (Jacobs, 2005:477; Goodier & Parkinson, 2005:66) communities, acquire discourses through “apprenticeship” (Gee, 1990:xv-xvi; Paxton, 1998:136; Van Schalkwyk, 2010:204) and determine how to read and write appropriately in the various “cultures and sub-cultures” of their particular disciplines (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988:8).

So, how do students become members of these “clubs”, “tribes”, “cultures” and “communities”? They need to show understanding in their subjects and demonstrate learning in their disciplines and according to Hyland (2009:2-5) this can only be done through language, written and spoken, and through managing the appropriate and relevant discourses of their particular discourse communities.

## **2.5 Academic discourse and academic discourse communities**

Regarding **discourses**, Gee (1990) differentiates between primary and secondary “[d]iscourses”. Primary discourses refer to the basic ways we have learnt to speak to our families at home. With secondary discourses, the social context in which language is used is important. Gee’s distinction between primary and secondary discourses seems to have parallels with Cummins’ BICS and CALP (cf. §1.2.2). The primary discourses and BICS form the basis

and framework for the acquisition of new secondary discourses in specialised social institutions such as academic discourses in higher education. For university students, it is vital to acquire the secondary discourses to indicate that they are academically literate in order to study successfully (Van Schalkwyk, 2008:25).

**Academic discourse**, specifically student writing (which is the main focus of this study), is thus “at the heart of the academic enterprise”. Academic discourse can also be described as a type of language that can connect academics and students within particular academic communities (cf. Bizzell, 1982:193; Bizzell, 1992:3). Becoming part of these academic discourse communities is one of the main challenges that first-year students have to cope with when entering universities (Evans & Morrison, 2010:395). Academic communities can be seen from a social point of view as **communities of practice** (Lave & Wenger, 1991:29) where students are required to participate in the social and rhetorical academic discourses in the groups of which they are becoming members. Furthermore, academic discourse helps students with the social relationships, roles and practices within their various disciplines (Wells, 1992:290; Hyland, 2009:2, 5). In addition, Hyland (2009:46) states that academic discourses “evoke a social milieu, where the writer activates specific recognizable and routine responses to recurring tasks”.

However, academic discourse is not an all-encompassing term for the entire academy. Academic discourse should rather be referred to as **academic discourses** (Hyland, 2009:46; Moore, 1994:37; Wells, 1992:290). The academic communities within universities have multiple subject-specific literacies that are diffuse and interdisciplinary by nature (Eldridge, 2008:110; Hyland, 2012:32-34, 352). One of the main features of academic discourse is the variability thereof. Academic discourse differs from university to university, from lecturer to lecturer, from discipline to discipline and department to department (Belcher & Braine, 1995:xiii). According to Wells (1992:290), every subject discipline has its own “modes of discourse”. Moreover, every subject discipline’s academic discourses differ and have their own research practices, views of knowledge, procedures, practices, rules, regulations, registers and conventions (Hyland, 2002a:352; Moore, 1994:37; Wells, 1992:290). Goggin (1995:12) as quoted by Baynham (2000:20) mentions that “diversity exists not only across disciplines, but also within disciplines”. What is more, not only do the ways that academic writing is written differ between disciplines and subjects, but also the ways that the writing is presented. An example of this diversity is found in Table 2.1 where Braine (1995:123) shows how within the engineering faculty, though there are commonalities, mostly the report formats differ. This variety in formats could cause some students to get confused, especially if they are taught generic formats in their generic-type academic literacy courses (cf. §2.7.1) such as AGLA 121 which is evaluated in this study.

**Table 2.1: Experimental report formats from engineering courses (Braine, 1995:123)**

	Chemical	Mechanical	Petroleum	Electrical
Introduction	Abstract	Objective and summary	Introduction	Abstract
Materials and methods	Introduction	Facilities and instrumentation	Apparatus	Introduction
Results	Theory	Experimental procedures	Procedures	Theory
Discussion	Apparatus and procedure	Results	Hazards	Solution
References	Results	Discussion	Results	Results
Conclusions	Recommendations	Conclusions	Conclusions	Conclusions

The confusion is further exacerbated as for many students these academic communities that they have to become part of are very unlike those of their school, home or workplace communities (Bizzell, 1982:193; Hyland, 2009:123). Also, as mentioned in Chapter 1, many lecturers expect and assume that students can communicate effectively in their new specific academic communities, which many students find very difficult to do (Crouch, 2006:22; Hyland, 2009:123). A possible solution for these types of issues that students have to deal with is discussed in Section 2.7.3.

Bartholomae (1986:4-5) summarises some of the challenges that students face with academic discourse:

The students have to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and they have to do this as though they were easily and comfortably one with their audience, as though they were members of the academy, or historians or anthropologists or economists; they have to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language, finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline. They must learn to speak our language. Or they must dare to speak it, or to carry off the bluff, since speaking and writing will most certainly be required long before the skill is “learned”.

Bartholomae’s opinion above highlights the huge task that first-year students face when they have to deal with academic discourse. The plight of nursing students regarding academic writing is described in Chapter 4.

Another issue that has to be addressed regarding academic discourse is outlined by Bizzell (1982:193): “[w]e have not demystified academic discourse”. In addition, Elbow (1991:135) makes the following statement that summarises the perplexity of academic discourse: “I love what’s in academic discourse: learning, intelligence, sophistication – even mere facts and naked

summaries of articles and books; I love reasoning, inference, and evidence; I love theory. But I hate academic discourse.” One of the reasons that Elbow (1991:138) provides for the negativity towards academic discourse is that he feels that it is impossible to teach students academic discourse as there is no one such thing. Weideman (2013:14) comes to a similar conclusion as Elbow. Many students struggle with academic discourse as it can be confusing, even for established and expert writers.

Another explanation Elbow (1991:152) gives for disliking academic discourse is the changing nature thereof. He gives the example where at some point Latin was the only language used for academic discourse and mentions that “[g]radually the other European dialects became acceptable – vernacular, vulgar, more democratic, closer to the business of the everyday and to feelings”.

It is thus evident that acquiring academic literacy and becoming part of the academic discourse communities is not an easy feat for most students and that acquiring or rather developing academic literacy is an intricate process. The various models and approaches that could be used by universities today for interventions to help students acquire academic literacy(ies) are discussed in the next sections (§2.6 and §2.7). It is important to note that even though these models and approaches are discussed separately, they must not be viewed in isolation or be interpreted that one is privileged over the other. It is necessary to describe all their qualities in order to provide the researcher with the best possible basis for programme redesign if found necessary through the empirical research in this study.

## **2.6 Models of academic literacy acquisition**

One of the prominent ways which tertiary institutions can apply to help students acquire and develop academic literacy is by basing their interventions on certain models of academic literacy. There are many models of literacy, and the four models discussed in this section were chosen as they align closely with academic literacy practices associated with AGLA 121 and share common characteristics. The most recognized and used models are Lea and Street’s academic literacy models (2006:158). Luke and Freebody’s four resources model (1999), the pedagogy of multiliteracies model from Cazden *et al.* (1996), and the transformative pedagogies of multiliteracies model of Cope and Kalantzis (2009) can be used as a foundation for academic literacy interventions. These models are discussed below in order to assess what type of intervention is used for the AGLA 121 course at the NWU Potchefstroom Campus and to establish if the models are useful and relevant for the case study which is the nursing faculty (cf. Chapters 4 to 7).

### 2.6.1 Lea and Street's models

The study skills, academic socialization and academic literacies models from Lea and Street (2006:158) are described as a possible way to design academic literacy interventions. Firstly, according to the *study skills* model, academic literacy can be seen as a set of atomised skills that can be learned and transferred when necessary. Henderson and Hirst (2006) also mention that the “dominant model of academic literacy is still a skills-based approach”. Weideman (2003:6), however, states that there is widespread criticism of a skills-based approach (cf. §2.3.2) to academic literacy. This relates to Bachman and Palmer’s argument (as already mentioned in §1.7): “[w]e would ... not consider language skills to be part of language ability at all, but to be the contextualised realisation of the ability to use language in the performance of specific language use tasks. We would ... argue that it is not useful to think in terms of ‘skills’, but to think in terms of specific activities or tasks in which language is used purposefully.” More critique against the study skills model is that it only considers academic literacy from a linguistic point of view and does not incorporate the social and cognitive dimensions of academic literacy (Van Dyk & Van de Poel, 2013:46, 48).

The second model from Lea and Street (1998:158) is the *academic socialisation* model in which it is the role of the lecturer to initiate students into the homogeneous culture of the academy. This can be seen as problematic as literacy, especially writing, is not uniform across disciplines. Therefore, Lea and Street (1998:158) propose the *academic literacies* model. This approach is closely linked to the NLS (cf. §2.3.2) where literacies are viewed as social practices “involving a variety of communicative practices including genres, fields and disciplines” (Lea & Street, 1998:158). Within this perspective, students should be able to distinguish and apply the correct discourses in appropriate contexts. Students must also be able to critique and compare various discourses. Nevertheless, not all students are familiar with or have meta-level knowledge of or exposure to various types of discourses which could make it difficult for them to critique and use the correct discourse for the correct context.

A number of researchers have challenged the academic literacies model, especially for its “apparent lack of attention to pedagogy” (Lea, 2004:741) and for the reason that it is not practically applicable. Lillis (2003:192) suggested that it was quite unclear what and how the pedagogic practice would resonate in the academic literacies perspective: “[w]hilst powerful as an oppositional frame, that is as a critique of current conceptualisations and practices surrounding student writing, academic literacies has yet to be developed as a design frame which can actively contribute to student writing pedagogy as both theory and practice.” Creaton (2008) supports this criticism and states that the model has “limited applicability as a pedagogical frame for action”. Lea (2004:752) reacted to the critique of the model and mentioned that in reality some course designers may find it difficult to implement the theory of

the model into practice because they are restrained “by the institutional procedures and practices of which they are a part”.

Furthermore, Lea (2004:741) responded to the criticism by stating that “[r]esearch in the field of academic literacies is in the main informed by disciplinary perspectives which have not traditionally been associated with research into student learning”. Lea (2004:743) therefore proposes that the contexts for academic literacies research should be broadened. Lea (2004:743) makes an interesting observation that the conventional written assignment, the essay, is overused in mainstream teaching and learning. This opinion is relevant to this study regarding the evaluation of the writing programme of the academic literacy course as the traditional academic essay is still the main way to assess content and discourse knowledge in AGLA 121. Lea (2004:743) proposes that course designers should not only pay attention to assessed texts but also to other types of texts such as course materials, web-based resources, guidance notes and feedback sheets. Moreover, Lea and Street (2006:376) also give an example how the academic literacies model can be used for pedagogical instructional design. They are of the opinion that the academic literacies model should be used to focus on the specificity and variety of institutional practices and that these practices should be made more explicit. They also propose that lecturers and students should collaboratively “investigate the range of genres, modes, shifts, transformations, representations, meaning-making processes, and identities involved in academic learning within and across academic contexts” (Lea & Street, 2006:376).

Table 2.2 provides a summary of Lea and Street’s three models of student academic literacy and writing.

**Table 2.2: Lea and Street’s (2000:34) models of student writing in higher education**

Model	Study skills	Academic socialization	Academic literacies
<b>Description</b>	Students are seen as having literacy deficits and conceptualize student writing as instrumental and technical.	Acculturation of students into academic discourse.	Sees literacies as social practices. Students’ negotiation of conflicting literacy practices.
<b>Characteristics</b>	Focus is on: Surface language Spelling Grammar Individual, cognitive, atomized, technical and instrumental skills.	Focus is on: Student orientation to learning and learning tasks, distinguishing between deep, surface and strategic approaches to learning. Viewing the academy as a homogeneous culture whose norms and views have simply to be learnt to provide access to the whole institution. Treating writing as a transparent medium of representation.	Focus is on: Viewing student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skills or socialization. Seeing the literacy demands of the curriculum as involving a variety of communicative practices, including genres, fields and disciplines. Students being able to switch practices between one setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting, and to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes.

All three models have merit and a blended view seems to be an appropriate choice for academic literacy course designers. Lea and Street (2006:158) state that the models are not “mutually exclusive” and that no model surpasses another but that qualities of all of them should be incorporated. For courses such as AGLA 121 such an inclusive approach seems relevant.

### 2.6.2 Luke and Freebody’s model

Originally designed as a model of reading (Freebody & Luke, 1990), the four-resources model has been adopted for literacy teaching and learning and could also provide a framework for what tertiary students need to know and should be able to do. The model proposes the following roles that students should embody if they want to be competent in tertiary academic literacy: code breakers, meaning makers, text users and text analysts/critics. Characteristics of these roles are discussed below (Luke & Freebody, 1999; Maiers, 2008).

Students are expected to be **code breakers** where they must be able to recognise, understand, and use language features such as syntax, style, patterns, conventions and discourses of various texts. Students must also become **meaning makers**, where they are capable of understanding and creating appropriate and meaningful texts through making use of the following strategies: skimming/scanning, determining what is the most important in texts, making connections, making inferences, and synthesizing information. In addition, students must also be **text users** where they are able to use language for the correct social and cultural functions. Students must also be able to apply what they have acquired across different genres and texts and thereby illustrate an understanding of the differences in various structures, genres and formats of texts. Finally, students must become text analysts / critics where they are able to take a critical stance by critiquing texts for appropriate uses.

### 2.6.3 Cazden *et al.*'s model

Cazden *et al.* (1996:83) propose a “pedagogy of multiliteracies” model with the following four main factors that need to be integrated so that students can become academically literate: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. With **situated practice** the aim is that students must become “masters” in practice through the immersion in authentic academic learning communities. Within these communities, collaboration between lecturers, students and peers is necessary for learning. Learning is also dependent on “heavily contextualised specific knowledge practices and domains” (Cazden *et al.*, 1996:84-85).

However, not only immersion is important in the process of acquiring academic literacy. As a foundation of learning and for students to be consciously aware of what they are acquiring, **overt instruction** is necessary (cf. Cazden *et al.*, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Unfortunately, in some cases overt instruction has quite negative associations of memorization and drilling exercises. Nevertheless, during overt instruction, the process of scaffolding can be applied where knowledge can be constructed upon what the students already know (Cazden *et al.*, 1996:86).

After the students' knowledge has been scaffolded through practice and previous knowledge, they need to **critically frame** “their growing mastery in practice and conscious control and understanding in relation to the historical, social, cultural, political, ideological, and value-centred relations of particular systems of knowledge and social practice”. The critical framing pedagogical act of Cazden *et al.* (1996:86) is similar to Foucault's model of knowledge framing (cf. Foucault, 1972). Foucault's framing of knowledge model proposes that students gain entry into academic discourse communities when they are able to reframe ideas corresponding to theories and concepts of the specific academic community and are capable of using the correct

and appropriate use of language pertaining to the academic community. Students must learn to distance themselves personally and theoretically and develop and learn to display skills of analysing and critiquing what they have learned. Ultimately students must be able to apply what they have learnt and eventually create their own knowledge to be transferred and used within their discourse communities (Cazden *et al.*, 1996:87; Hoadly-Maidment, 2000:168). When students can reflectively demonstrate that they can create academic discourses for their own goals and purposes, they have reached the stage of **transformed practice** (Cazden *et al.*, 1996:87).

#### 2.6.4 Cope and Kalantzis's model

Cope and Kalantzis's (2009:184) "transformative pedagogies of multiliteracies" model is based on Cazden *et al.*'s model. According to Picard (2006:145), the following knowledge processes in Cope and Kalantzis's model can be applied to academic literacy teaching and learning: experiencing, conceptualizing, analysing, and applying.

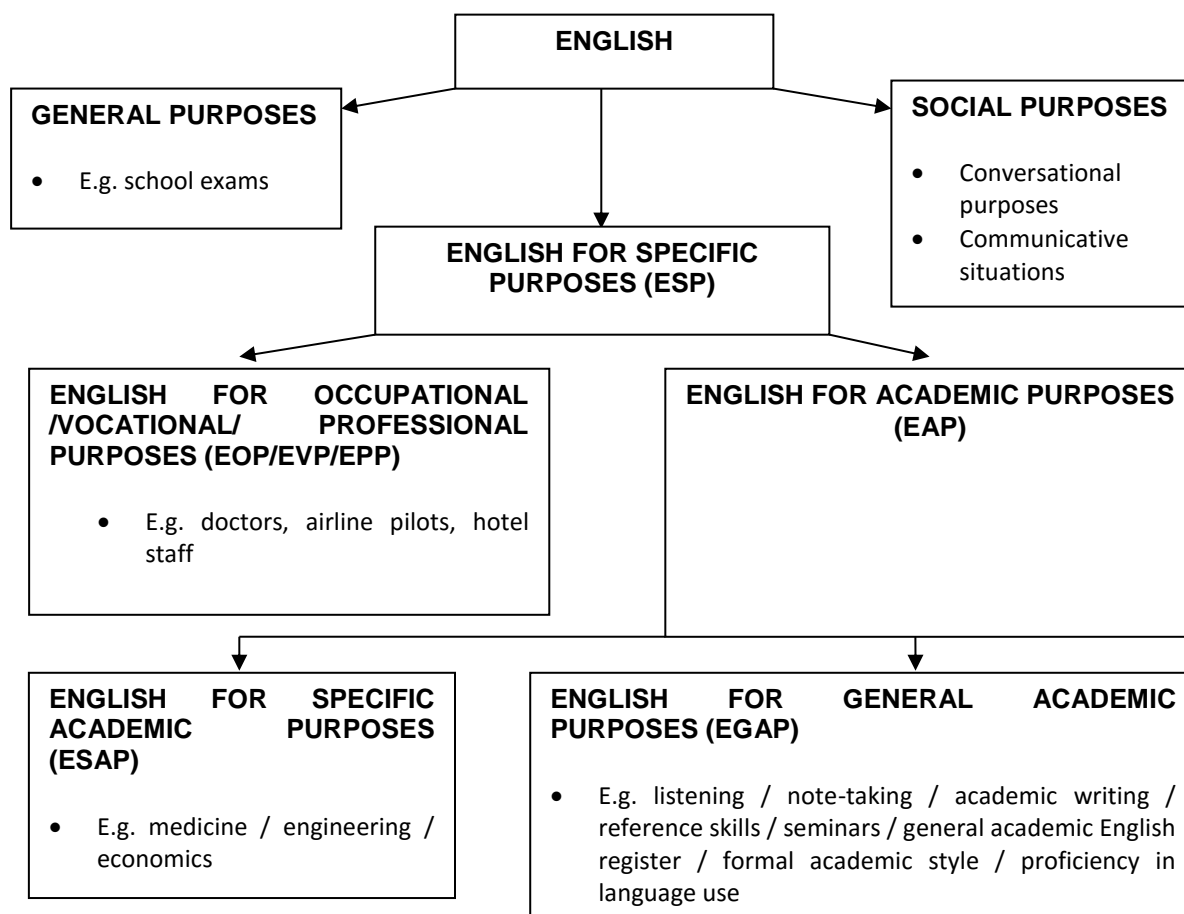
By **experiencing** the known, students need to reflect on their own perspectives, experiences, and familiar forms of literacy so that they can apply this knowledge to experiencing the new literacies they encounter in higher education. Students are exposed to unfamiliar discourses and are immersed into new ways of reading, writing and finding and collecting information. Students then need to take these new experiences and knowledge of these new discourses by means of **conceptualizing** the specialised knowledge developed by the "experts" in the discourse communities. Students also learn to make the "tacit explicit" and generalize from the particular (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009:185). Furthermore, students must be able to build and create abstract frameworks and develop concepts. The **analysing** processes involve students being able to draw inferences, make deductive conclusions, explore cause and effect and are proficient to develop sequences of reasoning and clarifying patterns in texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009:186). Moreover, students are required to analyse new knowledge in their specific discourses critically through evaluating other people's and their own perspectives. Thereafter, students should, in the process of **applying**, portray their new understanding and ways of representing knowledge in their specific academic discourses (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009:186).

After viewing the four chosen models of academic literacy acquisition, it becomes evident that there are multiple processes that students have to go through to acquire and develop academic literacy. There are many "information gaps" (cf. §1.8) that need to be filled. To assist students with these processes, universities have to provide students with opportunities to effectively go through all the stages of becoming academically literate and therefore offer to their students

academic literacy courses that are based on various approaches to literacy and academic literacy.

## 2.7 Approaches to academic literacy

The contentious “common-core” versus “subject-specific” approaches debate in academic literacy pedagogy has been deliberated on for at least twenty years (Carstens & Fletcher, 2009:319; Jordan, 1997:4). A lot of research regarding these approaches (cf. §1.8) to academic literacy is rooted in English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). Jordan (1997:3) provides the following categorization of the various purposes of English in Figure 2.1:



**Figure 2.1: Various purposes of English (Jordan, 1997:3)**

Thus, from Figure 2.1 it is evident that a lot of information is available on the various functions of English, specifically for academic purposes (EAP). Shum (2006:1) is of the opinion that

insufficient research exists in languages other than English. In this study, the focus is on Afrikaans for general academic purposes and Afrikaans for specific academic purposes based on the literature from EGAP and ESAP. The reason why the focus is on EGAP and ESAP is because currently the academic literacy course that is evaluated for this study is mostly similar to EGAP and the researcher is trying to establish whether this type of approach is useful to the case being evaluated.

An in-depth distinction between **generic** (common-core) and **specific** approaches to academic literacy is provided in the following section to postulate a foundation for the evaluation of the written component of the academic literacy course that is evaluated in this study. As with the models described in Section 2.6, the approaches described in the following section must not be viewed as completely separate approaches but as a continuum that function effectively when the best aspects of each are combined, even though they are referred to separately.

### 2.7.1 Generic approaches

Amongst others, Curry (2004:57), Dudley-Evans and St John (1998:41), Jordan (1997:6-9), and Hyland (2006:9) are of the opinion that certain core skills and activities are common to most if not all academic disciplines and can be transferred across contexts. Some of these skills and activities include:

- listening to lectures and taking notes;
- giving oral presentations by taking part in tutorials and presenting seminars;
- conducting Internet and library searches for relevant texts;
- skimming and scanning texts for information;
- reading articles, textbooks, and other material;
- consulting dictionaries;
- paraphrasing and summarizing arguments;
- writing reports, dissertations, essays, and examination answers;
- avoiding plagiarism; and
- creating bibliographies.

For students to acquire the above-mentioned skills, they also need study competence which involves the following affective and cognitive characteristics of successful students: self-awareness, logical thinking, critical questioning, independence of mind, and self-confidence. These characteristics involve the **underlying competence** that enables students to interpret the flow of new knowledge, irrespective of the subject, that all students need for successful study (Waters & Waters, 1992:264-267). Huckin (2003:5-6) is also of the opinion that students, regardless of their field of study, must be taught the basic underlying competence which entails

general linguistic competence and skills. Generic literacy courses can thus assist students with general linguistic competence and skills needed for their tertiary education communication purposes.

Generic literacy courses can also be seen as **wide-angle courses**, which “seek to provide learners with a general capacity to enable them to cope with undefined eventualities in the future” (Widdowson, 1983:6). Huckin (2003:5-6) mentions that the problem with the more general type of pedagogy is that, “as the angle gets wider and wider, it risks losing specificity and therefore face validity for any one individual student in the class”. In contrast to wide-angle courses, **narrow-angle courses** “provide learners with a restricted competence to enable them to cope with clearly defined tasks” (Widdowson, 1983:6). However, Huckin (2003:3) states that a narrow-angle position “can easily lead to a teacher-centred prescriptivism and to an overly rigid focus on certain forms and tasks at the expense of others. Furthermore, such an approach fails to prepare students for the unpredictable new forms of communication that await them in their professional careers”.

Another reason why a generic approach could be followed is because literacy lecturers are not necessarily specialists in subject-specific conventions and disciplines and lack expert training, knowledge and confidence (Hyland, 2006:10; Pecorari, 2009:91). Spack (1988:30) is of the opinion that “we should leave the teaching of writing in the disciplines to the teachers of those disciplines”. Robinson (1991:87) mentions that literacy lecturers should not be “pseudoteacher[s] of subject matter.” Furthermore, Spack (1988:37) states the following: “English faculty, even when they collaborate with content teachers, find they have little basis for dealing with the content. They therefore find themselves in the uncomfortable position of being less knowledgeable than their students. Students likewise can resent finding themselves in a situation in which their instructor cannot fully explain or answer questions about the subject matter.” Belcher (2006:139) concurs with this view and mentions that literacy lecturers may find technical content uninteresting, unfamiliar and even intimidating. Hyland (2012:32-34) states that many English (language) lecturers have concerns regarding the “depth of knowledge they needed of a subject”. Abbott (1983:35) also poses the issue that in how many subject content areas, any language lecturer could acquire even a “layman's outline knowledge”. In addition, Belcher (2006:140) mentions that literacy lecturers as “outsiders can only approximate what community insiders know and do, and they may actually do more harm than good”. However, it is important to mention that many content lecturers (subject specialists) do not always see the need to address language issues as they are often of the opinion that it is not their “job” to do so (Airy, 2012:74). Furthermore, many content lecturers do not always have the knowledge and skills to address their students’ language needs (Van de Poel & Van Dyk, 2015:171).

For most literacy lecturers, it is important to improve undergraduates' grammar and vocabulary and the stylistic refinement when assessing written work. For most subject lecturers, on the other hand, content is more important than "the quality of the medium through which it is delivered", (Evans & Morrison, 2010:392-395). Moreover, subject lecturers do not always understand the role that language plays in their subjects. They also do not always have the training or background and are often too busy to address language issues in detail (Hyland, 2006:11). Some lecturers also complain that the language is so bad that they cannot understand what some students are trying to say.

Even though some universities are able to have homogeneous subject-specific literacy classes, many universities do not have that privilege and have hybrid classes composed of students from various language backgrounds and different disciplines (Huckin, 2003:5-6). According to Eldridge (2008:111), literacy lecturers with hybrid classes "struggle to provide meaningful levels of specialization". With such classes, Huckin (2003:5-6) points out that literacy lecturers should not focus on the needs and interests of individual students but must instead "concentrate on topics of more general relevance".

There has been much criticism against generic approaches. As Hyland (2006:10) mentions, generic approaches do not "prepare students for unpredictable assignments and encourages unimaginative and formulaic essays". Generic approaches to academic literacy can also be linked to the autonomous model of literacy (cf. §2.3.1) where students who struggle with academic literacy at university are seen as only as having deficits which can be remedied with a few academic literacy classes. Generic approaches can be seen as a "service activity" or "marginalised as a remedial exercise" (Hyland, 2002b:386) or a "band-aid measure" (Hyland, 2006:12) to fix deficits. In some cases the status and autonomy of literacy courses are questioned and Spack (1988:37) states that it is difficult for literacy courses "to have a carefully planned pedagogical or rhetorical rationale when it is dependent on another content course". Furthermore, Hyland (2002b:387) mentions that language "must not be taught in a vacuum and should prepare students for the language and skills they will be exposed to".

In contrast to generic approaches, specific approaches "recognize the complexities of engaging in the specific literacies of the disciplines" (Hyland, 2006:11-12) and are discussed in the next section.

## 2.7.2 Specific approaches

The concept of specificity originally derives from the idea of Halliday *et al.* (1964) that language and activities must centre on specific disciplines and occupations. Thus, contrary to generic approaches, many researchers propose a more subject- (discipline- or genre-) specific approach to academic literacy teaching and learning. At some universities, funding bodies, policy-makers and academic departments have examined the effectiveness of and need for generic-type literacy courses that are seen as peripheral “service” courses (Evans & Green, 2007:5) and are therefore in favour of more subject-specific courses. Some of these generic academic literacy courses are viewed as “add-on” subjects (Amos, 1998:16). Potter (1996:48) is of the opinion that general support courses have had less success than subject-specific support ones as academic literacy development needs to be fundamental to the teaching of specific disciplines with clear focus and direction. Amos (1998:17) states that when academic literacy “skills are divorced from the subject content and out of context of the academic course, students find it difficult to make the transfer as each discipline has its own set of rules and conventions which the student has to internalise in order to learn effectively within that discipline”. Craig’s (1989:169) view is similar to Amos’ and asserts that academic literacy courses can only be effective if they “ride on the back of subject-specific content in order to be effective”.

As the development and acquisition of academic literacy lies at the heart of university students successfully completing their tertiary education (Amos, 1998:21), it is the responsibility of universities to provide explicit instruction in academic literacy. However, Scott (1994) as quoted by Amos (1998:14) mentions that universities should not offer generic academic literacy courses, as “inadequate provision for students to develop discipline-specific skills affect the student’s ability to succeed academically within the higher education context”.

In most specific approaches, instruction is based on authentic content and materials (Belcher, 2006:135-137). However, authenticity is seen by many as a problematic term as what is authentic for one student may not be authentic for another, especially in heterogeneous classes where students might be from the same broad discipline but have different subjects. Huckin (2003:5) proposes that where possible, the content should be recognizable, form part of the students’ specific disciplines or at least be something important that the students know is important for their studies. This can provide face validity and could also increase the students’ motivation to learn. Thus, if possible, especially with homogeneous classes, Huckin (2003:5) recommends that instruction should be directly subject-specific and is pedagogically the most effective way.

Some of the advantages of specific academic literacy courses are that they do not waste the students' time as they focus on their needs; they seem more relevant to students and therefore seem more cost-effective than general language courses (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998:9).

It is clear that both generic and subject-specific approaches have pedagogical merit (Van de Poel & Van Dyk, 2015:174). A question that is raised by many is whether academic literacy programme designers should have to choose between the two. Elander (2003:48) mentions that “[d]iscipline-based skills training allows generic skills to be related more directly to subject-specific studying, so that the relevance of generic skills is clearer to students and allows skills training to be integrated with students’ programmes of study.” The aforementioned idea of Elander proposes a blend or synthesis of both general and specific skills to address the debate between generic and subject-specific approaches and is supported by many researchers. In the following section, this blended-approach proposal as well as other possible approaches is investigated.

### **2.7.3 Blended and other approaches**

Skillen (2006:141) mentions that students must learn both “generic and specific skills of the disciplines they are moving into”. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998:42) propose that students should firstly develop core academic skills that can then be transposed to more specific work. Baynham (1995:102) supports this blended-approach idea and recommends that language specialists and content specialists work closely together through team-teaching. Thies (2012:15-16) also agrees with the blended approach and proposes embedding academic literacies in the curricula of subjects through the collaboration between subject specialists and language and literacy specialists. This blended approach informed the suggestion made for AGLA 121 to assist nursing students (cf. §8.3) with academic writing tasks where both generic and subject-specific skills can be applied.

Yet the collaborative team-teaching solution mentioned above can pose obstacles, for example, logistical institutional constraints and the fact that not all parties are always willing to collaborate. Furthermore, it would take a great deal of effort and commitment from both the language and subject specialists (Belcher, 2006:140). Nevertheless, in some cases team-teaching has been successfully implemented where the “Jack-of-all-trades” literacy specialists are embedded in the specific disciplines (Hyland, 2012:32-34).

Though not easy to implement, some researchers go further and suggest that ideally the collaboration should not only be between generic literacy and learning specialists and subject specialists and advocate a university-wide approach where the entire institution (across

management, faculties and departments) through policies and formal structures, takes responsibility for first-year students' academic literacy development (Thies, 2012; Brady, 2013).

Belcher (2006:139) feels that the generic and subject specific and the wide versus narrow approach debate is not really important as pedagogical decisions should not focus on the generic or specific content, but rather as Huckin (2003:9) points out on students' needs. As it is the students and not the lecturers who have to become new members of academic discourse communities, focusing on student-specificity is essential, particularly in heterogeneous classes. The role of the lecturer should be to act as a facilitator and to instruct students in rhetorical and textual analytic strategies (Huckin, 2003:3). Lecturers should also do needs assessments of students and then work towards "tailored-to-fit" literacy instruction (Belcher, 2006:135).

In some cases, students are exposed to a plurality of discourses from multiple subjects and disciplines. In such circumstances neither a generic nor a subject-specific literacy course would be useful to them. Thus, due to the "plurality of literacies" (Hyland, 2012:32-34) that exists within academic discourse communities, students should be given the opportunities, tools and examples to deal with a range of literacies and to cope with disciplinary differences in academic discourses (Bhatia, 2002:27). Van Dyk and Van de Poel (2013:59) suggest that students need exposure to generic and discipline-specific academic discourses through acculturation where students interact with lecturers, peers and texts and are able to "assimilate, understand, embrace, interact, and engage" with academic discourses in a variety of contexts. Similarly, Elbow (1991:152) proposes that students should be taught the "principle of discourse variation" where students are made aware of and sensitised to the idea of differences in form. Belcher and Braine (1995:xii) agree with Elbow and states that "this seems indeed a humane way of preparing students for the realpolitik of academic discourse disparity". Students should thus be exposed to as many discourses as possible to prepare them for their entire academic careers.

In Table 2.3, Van de Poel and Van Dyk (2015:172-173) summarise the strengths and weaknesses of a range of academic literacy teaching approaches that could be utilised by universities, depending on their various circumstances.

**Table 2.3 Van de Poel and Van Dyk's (2015:172-173) Academic Literacy (AcLit) Approach**

<b>Academic Literacy (AcLit) Approach</b>	<b>Levels</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Generic</b> <i>No specific content requirements</i>	Institution:	Material development easy: no subject-specific knowledge required handbook possible	Often perceived as remedial training Integration at macro-level only
	Lecturers:	Linguistic profile only	Low status
	Students:	Materials may include study / thinking skills ... Broad acculturation	Courses may be perceived as: irrelevant, too easy, not transferable to other courses
<b>AcLit Approach</b> <b>AcLit experts teach subject-specific content</b>	Institution	AcLit organised institution-wide	AcLit experts need to be appointed and integrated in disciplines (faculty members)
	Lecturers	Potential to develop subject-knowledge	May not have adequate subject-knowledge Possible low status in eyes of institution and students
	Students	Interest and motivation high	Courses may be perceived as not important Low class attendance
<b>Subject-specific approach</b> <b>Disciplinary experts teach AcLit</b>	Institution	Experts paid by faculties	Lecturers may need additional training and coaching
	Lecturers	High status Potential to develop AcLit knowledge	Lack of AcLit knowledge (genre, style, metalanguage, writing conventions) May not spend teaching on AcLit, but on content
	Students	High face validity Focused acculturation	False comfort with low AcLit levels
<b>Collaborative Approach</b> <b>AcLit and disciplinary experts teach in tandem</b>	Institution	Synergy between disciplines and colleagues Real CLIL	Time-consuming, not efficient unless colleagues remain in own domain
	Lecturers	Possibility of inter-disciplinary collaboration and research	Difficult to organise Lecturer's perception of difference in status may interfere; turf wars
	Students	Perception of holistic, integrated teaching	Potential confusion: two lecturers in one class; two lecturers in different classes

In their study, Van de Poel and Van Dyk (2015:174) came to the conclusion that no decisive evidence exists that either a generic or subject-specific approach is more effective than the other. These approaches should not be seen as being mutually exclusive, but could rather be applied in a synthesized way where the best-of-both could be incorporated. Academic literacy could be taught “in symbiosis with subject-specific content” and could be viewed as being “situated on a continuum and the pendulum will swing sometimes more towards content-specific teaching and sometimes more towards academic literacy teaching” (Van de Poel & Van Dyk, 2015:171).

It is apparent from the literature that academic literacy teaching is situation and context-dependent and can occur at different stages and contexts in students’ academic careers. Academic literacy courses such as AGLA 121 cannot possibly teach students everything about academic literacy in their first year at university, but can expose them to what may be required in their other modules. It cannot be academic literacy courses such as AGLA 121’s sole responsibility to support students on their academic literacy acquisition journeys. Faculties and subject groups also need to invest in their students’ academic literacy development.

## **2.8 Relevance and purpose of the literature for this study**

After describing all the models and approaches to the teaching and learning of academic literacy, it became clear that whatever type of intervention is chosen, it is important to evaluate academic literacy interventions on a continuous basis and to question whether the models and approaches on which these interventions are based are truly relevant and beneficial to the students. These evaluations should be researched using both qualitative and quantitative methods, and not mostly qualitative as Lea (2004:740) mentioned which is why this study utilised a mixed-methods approach. Statistical evidence is needed to determine the pedagogical impact of the approaches used for interventions. The findings of these evaluations should be reported and shared – we as researchers are after all also a discourse community. The reports of synthesised, eclectic best practices could therefore expand on the good intentions of the theoretical frameworks (such as the models mentioned in §2.6).

It would be ignorant to assume and envisage that, even after reporting and sharing good academic practices based on theoretical frameworks, a one-size fits all solution (McWilliams & Allan, 2014) for academic literacy interventions exists. As already mentioned (§2.2), due to a broad-range of variables such as economies of scale, affordability, sustainability, and context specific requirements, some universities are faced with many restrictions regarding the type of academic literacy interventions they can provide. However, being aware of other possible

solutions and by sharing these solutions could only strengthen the academic literacy discourse community as a whole. Most importantly, the first-year students' experience with academic literacy can be enhanced.

The following quote of Lea (2004:754) summarises the relevance of this chapter:

As course designers we need to recognize that engaging in new and familiar literacy practices is an integral part of engaging in institutional practices and processes as part of successful study, whatever the course, whatever the level, whatever the text types and whatever the technologies used to mediate these texts. How one engages in these depends not merely upon a tacit knowledge of the workings of the institution, its discourse and genres, but a more contested understanding of what it means to participate, within different contexts and for different purposes, as both students and tutors.

## 2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the terms **literacy**, **academic literacy**, **academic discourse** and **academic discourse communities** were explicated. This chapter described the various approaches to and models of this multifaceted term that is academic literacy. It became evident that being literate in a tertiary environment is not as straightforward as just being able to read and write. Becoming and being literate today is an intricate process and even more so for university students due to various variables having an impact on students' academic literacy.

As the focus of this study is not on academic literacy in the wider and general sense, but on academic writing, the following chapter reviews the nature, extent, characteristics and conventions of academic writing. In order to address the main research question of this thesis, which is whether the academic literacy course offered to first-year students has an effect on student writing, the current theories, trends and methods in teaching and learning of academic writing are also scrutinized.

## CHAPTER 3: ACADEMIC WRITING

*“The essay then, is not a routine exercise, a chore for the student to write, a chore for the professor to read. It is, if properly approached by both parties, education in the truest sense.”*

*(Harris & McDougall, 1958)*

### 3.1 Introduction

The focus of this study and this chapter in particular will be on academic writing as writing is a high stakes activity and remains one of the primary means of assessment of knowledge and understanding at university. By assisting students with academic writing, universities can contribute to students successfully completing their studies (cf. Archer, 2008:248; Atkinson, 2011:1; Butler, 2013:71; Carstens, 2009:5; Daly & Miller, 1975:244; Hyland, 2009:5,123; Lillis & Scott, 2007:9; Lonka, 2003:114; Norton, 1990:411; Zhao & Llosa, 2008:154).

In this chapter an attempt is made to define and contextualise academic writing (§3.2). Some of the possible influences that could affect the learning and acquisition of academic writing are pointed out (§3.3). An overview is given of the various learning theories (§3.4), approaches to and techniques for (§3.5) the teaching of academic writing and various types of academic writing assessment (§3.6) are included. Aspects pertaining to feedback are also discussed (§3.7). The general conventions of academic writing (§3.8) are provided as well as what difficulties (§3.9) students (especially first-year students) experience with these universal conventions. Finally, academic genres are described with the focus on the academic argument in essays (§3.10).

### 3.2 Contextualising academic writing

Just as difficult and problematic as it is to attempt to define academic literacy (cf. §2.4.1), so is it to define academic writing as it cannot be defined as a single, autonomous, generalizable and homogenous phenomenon and activity in the tertiary environment (Butler, 2007b:4; Galbraith *et al.*, 2007:1; Thonney, 2011). Downs and Wardle (2007:555) support this view and mention that “academic writing is constituted by and in the diversity and genres that mediate a wide variety of activities within higher education; its use as an umbrella term is dangerously misleading”.

Academic writing can be viewed as a multi-faceted activity where it is not only used to copy, document or present knowledge, but also to develop it (Bräuer, 2003:136-137). Bräuer mentions that writing is a “complex individual and social phenomenon that neither appears all of

a sudden when one enters university as a new student, nor disappears when one graduates". Recent research has emphasized that disciplines have different views of knowledge, different research practices, and different ways of seeing the world, and that these differences are produced in diverse forms of argument and expression (cf. Hyland, 2000; Johns, 1997). Essentially, academic writing is not "a single undifferentiated mass" (Hyland, 2002a:352), but a variety of developing subject-specific literacies that students develop and acquire and must be able to use in appropriate contexts. Contexts are important for student writers as what is considered good writing in one context may not be the case in another context. Different contexts often impose different and even contrasting constraints on student writers (Leki, 1995:24).

One perspective of academic writing that many lecturers and researchers seem to have in common is that students cannot write and that they appear to be getting worse every year (Mitchell & Evison, 2006:68). Some of the negative connotations typically linked to first-year student academic writing include: bad, basic, deficit, difficulties, developmental, elementary, remedial, and remediation (cf. Fox, 1999:24; Ivanič & Lea, 2006:9; Mitchell & Evison, 2006:68; Mullin, 2006:168; Russell, 2003:vi; Skillen, 2006:141; Tomic, 2006:56).

Not only are the academic writing levels of South African students seen as being sub-standard, but worldwide movements have emerged to develop students' writing skills at university level. The poor academic writing "skills" of students entering higher education are seen as an "international problem" and interpreted as "standards are falling" (Büker, 2003:41; Russell, 2003:v). This is usually attributed to the massification of higher education bringing about a changed student population with students with mixed linguistic resources (cf. Curry, 2006:183; Fraser & Killen, 2003:254; Hirst *et al.*, 2004:66; Lillis, 2006:30; Olivier & Olivier, 2012:31; Russell, 2003:v; Skillen, 2006:140; Tomic, 2006:54; Weese, 1999:4). Due to massification and diverse student populations in the United Kingdom during the 1990s, a need was expressed by the professional world as well as the universities to support students with their academic writing in order to maintain standards in higher education and to provide students with the opportunity for lifelong learning (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006:xxii). In the United States of America, national surveys indicated that students had difficulties with their writing (Cho & Schunn, 2007:409-410) and therefore many universities have provided students with courses such as "first-year writing" or "freshman composition" (Curry, 2006:183). Skillen (2006:140) mentions that in Australia, even though learning was assessed through academic writing by means of essays and reports, for example, not a lot of formal instruction in writing was provided to students. Massification also influenced written student teaching and learning assessment practices at African universities.

Because of large numbers, many students in Africa are not sufficiently exposed to critical analysis and academic writing (Mohamedbhai, 2008:35).

Many of these issues surrounding academic writing worldwide can be summarised in one word: assumptions (cf. §1.2). Lecturers often tacitly assume that students are adequately prepared to successfully complete the courses they are enrolled for. In South Africa, many universities assume that if Grade 12 learners performed well in their final examination, they would be able to cope with all the demands at university (Fraser & Killen, 2003:254). For many years it was believed by content lecturers that it was not necessary to teach students academic writing skills as they assumed that students had already been exposed to academic writing at school level (Lonka, 2003:113; Skillen, 2006:140). Some lecturers still believe that students could automatically cope on their own with all the writing challenges that they are faced with (Ivanič & Lea, 2006:6; Hirst *et al.*, 2004:66). This is problematic as many students truly are unfamiliar with academic writing at university (Bizzell, 1992:7; Hyland, 2009:123) which is why courses such as AGLA 121 are necessary. Often students do not know what the requirements of their written assignments are whilst the lecturers are under the impression that their assignment instructions and expectations were quite clear. Weese *et al.* (1999:xviii) state that lecturers' expectations are often implicit and that lecturers need to reflect on the ways that the assignments are worded and structured so that students understand the expectations and learning goals. Norton (1990:411) also mentions that there are often discrepancies between what students believe lecturers look for and the actual criteria set by the lecturers. Students are often more interested in content and lecturers focus more on argument (Norton, 1990:411).

### **3.2.1 The need for academic writing instruction at university level**

For students to be successful both academically and professionally, they need sufficient academic writing skills as they are expected to function within a wide range of written genres. Many of these skills are foreign to them and writing support and instruction are therefore critical (Cho & Schunn, 2007:409; Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006:xxii). Russell (2003:v) also stresses the importance of assisting students with a diverse range of academic writing skills, as it is clear that many of the jobs that students will enter have become extremely specialised and consequently so have the writing requirements.

Even though many content lecturers are aware that students may need help with academic writing, due to workload issues and large student populations, the formal attention paid to writing practices in content classes are "near neglect" (Cho & Schunn, 2007:410). This could influence and hinder the development and acquisition of effective writing skills. Musgrove (2006) summarises the problem with student writing that content lecturers often enhance: "[m]ost

college professors would prefer to complain about poor writing rather than simply refuse to accept it. Therefore, students rarely experience any significant penalties for their bad behaviors in writing. They may get a low mark on an assignment, but it would be a rare event indeed if a student failed a course for an inadequate writing performance.”

Not only do individual subject lecturers and disciplines not always respond to the writing challenges of their students (Russell, 2003:v), but institutionally writing instruction also “continues to be typically a peripheral concern in universities” (Prosser & Webb, 1994:137). Some lecturers argue that writing need not and cannot be explicitly taught as there are no set rules to teach (Thonney, 2011). Some lecturers contend that students must pick up writing skills through “osmosis” (Skillen, 2006:142). Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995:13) are of the opinion that if academic writing is not explicitly taught then it will be “a lengthy apprenticeship and enculturation” for the students to become competent writers and members of their respective discourse communities. This could be problematic, especially as many students have full academic programmes and are constrained for time (as is evident in the case study of this study).

Fortunately, many institutions do see the need and benefits associated with isolating and actively teaching academic writing (Curry & Hewings, 2003:21; Thonney, 2011), especially as academic writing can have serious consequences for students’ future academic and professional lives. Myles (2002), for example, is of the opinion that being able to write well is not an inherent and naturally acquired skill and that a possible way that writing can be learned is through practice in formal instructional settings.

The support that universities offer students varies, from compulsory academic literacy and or writing courses, optional composition courses, writing centres, or via e-learning. In the following section, the nature of academic writing provision at universities is discussed.

### **3.2.2 The nature of academic writing provision**

It is apparent that explicit instruction of academic writing is necessary as it is important that universities support students instead of letting students “flounder along and gradually pick up the expectations of academia” (Nightingale, 1991:7). To assist students with academic writing, the NWU makes use of a writing centre (writing laboratory) and compulsory academic literacy courses.

Archer (2010:497) states that the identity, character and nature of **writing centres** could vary due to the approaches to student writing followed. Writing centres usually focus on one-on-one

instruction; work with undergraduate and graduate students, and even staff; train assistants as writing tutors; and reach out to faculty to establish the assessment criteria and clarify writing assignments (Mullin, 2006:177). Unfortunately, many stakeholders are reminded of the “the sticky history of remediation that haunts writing center work” (Grimm, 1999:84). Other words frequently associated with writing centres include: “add-on”, “remediation”, “decontextualized”, “drop-in”, (Archer, 2010:496) and “ad hoc” (Archer, 2008:249). Despite all these negative connotations with writing centres, the demand for methodological and pedagogical knowledge and support regarding writing is ever-increasing and writing centres have to meet those demands through “consultation, curriculum development, training, and networking” (Bräuer, 2003:138). Mullin (2006:177) mentions that “successful writing centres gain a global view of the institutional culture of teaching, learning, theory, and practice and can better understand how to use the currency of the academy (research) and the vocabulary of academics or administrators to explain writing to multiple academic audiences”. The NWU has a writing centre (called a writing laboratory) to assist all students with academic writing tasks and this is discussed later in the chapter (§3.11).

Regarding academic writing, to assist students with the transition from high school to university, many universities provide interventions in the form of **writing courses** as part of the students’ curriculum. The main purposes of these courses are to enable underprepared students to be able to express themselves academically in a variety of contexts and to initiate students “into the written discourse of academia” (Fox, 1999:21).

One aspect that has to be addressed is the length of these writing courses. Some courses last only a semester (such as the one in this study). Others are provided for a year or even longer. The reason why these courses vary in length can be due to the different circumstances and logistics at universities. Sperber (2011) summarises the problem with shorter courses as follows:

Too many universities, even those making a serious attempt to include a quality Freshman Composition course; do not follow up the basic course with subsequent intensive writing classes. Many students improve their writing during their freshman year and then either hit a plateau in their writing or, more often, forget what they learned and lapse into sloppy writing. Educators know that the learned skills must be reinforced but many schools fail to do so.

In many cases instruction in academic writing at universities is provided in the form of “learning support units” or “study skills centres” to teach academic literacy. The focus of the given provision is usually also broad in nature, not focusing on writing alone but also on aspects such as learning and communicating for academic purposes. In many cases, the teaching of the academic writing is separated from the academic departments and treated in an ad hoc way

and this at times results in academic writing being seen as a “low-status area of work” and is “marginalised in the hierarchy of activities in the university” (Ivanič & Lea, 2006:10).

For the students, when they start their writing journey in writing courses, it could often feel quite “fragmented” (Weese, 1999b:45), especially if the writing course assignments and the assignments they do in their other courses are not similar in nature. Musgrove (2006) mentions that some students can even display “passive aggressive behaviour” if they do not have an interest in the writing they have to do in compulsory writing courses. Weese (1999b:45) states that ideally, when students are exposed to academic writing at the beginning of their academic careers, the writing courses should assist them to view their education in a relevant and cohesive way. The relevance of these courses is a very important aspect for students. If the focus of these courses are only on “mechanical training”, and the topics seem “artificial” to students (Schilb, 1991:178), then students will not do their best with academic writing. Monroe (2003:7) mentions that it is important for students that the writing they have to do in writing courses is fully integrated with the work they have to do in their chosen disciplines. Regarding the nature of many writing courses, Rose (1983:109) feels that some courses are remedial in nature and are self-contained which means that “they have little conceptual or practical connection to the larger academic environment in which our students find themselves”.

The abovementioned quote by Rose links up with the familiar debate regarding the nature of writing courses, which is whether the courses should be **generic or subject-specific or discipline-specific** (cf. §2.7) Not only is the debate alive in South Africa, but also in the United States of America and Europe (Russell, 2003:vii). On the one side, some researchers and lecturers argue that there are some generic, transferable skills such as: being able to evaluate and synthesise data, thinking critically, and organizing an argument. They claim that these generic conventions should be taught so that students can write better academic assignments and enjoy the writing experience. They also mention that students ought to be exposed to the variable nature of academic writing and that this could be covered in generic courses (cf. Pally, 2001:281; Thonney 2011). On the other side, some researchers and lecturers argue strongly that academic writing cannot be assumed as being a generalizable, single set of skills (Russell, 2003:vi; Thonney, 2011) that can be taught to the masses. Some state that teaching academic writing should not be an “add-on activity” and remedial in nature (Mitchell & Evison, 2006:72). As a proponent of discipline-specific writing courses, Wells (1992:290) mentions that every discipline has their own specific practices such as the criteria for determining validity and relevance, and most importantly the conventions of the academic argument. Thus, some feel that teaching academic writing should be an essential part of their continuing discipline-specific learning and should take place within the curriculum of the discipline and should be the

responsibility of the lecturers of the specific discipline (Mitchell & Evison, 2006:72). However, this responsibility could be problematic for many subject or discipline specialists, as some of them view content as more important than language matters. Furthermore, not all subject specialists have the background and training to address language issues (cf. §2.7.1; Van de Poel & Van Dyk, 2015:171). Skillen (2006:141) proposes a solution and states that students must be exposed to both generic and specific writing skills.

Whether the types of academic writing courses are generic or subject-specific, directly connected to the students' curricula or not, it is important that some sort of support is provided to "acculturate students into the norms of academic literacy" (Ivanič & Lea, 2006:11). Writing courses are essential at university level and has "extrinsic importance" and is seen as one of the main characteristics of "graduateness" which is important for student success (Catt & Gregory, 2006:17). Regarding this importance of graduateness, Torrance *et al.* (2000:189) state that the "ability to write clearly and fluently is undoubtedly one of the more important skills required of graduates". In order to assist first-year students at the NWU's Potchefstroom Campus with "graduateness", the AGLA 121 course was developed.

It is imperative that the relevance, purpose and need of the course should be clear to students. The students should always be the most important stakeholders in writing courses. Johns (1997:92) supports this view and claims the following: "[t]he most important factor in the success of any pedagogy is the student. Unless we can motivate our students, providing them with tools and experiences that are relevant to their current and future lives outside of our literacy classrooms, we are not doing our jobs."

It is clear that being able to write effectively is important for tertiary education institutions. Whatever approaches these institutions choose to assist students, there are many other possible influences that could potentially hinder the development and acquisition of academic writing. Some of these influences are discussed in the next section.

### **3.3 Possible influences affecting student writing**

Many factors affect the acquisition and development of students' academic writing (Archer, 2008:249). Firstly, the influence of schooling (§3.3.1) is deliberated. Subsequently, poor reading (§3.3.2) and technology-related skills (§3.3.3) are discussed. Thereafter, cognitive (§3.3.4), social (§3.3.5), and affective (§3.3.6) factors that could influence the acquisition and development of academic writing are examined.

### 3.3.1 Schooling background

As mentioned countless times before, university lecturers and employers are of the opinion that the written communication skills of undergraduate students are not up to standard (Bothma & Cloete, 1964:2). The reason why such an outdated source was used is to indicate that seemingly not much has changed regarding the writing skills and abilities of undergraduate students over several decades. Interestingly, Bothma and Cloete (1964:2) also blamed the poor writing abilities on the poor matriculation (Grade 12) results of that time. In turn, the poor matric results were blamed on the writing quality produced in the lower grades (Bothma & Cloete, 1964:2). Today, many researchers feel that the matriculation results and the writing produced by undergraduate students are still poor. Van Dyk *et al.* (2007:154) are of the opinion that the poor language skills of first-year students worldwide could be attributed to the secondary schools' language curricula that do not prepare the students to function effectively at universities. Years after Bothma and Cloete (1964) and Van Dyk *et al.* (2007), Anon (2014) confirms that the literacy and writing issues do not only exist in the Grade 12 year, but in the earlier years. Pretorius (2007:106) also mentions that academic literacy is mostly associated with tertiary and also secondary education, but points out that academic literacy already starts in primary school and yet research into the academic literacy practices in primary schools in the South African context remains mostly under-researched.

Pretorius (2014:53) is of the opinion that the place to start with this important research is in Grade 4, as worldwide this grade is imperative in the instructional transition of "learning to read to reading to learn". In this phase, primary school learners must scaffold their literacy skills as they are supposed to become more academic. Literacy practices such as acquiring, transmitting and transforming knowledge become increasingly important. The registers that learners need to understand and use in the discourses of their academic subjects have to be learned at this stage. The CALP (cf. §1.2) is thus starting to form in this grade. During this time, learners must learn to access and make meaning from written texts and manage a larger vocabulary. Learners must also deal with more complex syntactic structures and must be able to use passives and nominalization (Pretorius, 2014:53).

It is thus clear that Grade 4 in primary school plays an important part in the acquisition and development of academic literacy that all university students will need. Unfortunately, in South Africa, many learners are basically still functionally illiterate when they reach Grade 4 (Masondo, 2014b). This has dire consequences for schools and universities. For further research possibilities, the effects of writing taught in primary schools in South Africa on the matriculation

results and eventually academic writing at tertiary level could be an important avenue to explore.

Regarding the influence of language teaching in secondary schools internationally and in South Africa, university students are expected to produce appropriate academic texts. However, first-year students often use writing strategies and conventions that they had learnt in secondary school which are not adequate to cope with academic discourse conventions (Preus, 1999:67).

### **3.3.2 Poor reading skills**

The importance of academic reading as well as its association with writing has been well documented (Butler, 2007a:55; Creme & Lea, 2008:5; Van Dyk *et al.*, 2013:353). The purposes and demands of reading at school level differ from reading at tertiary level (Taraban *et al.*, 2000:284). According to Sengupta (2002), academic reading is “complex, multi-level and different from other kinds of reading”. Many South African students have low levels of reading ability and do not have adequate reading strategies and comprehension abilities (Dreyer & Nel, 2003:349; Nel *et al.*, 2004:95). One of the causes could be that schools (primary and secondary) do not emphasize and pay enough attention to reading skills beyond the early primary years and some teachers only see reading as a “leisure-time activity” (Pretorius, 2002:190). In secondary school, the instruction of reading comprehension often only includes the reading of a short passage in which learners then have to answer a few short or multiple-choice questions about the passage (Dreyer & Nel, 2003:35). Furthermore, Taraban *et al.* (2000:284) mention that the textbooks and reading materials at university differ significantly from those used at high school as the materials covered are somewhat different to what they were used to and the textbooks are more sophisticated.

The low reading levels of students are problematic as reading for and at university level are demanding considering “the sheer amount, the range of topics and the variety in tasks” (Taraban *et al.*, 2000:283-284). Reading is vital for tertiary studies as Pretorius (2002:169) states: “[r]eading is important in the learning context not only because it affords readers independent access to information in an increasingly information driven society, but more importantly because it is a powerful learning tool.” As this study focuses specifically on nursing students, it is relevant to mention that reading comprehension contributes to nursing students successfully completing nursing programmes at universities (Gallagher *et al.*, 2001:134).

According to Creme and Lea (2008:51), reading plays a very important part in the writing process. Thus students with low levels of reading comprehension and the inability to read critically could struggle with the production of written academic texts as they could struggle with

selecting main ideas from texts and then coherently develop their own texts. Students also find it difficult to make inferences. Furthermore, they often find synthesizing and restructuring ideas problematic (Nel *et al.*, 2004:96).

Regarding nursing students (who form the case study of this thesis), Gallagher *et al.* (2001:134) state that reading effectively for academic purposes is essential for nursing students to complete their nursing degrees. As reading plays such a big role in writing, it is important to also evaluate the reading component (LEES) of the AGLA 121 course (cf. §5.5).

### **3.3.3 Poor technology skills**

To survive in the academic world, university students need to be literate in multiple literacies in multiple discourses (Williams, 2005:158) which at some point could include some type of technology. Once again there is an assumption that students who enter higher education in South Africa have had a “comparatively universal and uniform digital upbringing” (Thinyane, 2010:406). However, this is not the case in South Africa where, with the heterogeneous student population, there are students who are exposed to computers and other technologies for the first time when they enter higher education (Hugo, 2003:48; Williams, 2005:158; Thinyane, 2010:406-407). The aforementioned aspect regarding technological literacies is important for this study, as information literacy is a key skill that nursing students in particular must acquire (Barnard, 2005:505; Tarrant *et al.*, 2008:459; Wallace *et al.*, 1999:137). Consequently, the computer literacy component (RINL) of the AGLA 121 course is also evaluated (cf. §5.4).

In the following sections, the cognitive (§3.3.4), social (§3.3.5), and affective (§3.3.6) factors that could influence the acquisition and development of academic writing, are discussed. These factors are important as Zimmerman and Kitsantas (2007:53) state: “[p]rofessional writers take special pains to create favourable social and physical environments in which to write. Furthermore, they use a variety of behavioural as well as cognitive self-regulatory methods to garner and sustain their affective experiences and motivation.”

### **3.3.4 Cognitive factors**

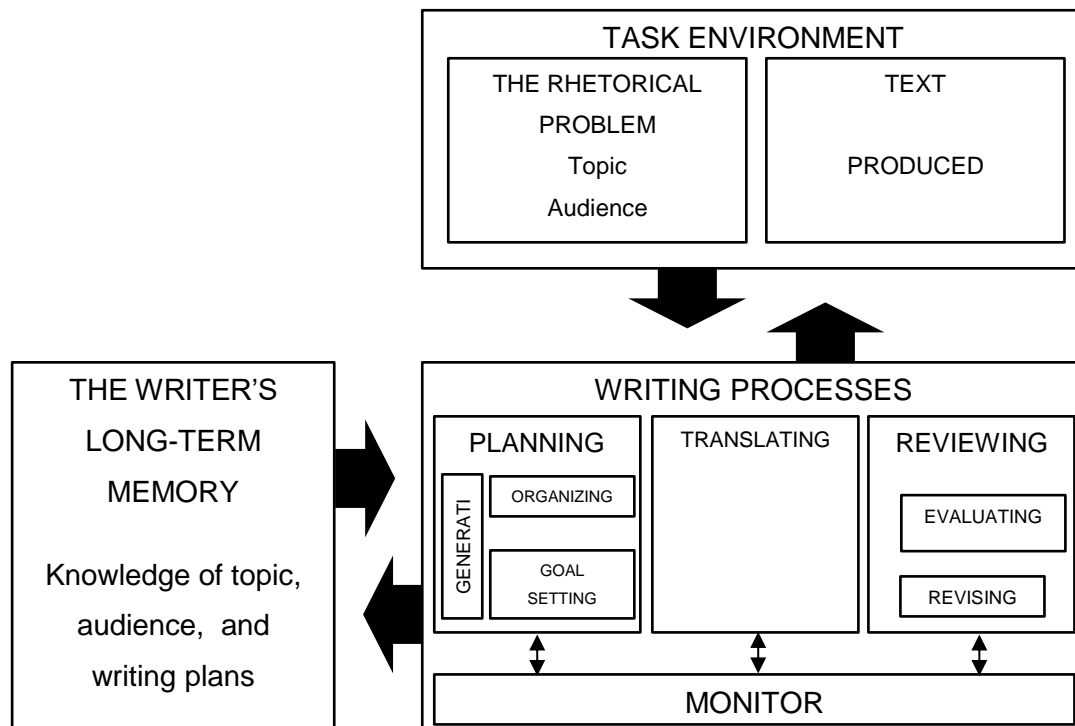
Academic writing is cognitively a very demanding and complex activity (Bräuer, 2003:136; Deane *et al.*, 2008:11; Myles, 2002). Research has proven that cognitive factors affect language learning (Myles, 2002). Thomas and Turner (1994:5) state that “writing proceeds from thinking” and writers must thus “work through intellectual issues, not merely acquire mechanical

techniques". Writing involves a wide array of cognitive skills, processes and sub-possesses such as planning, memory, critical thinking, knowledge, metacognition, problem solving, self-evaluation, self-regulation, and revising / reflecting (cf. Boscolo *et al.*, 2007:80; Boscolo & Hidi, 2007:8; Deane *et al.* 2008:i-38; De Bernardi & Antolini, 2007:185; Galbraith, 2009:7; Kellogg, 1994:68; Nelson, 2007:20; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2007:51).

Various models exist and demonstrate the various cognitive processes involved in academic writing. In this study, the models of Flower and Hayes (1981), Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), Hayes (1996), and Grabe and Kaplan (1996) are briefly analysed to indicate the extent of some of the cognitive processes needed for effective writing.

#### **3.3.4.1 Cognitive models**

Flower and Hayes (1981:367) propose the **Cognitive Process Model** that concentrates on the activities of writers when they write (Myles, 2002). What makes this model unique from the traditional product-orientated view where writing is seen as a linear process (where students first plan, then write and then edit), this model emphasises the recursive nature of the writing process. In effect, the planning, interpreting and revising can happen at any moment. Therefore, this model rather refers to cognitive processes than cognitive stages (Galbraith, 2009:8). Another feature of the model is that it highlights the differences between novice and expert writers. According to Flower and Hayes (1981:369), the following elements are involved in the act of writing: the task environment, the long term memory of the writer, and the writing process. Flower and Hayes's model is presented in Figure 3.1 on the next page.



**Figure 3.1 Flower and Hayes's (1981) model**

The **task environment** often includes aspects that are beyond the control of the writer such as the rhetorical problem that includes the topic, audience and exigency of the writing task. The organizing of the rest of the text is also important as the writer has to make various choices as to how the text should be structured (Flower & Hayes, 1981:368).

The second aspect of the model addresses the writer's **long-term memory**. Long-term memory encompasses the stored knowledge of topics, audiences and writing plans (Flower & Hayes, 1981:371).

The final element in the Flower and Hayes (1981:369-374) model incorporates the processes of **planning, translating** and **reviewing** which are controlled by a **Monitor**. Planning can be seen as an act of building an internal representation that consists of many sub-processes. Firstly, writers have to generate ideas. This can be done by retrieving information relevant to the task from the long-term memory. All the relevant information then needs to be organised. The organising process creates the opportunity for the writer to identify categories and to look for subordinate ideas and to then to present the text in an organised manner. Another important part of the planning process is for writers to set goals for completing the writing and can be both procedural and substantive. All the ideas then need to be translated into visible language. After transcribing the ideas, writers need to constantly review (evaluate and revise) and monitor their processes and their progress.

Hayes (1996:10) decided to design a **revised version** of the Flower and Hayes's model (1981). In this version, the task environment and the individual are highlighted. Even though the model focuses mostly on the cognitive processes, the importance of the interaction between cognitive and social aspects of writing are incorporated (McCutchen, 2006:115; McCutchen *et al.*, 2008:451). The motivational and affective variables (such as goals, predispositions, beliefs, attitudes, and perceived benefits of the task) are recognised as being just as important as cognitive variables. Planning has become a part of the more general reflection module, translation is now seen as text production, and revision is not seen as a separate process but as an amalgamation of text interpretation, text production and reflection. The importance of working memory is also foregrounded in the central position in this model.

The working memory in Hayes's model is mostly based on Baddeley's (1996) working memory model. In Hayes's model, working memory consists of phonological memory, semantic memory, and visual/spatial sketchpad. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), Grabe and Kaplan (1996), Kellogg (1994) and McCutchen (1996) also emphasise the role of working memory. Cognitive resources are often limited though and working memory therefore has a limited capacity (Galbraith, 2009:11). Writers with a larger working memory capacity are able to use revision processes that extend to the macrostructure of the text. In contrast, writers whose working memory capacities are limited, struggle especially with revision processes. During processing, working memory stores information from the current environment and from long-term memory. As the resources are limited, there is often a trade-off between processing and storage functions. Thus, if more resources are used for processing, there are fewer resources left to store information. The limitation of resources could have serious implications for intricate processes such as reading (comprehension) and writing (composition) as both enforce a significant demand on processing and storage functions. If either the storage or process functions are overused, then the overall writing performance of the students will be affected (McCutchen, 1996:300-320).

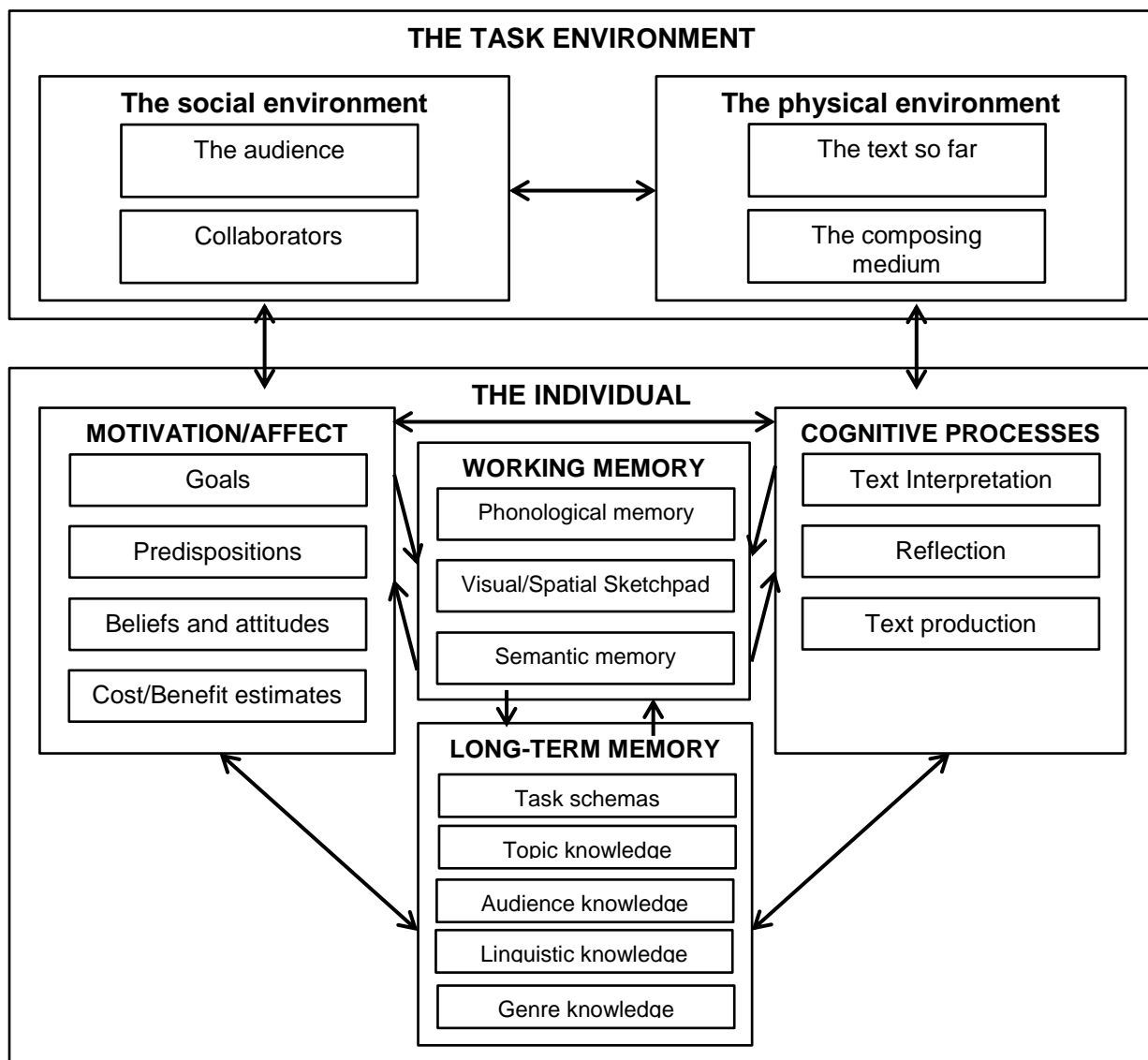


Figure 3.2 Revised model by Hayes (1996)

The **knowledge-telling model of writing** and the **knowledge-transforming model of writing** of Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987:5-6) mainly focus on the differences between expert and novice writers. Figures 3.3 and 3.4 are visual representations of Bereiter and Scardamalia's (1987) knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming models. From the knowledge-telling model, it is evident that novice writers use strategies where they produce written texts based on the retrieval of content and discourse knowledge that lies in their long-term memory and do not employ reflection strategies. The writing produced is a more "natural" way of writing and is generally employed by all writers. With knowledge telling, content is generated about something that is familiar and does not need much planning or goal-setting. The main focus of **knowledge telling** is identifying aspects relating to the topic and genre of the written texts that have to be

produced. Aspects of coherence and structure are not the main focus areas with knowledge-telling kind of writing (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1987:146).

In contrast, more experienced writers use **knowledge-transforming** strategies such as reflecting and revising on their work whilst they are writing. Furthermore, these more skilled writers continuously plan, modify, and adapt to the perceived communicative goals, and are able to solve the communicative or rhetorical problems of the written task (cf. Galbraith, 2009:9; Hattingh, 2009:92; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1987:142; Weigle, 2002:31).

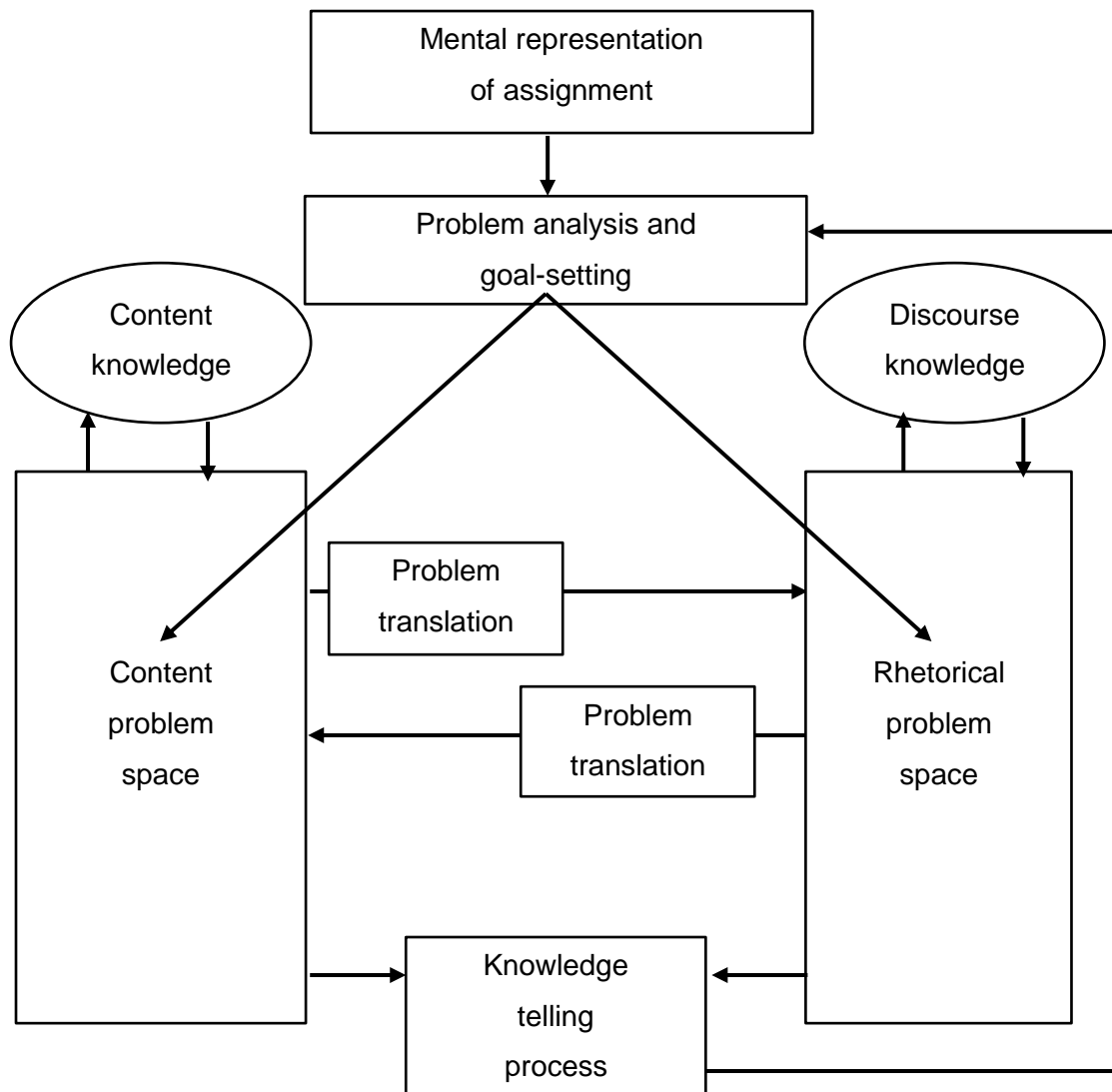
Deane *et al.* (2008:35-36) state that there are certain reasons why some writers struggle to implement a knowledge-transforming approach to writing. These reasons could include: interference effects, lack of strategic writing skills, insufficient topic-specific knowledge, weak content reasoning and research skills, and unformed or rudimentary rhetorical skills. These reasons are now discussed.

Firstly, the focus is on **interference effects**. In the working memory of many novice writers, and there are numerous writing processes that compete and for knowledge transforming to take place, students must be able to deal with the heavy demands on memory and attention. If fundamental skills (such as such as text decoding or reading) are not in place, then there is no place for strategic thoughts. Struggling to read can impair students' abilities to plan and revise.

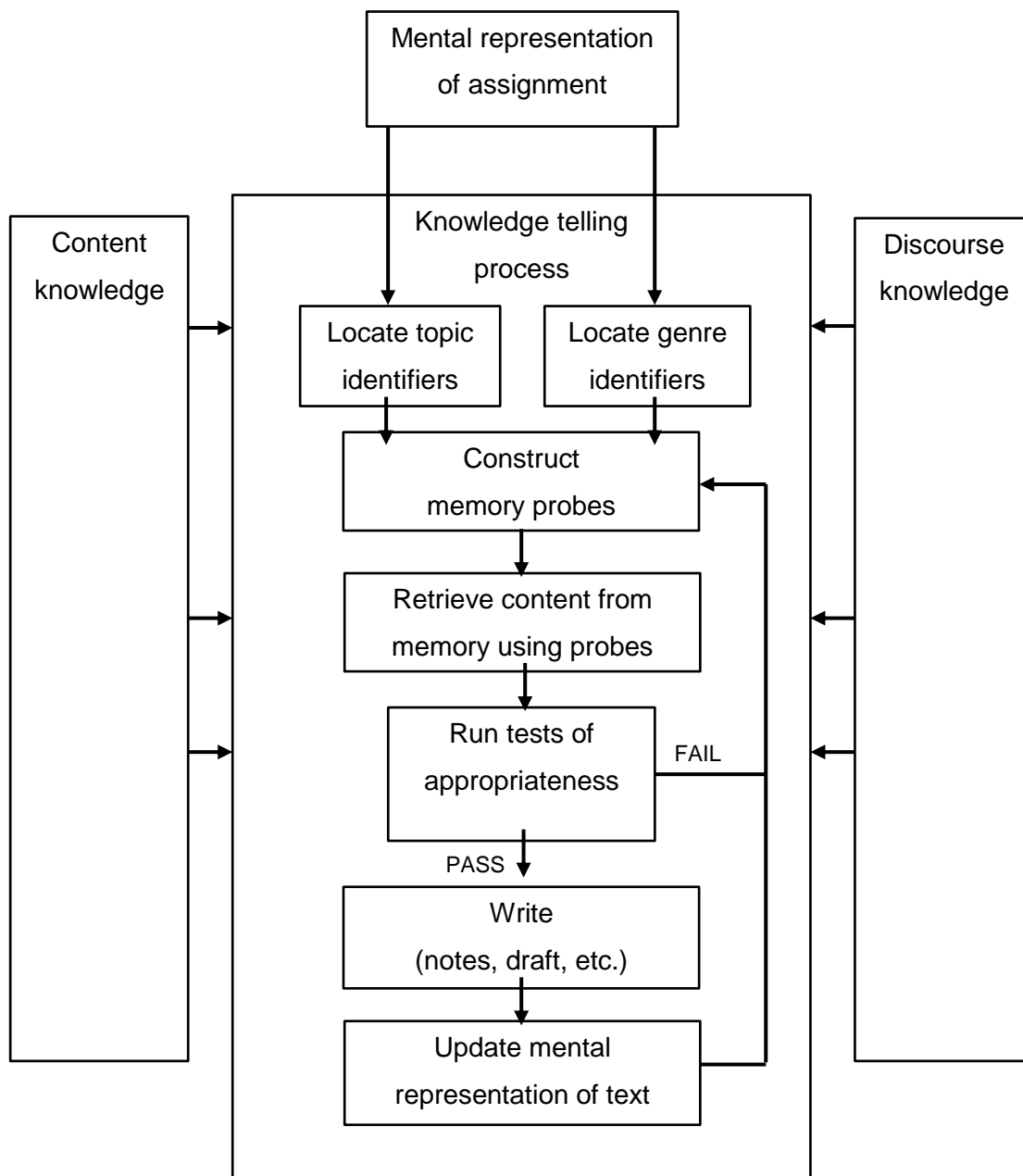
Even some expert writers can be hindered by working-memory capacity and struggle to cope with all the demands of the writing task at the same time. Examples of *strategic writing skills* that many writers lack include struggling with planning and controlling the writing processes.

Having **topic-specific knowledge** is an essential part of writing successfully and is a main predictor of writing quality. Just as with Flower and Hayes's model (1981), writers with sufficient long-term memory are at an advantage as they are able to make supportive judgments of relevance and can critically reason about content. Many writers have **weak content-reasoning** and **research skills**. Writers struggle especially with problem-solving activities such as developing ideas, identifying information needed, and obtaining the relevant information. These struggles are enhanced for many writers as the reasoning and research skills required for successfully completing writing assignments often differ with audience, genre and purpose.

Lastly, many writers have unformed goals or fail to set appropriate **rudimentary rhetorical goals**. The main flaw of the knowledge-telling approach to writing is that it assumes that there is only one goal for writing which is that existing knowledge must be changed only minimally to suit the writing assignment. Novice writers can benefit from clear instructions that highlight the importance of the identification of the intended audience.



**Figure 3.3 Knowledge-telling model of Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987)**



**Figure 3.4 Knowledge-transforming model of Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987)**

Some of the criticism against Bereiter and Scardamalia's knowledge-transforming model is that contextual factors that could potentially have an effect on the writing process are not taken into account (Weir, 2005:110). Furthermore, the model does not indicate where the transformation between knowledge-telling and knowledge-transformation occurs (Weigle, 2002:35).

Grabe and Kaplan's (1996) model (Fig. 3.5) is mostly based on the questions: "[w]ho writes what to whom, for what purpose, why, when, where and how?" (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996:203). The model attempts to integrate the cognitive processes of writers, the textual and linguistic resources needed for a task, and contextual factors that shape writing in a single model. The

two major components of the model include the **context** for language use and the language user's **verbal working memory**. As an external factor (that writers have no control over), the context includes **situation** (participants, setting, task, text and topic) and **performance** (language) output. The performance (textual) output is produced due to verbal working memory processing. The working memory in this model differs from Hayes's (1996) working memory in that it distinguishes between the following sub-components: internal goal setting, verbal processing, and internal processing output. Language competence, knowledge of the world, metacognitive awareness and processing are set as important activities in the writing process.

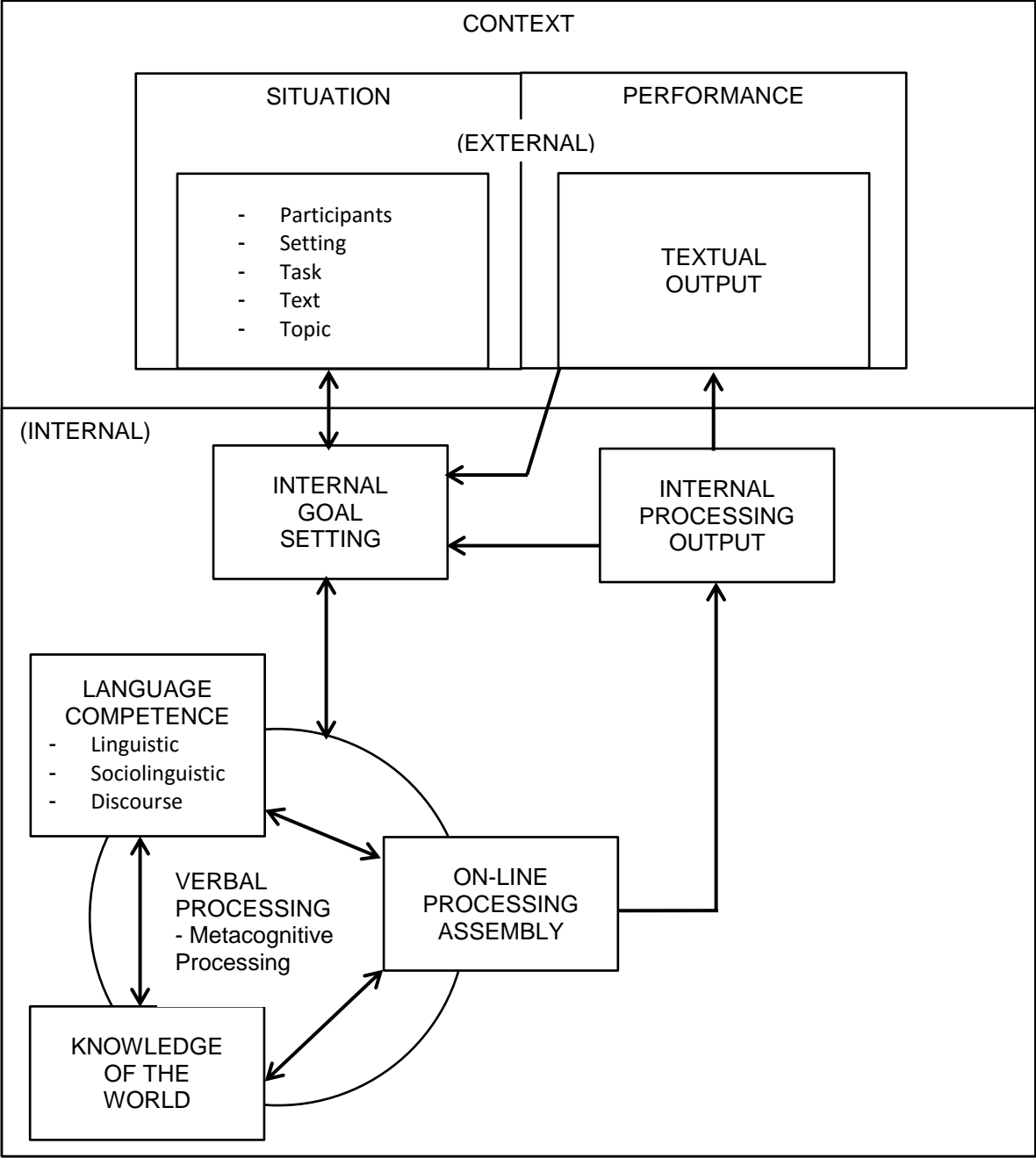


Figure 3.5 Grabe and Kaplan's (1996) model of writing

However, one limitation of this model is a lack of description of how the subcomponents of language competence relate to processing and world knowledge (cf. Grabe & Kaplan, 1996:229-230; Lu, 2010:14-16).

After reviewing the cognitive models of Flower and Hayes (1981), Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), Hayes (1996), and Grabe and Kaplan (1996) it is evident that there are countless cognitive processes and sub-processes that first-year students need to acquire and develop. Yet again, the models only states what must be done but does not suggest how these processes can be managed pedagogically. Furthermore, the models highlight the individual nature of academic writing, but propose no solution how to manage academic literacy classes with a variety of students with mixed writing abilities.

### 3.3.4.2 Cognitive processes necessary for academic writing

From the models discussed, it is apparent that there are many intricate processes and sub-processes that students have to go through in order to produce written text. Processes such as having sufficient knowledge (§3.3.4.2.1), critical thinking (§3.3.4.2.2), and meta-cognitive reflection (§3.3.4.2.3) are discussed in more detail below as these processes are important for nursing students to acquire and develop (cf. §7.10).

#### 3.3.4.2.1 Knowledge

Regarding knowledge, Kellogg (1994:68) expands on Flower and Hayes’s view of knowledge and states that knowledge “must be available as a result of past learning, accessible at the time it is needed in the writing process, and applied inventively to the rhetorical and content problems posed by the task environment”. In Table 3.1, the various types of knowledge needed for effective academic writing are summarised. These types of knowledge are relevant to all students (including nursing students).

**Table 3.1 Kellogg’s (1994:71-79) types of knowledge**

<b>SOCIOCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE</b>
Tacit understanding of basic beliefs shared with members of one’s family, community, ethnic group, and national culture.
<b>CONCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE</b>
Knowledge of the world and knowledge of language

### **Content knowledge**

Concerns physical, social, and mental aspects of the world. Such knowledge becomes increasingly formalized in the sub-categories of domain knowledge and discipline knowledge. Text quality measures of content, idea development, organization, factual communication, and the like depend crucially on content knowledge.

- *Domain knowledge*

Knowledge of a domain. Helps with planning. Topic knowledge - helps writers generate a large number of relevant ideas and organize them effectively.

- *Discipline knowledge*

As knowledge of a domain deepens and widens, and as the domain itself acquires a history of development and scholarship, a discipline appears.

### **Discourse knowledge**

Refers to knowledge about language and its uses. Text quality measures of style, language use, punctuation, mechanics, rhetorical skill, sentence complexity, textual cohesiveness, and the like depend on discourse knowledge. Operates at the word, sentence, paragraph, and text levels.

- *Text structure knowledge*

Texts vary in structure according to their aims and uses. Knowledge of the prototypical structure of a mode of discourse is important in the comprehension and recall of text and in text production. Explicit instruction on text structures amplifies students' writing quality.

- *Syntactic knowledge*

Understanding the syntactic rules for combining words into meaningful propositions and sentences. Syntactic rules define the acceptable and unacceptable strings of words in a language. The coherence of a paragraph depends in part on the use of syntactic ties between independent clauses. The use of conjunctions, for instance, illustrates such cohesive ties. The complexity of syntactic structures used by writers increases as they mature and learn how to write.

- *Rhetorical knowledge*

Rhetorical knowledge concerns an understanding of the audience of a text. The writer adopts different styles and assumes different tones to achieve various rhetorical effects with various audiences. Although writers may compose only for themselves, they typically address the needs of the intended readers. Instead of using the word audience, the term discourse community can be used to describe the way in which writers, readers and texts interact.

- *Lexical knowledge*

The more words a writer knows, the more opportunities he or she has to choose the right word in a particular context. Vocabulary and diversity in word choice relate positively to the quality.

### **METACOGNITIVE KNOWLEDGE**

Knowledge about the self, tasks, strategies, plans and goals. When people reflect on what they know and what they can do, they engage in metacognition, or thinking about thinking.

- *Self-knowledge*

Involves awareness of how well one performs various tasks. Such knowledge might well influence a writer's motivation levels, depending on their assessment of whether

success is likely.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Task knowledge</i> The relative difficulty of different types of writing assignments, comprises part of what a writer knows about the task environment. Knowledge of the materials that are relevant to a particular writing assignment is another aspect of task assessment. Knowing where to turn in collecting information needed for completion of the task is crucial.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Strategic knowledge</i> Awareness of the strategies that help one to retrieve and apply knowledge. The ability to evaluate when a strategy is needed, to select an appropriate strategy, and to monitor the effectiveness of the chosen strategy. Skilled writers use what they know about themselves, about tasks and materials, and about strategies to navigate their way through the sea of challenges confronting them in writing.</li> </ul>

From the overview provided in Table 3.1, it is clear that students have a wide range of knowledge that they must apply in order to be perceived as academically literate. Closer collaboration with certain subject lecturers are necessary if academic literacy lecturers want to assist students with domain and discipline knowledge. If longer time is allocated to academic literacy courses at the NWU's Potchefstroom Campus, then students can be better assisted with metacognitive knowledge. The one aspect of knowledge that academic literacy lecturers can have an effect on their students' academic writing abilities is discourse knowledge. In AGLA 121, both nursing students and all other first-year students can be assisted with syntactic, rhetorical and lexical knowledge.

#### 3.3.4.2.2 Critical thinking

The close relationship that exists between critical thinking and language is crucial and essential in order to learn effectively in an academic context in higher education (Grosser & Nel, 2013:1-2). Critical thinking can be defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes (Profetto-McGrath, 2003:570). Critical thinking is an important and essential skill that students of all faculties and at any level must possess (Burns & Foley, 2005:352; DasBender, 2011:38; Newton & Moore, 2010:221; Wangenstein *et al.*, 2010:2171). Even though critical thinking is mostly subject-specific, varying in technique and method in various disciplines, there are general principles that can be applied to all disciplines (DasBender, 2011:38).

For the relevance of this study it is important to note that being one of the outcomes of nursing education, critical thinking is an essential skill for nursing students too (cf. Table 7.19; Glen, 1995:170; Facione, 1994:345; Gimenez, 2007:48; Pai & Eng, 2013:249; Profetto-McGrath, 2003:576; Profetto-McGrath, 2005:366; Suliman & Halabi, 2007:163; Tanner, 1999:99),

especially as writing assignments can be used to develop and enhance nursing students' critical thinking skills and abilities (Cowles *et al.*, 2001:363; Newton & Moore, 2010:221). Another reason why it is important for nursing students to be critical thinkers is because critical thinking reduces the gap between research and practice and it also fosters **evidence-based practice (EBP)** (cf. §4.7; Profetto-McGrath, 2005:364; Wangensteen *et al.*, 2010:2171). Critical thinking is a principal process in EBP as the development of critical thinking skills can help students with the essential skills and dispositions (attitudes, habits of mind, and traits) necessary for EBP. These skills and dispositions also assist students in developing into self-directed, independent students and as professional nurses (Profetto-McGrath, 2005:364). It is important that both critical thinking skills and EBP are fostered and taught.

In Table 3.2, a summary is provided of critical thinking skills and dispositions that students (also nursing students) need to be successful academic writers.

**Table 3.2 Critical thinking skills and dispositions**

Critical thinking skills and dispositions	Authors
<b>CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS</b>	
<b>Reflection</b>	Profetto-McGrath (2005:366)
<b>Evaluation of claims and support from a range of sources</b>	Pally (2001:279), Profetto-McGrath (2005:366), Wangensteen <i>et al.</i> , (2010:2171)
<b>Critical appraisal</b>	Profetto-McGrath (2005:366)
<b>Suspension of judgement</b>	Profetto-McGrath (2005:366)
<b>Making informed judgements</b>	(APA) (1990:3), Facione, (1990:2), Profetto-McGrath (2005:366), Lai (2011) Wangensteen <i>et al.</i> , (2010:2171)
<b>Analysis (categorizing, decoding, and clarifying information; identifying the intended and actual inferential relationship among statements, questions, concepts, and judgements; exploring ideas; discriminating claims; examining arguments)</b>	Facione <i>et al.</i> (1994), Profetto-McGrath (2005:366), Lai (2011); Wangensteen <i>et al.</i> , (2010:2171)
<b>Interpretation</b>	Lai (2011), Profetto-McGrath (2005:366) Wangensteen <i>et al.</i> , (2010:2171)
<b>Inference through deductive or inductive reasoning</b>	Profetto-McGrath (2005:366), Lai (2011), Wangensteen <i>et al.</i> , (2010:2171)
<b>Problem solving</b>	Lai (2011)
<b>Making decisions</b> <b>Other abilities or behaviours identified as relevant to critical thinking include asking and answering questions for clarification; defining terms; identifying assumptions; interpreting and explaining; reasoning; predicting;</b>	Lai (2011)
<b>CRITICAL THINKING DISPOSITIONS</b>	
<b>Open-minded</b>	(APA) (1990:3), DasBender (2011:38), Facione, (1990:2), Facione <i>et al.</i> (1994), Lai (2011), Profetto-McGrath (2005:366)
<b>Habitually inquisitive</b>	(APA) (1990:3), Facione, (1990:2), Facione <i>et al.</i> (1994), Lai (2011)
<b>Well-informed</b>	(APA) (1990:3)
<b>Flexible</b>	(APA) (1990:3), Lai (2011)
<b>Diligent in seeking relevant information</b>	(APA) (1990:3), Facione, (1990:2)
<b>Honest in facing personal biases</b>	(APA) (1990:3), Facione, (1990:2)
<b>Being self-confident in decision making</b>	Facione <i>et al.</i> (1994)
<b>The desire to be well-informed</b>	Facione, (1990:2), Lai (2011)
<b>Having respect for, and willingness to entertain, others' viewpoints</b>	Lai (2011)
<b>Willing to reconsider</b>	(APA) (1990:3), Facione, (1990:2)

There are wide-ranging critical thinking skills and dispositions that students are supposed to display for academic purposes. Some of the skills and dispositions can be taught in academic literacy courses such as AGLA 121. However, some skills and dispositions require longer time to practice and to acquire. Some students might never acquire all the skills and dispositions mentioned in Table 3.2 during their academic careers. The almost impossible task with limited time that academic literacy lecturers have at the NWU's Potchefstroom Campus is emphasized.

#### 3.3.4.2.3 Meta-cognitive reflection

A cognitive process that can be used to teach academic writing is that of reflection. The high-level, developable cognitive activities of meta-cognitive reflection include: thinking and being aware about one's own thinking; attempting to understand one's own thinking processes; exploring and reviewing what has been produced; solving problems and most importantly asking strategic questions on how to improve thinking and eventually learning (cf. Boud *et al.*, 1985:17; De Bernardi & Antolini, 2007:188; Granville & Dison, 2009:55; Perkins, 1992:102; Tishman *et al.*, 1995:67). Reflection plays an important role in learning and reflection and learning share a "symbiotic relationship" (Andrusynzyn & Davie, 1997:123).

Granville and Dison (2005:114) propose that students should be encouraged to get into the habit of reflecting on their learning from early on in their academic careers in order to be successful at university. Meta-cognitive reflection can help with the acquisition of academic conventions and discourses of specific disciplines; inspire higher-level thinking and support more effective learning. Granville and Dison (2005:100) state that "[b]y reflecting on classroom tasks using their own voices, students can more easily make the transition from their everyday vernacular languages to the specialist languages required by the university". For Brockbank and McGill (1998:41) reflection should be "person-centered" and personal reflection should assist students to become aware of their own learning strategies. It is essential that lecturers will nurture a well-developed sense of self by providing their students with the correct tools to regulate their own learning (Granville & Dison, 2005:100). Perkins (1992:102) recommends that lecturers should "create learning dispositions" by "cultivating attitudes of reflective thought" by incorporating reflective opportunities into programmes as the previously mentioned dispositions need to be practised and developed.

For the purposes of this study, it is interesting to note that self-reflection can support students with academic literacy acquisition and ultimately also with academic writing. According to Jay (2003:4-5), reflection has not played a major role in writing history and not a lot of research has been conducted regarding reflection as part of the writing process. However, Pianko

(1979a:278) is convinced that lecturers can have a positive effect on their students' writing if they do not only focus on assessing finished written assignments, but to also help students to focus on the writing processes by motivating them to reflect often on their own writing. Even though reflection is a very personal activity, lecturers can use collaborative reflection where students work in pairs or groups and help each other to clarify and form ideas (Francis, 1995:240). Lecturers can also help students with scaffolding the reflective writing processes (such as planning, drafting, revising, editing and proofreading) (Department of Basic Education, 2011:10) they have already learned in high school.

According to Pianko (1979a:277), what differentiates the able from the not so able writers is the ability to reflect on what has been written and what is being written. There are many characteristics of experienced writers that use reflection in their academic writing. Less skilled students write in a more mechanical and formulaic manner and are quite obsessed with form and the correctness thereof. Skilled writers go beyond such surface features and tend to anticipate their readers' expectations and needs. For example, skilled writers change big sections of their written texts. These writers know that "writers go back in order to move forward" (cf. Zamel, 1982:197-198). Other characteristics that skilled writers use include discussing the aspects of assignments with peers and the lecturer; using experiences from previous writing assignments; and comparing writing tasks to different and similar tasks (Johns, 1997:104). Furthermore, superior writers employ techniques such as pausing and rescanning in their academic writing tasks. Experienced writers are also aware of the various cognitive and linguistic strategies they know and are actively aware of the lexical, organizational, and syntactical choices they have to make simultaneously when writing. Not only can the practice of reflection help first-year students with their academic writing and learning, but lecturers can also benefit. Lecturers can use reflection to enhance their writing pedagogical practices (Jay, 2003:2) which will in turn benefit the students.

It is evident that writing is greatly influenced by students' cognitive dispositions, abilities, and skills. However, not only cognitive factors influence the quality of the writing. In the following section, the social aspects that could influence academic writing acquisition and production are discussed.

### **3.3.5 Social factors**

Even though cognitive factors play an influential role in the production of effective writing, language and knowledge must always be acknowledged and connected within the social context (cf. Myles, 2002; Sayer, 1984:20; Swales, 1990:4; Van de Poel & Gasiorek, 2012:59;

Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2007:53). It is important to note that literacy practices such as reading and writing are not separate entities, but are social processes that function within a social context (Faber, 2008:270; Hyland, 1999:100; Krause, 2001:148).

Experienced writers create safe and favourable social environments in which to write (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2007:53). These environments are often situated within specific academic communities. Within these communities, students can acquire and develop discourse conventions by engaging with and integrating themselves into their specific academic cultures. This view is based on the Vygotskian idea that humans act and interact socially in cultural settings and that learning cannot be separated from these social settings (cf. §3.4.4; Krause, 2001:148; Swales, 1990:4; Van de Poel & Gasiorek, 2012:59). As a university can be seen as a new social environment, students need assistance to adapt and this can be done through acculturation (§1.2).

According to Boscolo and Hidi (2007:9), writing is frequently seen as an extremely isolated activity. This isolation can be overcome through collaboration in classroom activities. If students participate in social activities in class, the functions of reading and writing can become clearer to them. Also, writing is frequently only associated with the teaching of language skills. However, writing can be used in various subjects for several reasons across the curriculum. Students thus need to be made aware of various genres and text types instead of exposing them only to “general and fixed” models of writing. Students need to know how to communicate effectively through writing in their various social environments.

It is important to note that the social environment where the teaching and learning of academic writing take place has exponentially expanded from traditional classroom instruction to include technology-orientated (often digital) social interaction. It is important for both students and lecturers to incorporate digital social environments in writing as the digital age forces everyone to reimagine how learning takes place as achieving academic success is redefined for both individuals and society (Hagel *et al.*, 2012:31).

Social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter can be incorporated into writing education (Hull *et al.*, 2014:55). Flipped classrooms are also an avenue to explore especially as more traditional classrooms are increasingly urged to incorporate flipped classroom strategies. A flipped classroom is a type of blended learning environment where basically homework is switched for class work. Students typically do online activities such as watching videos at home and then class time is opened up so that discussions and questions can take place (Ash, 2012; Horn, 2013:78-79). There is thus more time for communication practices and this can help students learn more from their peers.

The social environment has changed for both students and lecturers. This could also have an effect on writing teaching strategies. Using social media platforms and flipped classrooms makes the classroom a more interactive social environment and gives students greater ownership of their learning. In order for these new social environments to be effective in helping students write, both students and lecturers need instruction in these new social roles.

Some of the learning theories that underlie these social factors that can affect writing include social cognitivism (§3.4.3) and social constructivism (§3.4.4).

### **3.3.6 Affective factors**

#### **3.3.6.1 Attitude and motivation**

Picard *et al.* (2004:253) mention that the human brain is not only a “cognitive information processing system” but is also a system where affective and cognitive functions are closely integrated. Dehbozorgi (2012:41) claims that the affective side of the learners is the most influential aspect in language learning success or failure. No matter how innovative and attractive certain learning materials are, students’ learning will be affected if they are anxious, scared, angry or depressed (Arnold & Brown, 1999:2). In this section **attitude** and **motivation** are discussed as affective factors that could affect academic writing acquisition and development.

There is a close link between affective factors such as attitude and the learning progress and student achievement (cf. Olivier & Olivier, 2013). If anything negatively impacts attitude, then learning will be retarded (Semke, 1984:195). In terms of language learning, Brunton (2009:29) claims that attitude is as important as aptitude. Krashen (1981:5) goes even further and also believes that attitudinal and motivational factors are more important than aptitude.

Motivation also impacts on the amount of time and effort that students invest in learning situations (Du Toit, 2006:74, 163; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996:163). Motivation plays a significant role in learning a foreign language, and Du Toit (2006:78) describes that when students understand the rationale behind learning a foreign language, it could influence their attitude and motivation towards the target language. As academic literacy can also be seen as the acquisition of a foreign or second language (cf. Gee, 1989:7; Olivier & Olivier, 2014; Van Dyk, 2010:5), motivational aspects should not be ignored. According to Gardner *et al.* (1997:345), motivation refers to the individual’s attitude, desire and sacrifice to learn a new or foreign language. According to Hidi and Boscolo (2007:xi) one of the main problems with writing acquisition is students’ lack of motivation to write.

There are many reasons why students lack motivation. One of the most important tasks that a writing lecturer can have is to ensure that students have something interesting, important, relevant and significant to write about (Ballard, 1934:117; Bothma & Cloete, 1964:11; Kellogg, 1994:69; Skillen, 2006:142). For some students, academic writing is self-fulfilling and what and how they write are vital for themselves on a personal and universal level (Ballard, 1934:117; Nevile, 1996:49). Some students even enjoy writing at university and write with interest and satisfaction (Boscolo & Hidi, 2007:4): For many students the importance of academic writing lies therein that it needs to be of interest to them in their specific fields of study (Bothma & Cloete, 1964:24; Myles, 2002; Skillen, 2006:142). Heyda (2006:164) emphasises the importance of compulsory writing courses indicating a clear benefit to the students. Powers *et al.* (1979:225) state that writing skills “alone are insufficient unless one also has a predisposition toward using those skills”. Many students do academic writing because they have to write and attempt it only for assessment purposes. Unfortunately, if students approach academic writing from this point of view, it is not very conducive to learning (Boscolo & Hidi, 2007:4; Mitchell & Evison, 2006:70).

If students are not motivated to write appropriately and for the right reasons, unfortunately there are some implications. This could result in poor quality of work and poor marks and in time make them even more negative about academic writing. If students are unmotivated and do not see the use of a written assignment they will not care if they make mistakes; and are inattentive to rhetorical issues (Carson, 2001:191). One way that this issue can be addressed is by providing students with the correct topics to write about (Tillema, 2012:15). Boscolo and Hidi (2007:6) are of the opinion that “topic attractiveness has been viewed as the basic motivational source of writing”. To help students with their motivation for writing, Bothma and Cloete (1964:23) suggest that the topic must also be structured and designed in such a way that the students have efficient vocabulary to complete the writing task. Also, students must know exactly for whom and for what they are writing. Furthermore, students must view writing as “a self-fulfilling and intricate part of their learning and on-going literacy development” (Nevile, 1996:49).

### **3.3.6.2 Writing apprehension**

According to Piller (2013), as part of academic life, many students tend to procrastinate and have a great sense of self-doubt when it comes to academic writing. A famous example of this phenomenon is the case of Ferdinand de Saussure. De Saussure, the “father of modern linguistics” did not publish much during his lifetime and even his seminal work, *Cours de linguistique générale*, was published posthumously by some of his students.

For one of his articles promised to an academic journal editor, De Saussure kept asking for extension time over a period of ten years and eventually never finished the article and provided the following excuses as provided by Piller (2013): *incurable graphophobie* (incurable fear of writing);  *paresse scripturale* (scriptorial laziness);  *horreur d'écrire* (abhorrence of writing);  *une horreur malade de la plume* (a morbid horror of the pen);  *toute redaction me procure un supplice inimaginable* (all writing causes me unimaginable torture).

Just as for De Saussure, for many students the act of writing can be a daunting, negative, uncomfortable, and even punitive experience (Atkinson, 2011:4; Brennan, 1995:352; Cornwell & McKay, 2000:119; Irvin, 2010:3; Teichman & Poris, 1989:94). According to Bothma and Cloete (1964:23), for most students writing essays is an artificial and not very pleasant activity to do. For these authors, the first and foremost task of a teacher or lecturer is to make writing desirable for the students. Bothma and Cloete (1964:5) are of the opinion that the methods used to teach writing can cause some students to develop an aversion in writing which could result in writing apprehension. Writing apprehension is usually associated with people who have a general predisposition to avoid writing. Writing apprehension tends to be person, situation and subject-specific (Choi, 2013:4; Daly, 1978:10; Faigly *et al.*, 1981:16, Fox, 1980:39; Onwuegbuzie, 1997:8). Atkinson (2011:4) attributes student writing apprehension to cognitive stress; language and writing aptitude; negative lecturer feedback; and students' attitude towards revision of written texts.

An aspect to consider is that writing apprehension is often related to the choices that students make when they decide on their academic and professional careers. People with high writing apprehension frequently choose academic subjects and careers that they perceive have low writing requirements (Cornwell & McKay, 2000:119; Daly, 1978:10; Daly & Miller, 1975:244; Powers *et al.*, 1979:225).

It could therefore possibly be of great concern for some students entering universities assuming that they do not have to write in their chosen disciplines and modules and then being expected to write in compulsory academic literacy courses. Unfortunately, compulsory academic literacy courses such as AGLA 121, that was initially designed to support students with their writing, may end up alienating many students. Onwuegbuzie (1997:6) and Powers *et al.* (1979:228) support this view as they found that compulsory academic writing could increase writing apprehension.

Courses such as AGLA 121 should thus provide a safe environment for apprehensive writers with not only a lack of writing skills but also a negative attitude towards their own writing abilities (Fox, 1980:40). In order to help students with writing apprehension, lecturers should be aware of the common characteristics that students with high writing apprehension have. Students with

a high apprehension of writing often fear that their writing will be negatively assessed. As they expect to fail, these students then avoid writing and do not complete or turn in the writing assignments (Atkinson, 2011:1; Choi, 2013:4; Daly & Miller, 1975:244). Powers *et al.* (1979:225) mention that students with high writing apprehension show lower quality in writing, use fewer commas and other delimiting punctuation, words, “-ly” words, and use less intense language. Further characteristics of students who have high levels of writing apprehension include a lack of organisational skills and a tendency to revise and edit less than students with lower levels of apprehension. High apprehensive writers also write shorter texts and usually the content and syntax are not fully developed (Cornwell & McKay, 2000:119).

Students with writing apprehension should be supported by lecturers as Pajares and Johnson (1996:172) mention that “teachers have the dual responsibility of increasing students’ competence and confidence”. Fox (1980:48) notes that it is important not to indoctrinate students with false beliefs about their own writing abilities. However, the focus should not only be on the mistakes that students make, but rather that their positive qualities should be highlighted in the feedback they receive. Faigly *et al.* (1981:16) state that if students receive negative comments in their early years of writing their writing anxiety could be affected. Lecturers should be “honest but tactful” in order to promote students’ “confidence in the act of writing and a healthy acceptance of its subsequent evaluation” (Fox, 1980:49). Bandura (1986:417) supports this view and is of the opinion that lecturers should not only impart knowledge and skills, but should help students believe in their own abilities and help them develop “a strong sense of self-efficacy”. To help students with writing apprehension, lecturers could also work student-specifically and make use of differentiation, where different instructional methods and materials are used for highly apprehensive writers (Faigly *et al.*, 1981:20). Ultimately, DasBender (2011:43) is of the opinion that lecturers should help students to not “be intimidated by academic writing and to embrace it not as a temporary college requirement but as a habit of mind”.

Ideally, all students’ writing apprehension should be addressed. Regrettably, courses such as AGLA 121 cannot assist all students individually due to the large numbers of students that have to be dealt with annually.

### **3.4 Learning theories relating to academic writing**

There are many learning and language theories and perspectives that influence and frame the teaching of academic writing. Due to the varying nature of academic writing needs, there are numerous theories that can be used to underpin the teaching of writing in academic literacy

courses such as AGLA 121. In the following sections, current-traditional rhetoric (CTR) and behaviourism (§3.4.1), cognitivism and social cognitivism (§3.4.2), constructivism and social constructivism (§3.4.3) will be discussed. These theories form part of this study as a combination of them seems to align closely with AGLA 121. The relevance of these theories for AGLA 121 is described later in the chapter (cf. §3.4.4; §3.11).

### 3.4.1 Current-traditional rhetoric (CTR) and behaviourism

For a long time, especially during the last hundred years, **current traditional rhetoric (CTR)** has been the main rhetorical paradigm used by language teachers and lectures. For many, this approach was and always will be the norm to teach academic writing (Berlin, 1987:156). CTR teaching can be viewed as “writing-by-the-numbers” and has a “skills-and-drill character” (Heyda, 2006:155). The main genres associated with CTR are argument, description, exposition, and narration. One format of CTR was overemphasized - it proposed that the essay should be written in five paragraphs that included a short introduction followed by three paragraphs supporting the author’s thesis and a conclusion. The most important aspect of CTR is form (Crowley, 1998:95). Students are expected to analyse traditional, institutional, and professional examples provided by lecturers which they are then expected to exactly reproduce in their paragraphs and essays. There is no part for individualism and the reader is not taken into account at all during the writing process. Students failing to adhere to the sanctioned forms of writing are often labelled as lazy or inattentive (cf. Crowley, 1998:95; Heyda, 2006:156).

Closely related to CTR is a **behaviourist approach** to writing. This approach took shape in the 1930s. Even though the approach has been challenged many times, it still remains a central part of writing instruction in many universities. Within this approach, the focus is on isolated parts of discourse, surface rules, grammar, and mechanics. Furthermore, it is atomistic and error-centred; and is seen as a remediation tool that can be quantified and measured (Rose, 1985:343). Traditionalists of this approach maintained that fixing surface features would help students become better writers (Mullin, 2006:168). Regarding this approach, Berlin (1984:73) mentioned that correctness in writing became the “most significant measure of accomplished prose”.

### 3.4.2 Cognitivism and social cognitivism

The main difference between behaviourism and **cognitivism** is the main focus on thought processes instead of only behaviour. Two primary figures associated with cognitivism are Jean

Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Cognitivism promotes the process of writing over the finished product. Proponents of cognitivism relating to writing are mainly concerned with the decisions that writers make to accomplish the goals they set out for themselves (cf. Flower & Hayes, 1981:367; Olivier, 2011:140). The writing models that evolved from cognitive theories were briefly discussed in Section 3.3.4.1.

Regarding **social cognitivism**, Bandura's (1986, 1997) Social Cognitive Theory stresses the importance of the interaction between the behavioural, environmental and personal factors that is necessary for learning (Bandura, 1991:248; Schunk & Ertmer, 1999:251). The theory highlights the importance of student **self-efficacy** and **self-regulation**.

**Self-efficacy** can be defined as the confidence or personal beliefs that people have about their own abilities to learn or produce certain actions at selected levels. Self-efficacy beliefs of students have proven to be strong predictors of academic achievement. Writers with high self-efficacy beliefs view difficult tasks as challenging, show more interest in the task, and therefore set higher goals for themselves. Students with high self-efficacy also stress less when they have to execute the task and are often willing to change their approach if they perceive their current approach as failing (cf. Pajares & Johnson, 1996:163; Raedts *et al.*, 2007:220-221; Schunk & Ertmer, 1999:251).

Another important aspect of social cognitive theory is **self-regulation**. Schunk and Ertmer (1999:251) define self-regulation as "self-generated thoughts, feelings, and actions that are planned and cyclically adapted to attain personal goals". Increased perceived feelings of self-efficacy can affect students' self-regulatory learning activities. In turn, the motivation levels of students then increase and could produce greater academic achievement (Zimmerman, 1990a:16; Zimmerman, 1990b:173).

The link between social cognitive theory and academic writing is that writing is not only a cognitive skill, but also a social cognitive process where student writers must spend time to revise their written texts until they are able to effectively communicate through them. If students have low self-efficacy levels, their writing skills might be compromised (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2007:53). Writers with low self-efficacy may be less confident in their writing abilities and may develop writing apprehension (cf. §3.3.6.2; Pajares & Johnson, 1996:165). Pajares and Johnson (1996:172) suggest that lecturers should pay attention to their students' self-efficacy beliefs as these beliefs could potentially predict students' motivation to write. Lecturers should assist students to identify and change inaccurate personal judgements about their writing abilities.

Bandura (1977:129) emphasises that writing should be continuously self-regulated. Writers who are able to self-regulate, have standards and know when a piece of writing is acceptable. Before self-regulated writers physically write down anything, they generate and phase in ideas over and over until they are satisfied. Students with low self-regulation abilities will not self-correct often. However, writers with high self-regulation abilities must take care not to over-self-regulate and “paralyze their own writing efforts” (Bandura, 1977:129).

### 3.4.3 Constructivism and social constructivism

**Constructivism** can be seen as learning that takes place where people construct their own knowledge from previous experiences and from interaction with the environment (Alessi & Trollip, 2001:31-32). With constructivism, students can construct their own understanding and develop skills by “learn[ing] by doing” and completing learning activities put to them (Macdonald, 2008:128). With constructivist learning activities, students take ownership of the task, learning is scaffolded through guided discovery and students are provided with opportunities for reflection (Mayes, 2006:14). Furthermore, Alessi and Trollip (2001:32) mention that with constructivism, learning rather than teaching is emphasized and purposeful and authentic learning activities and tasks are used that are personally relevant to students.

Constructivism can be individual (personal) and/or social (Smith & Ragan, 1999:15; Walker & Baets, 2009:245). With individual constructivism, learning can be seen as an independent experience and reflection (Walker & Baets, 2009:245) and results from an individual interpretation of knowledge (Smith & Ragan, 1999:15). In contrast, with **social constructivism**, knowledge and learning is socially constructed within a social context (Walker & Baets, 2009:245). In a social learning environment, cooperative and collaborative learning between students is very important.

**Cooperative** and **collaborative** learning are viewed by many as synonyms; however, these two concepts have their own classroom connotations and applications. Cooperative learning is group learning where students work together to reach learning goals through an exchange of knowledge and information. In contrast, collaborative learning is “acculturation into knowledge communities” through guidance and facilitation by “more capable others” (such as lecturers and more advanced peers) so that students can increasingly and eventually become self-directed and self-empowered in and through their learning (Oxford, 1997:443).

Students’ learning and skills are thus systematically scaffolded, which means that through the learning process knowledge is “built” on previous knowledge and more capable others provide support with new knowledge and this support is slowly removed so that the students can

become totally independent producers of knowledge and skills without any assistance. Students are systematically exposed to more difficult tasks as one learning activity functions as a stepping stone to the next learning activity. Scaffolding is important for both students and lecturers as constructivist scaffolding can help students produce better writing; lecturers can create more flexible and interactive interventions; and can assist with developing students' attitudes, contribute to the development of students' knowledge, ideas, attitudes and values" (cf. Bothma & Cloete, 1964:23; Conradie, 2009:37; Krause, 2001:148; Oxford, 1997:443-448; Skillen, 2006:143).

Students' development through scaffolded collaborative processes is strongly linked with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (cf. §1.8; Conradie, 2009:41; Krause, 2001:148; Oxford, 1997:448; Richmond *et al.*, 2008:53; Vygotsky, 1978:86-90). ZPD can be defined as "the realm of potential learning that each learner could reach under optimal circumstances and with the best possible support from the teacher and others in the environment (Oxford, 1997:448). According to Conradie (2009:41), ZPD is "the difference between unaided learning, and support from a knowledgeable partner". Ultimately, Vygotsky (1978:90) is of the opinion that certain internal processes are only initiated and internalized when students interact and cooperate with especially their peers in their social environment. According to Bothma and Cloete (1964:11), students are more interested in each other and attach more value to the ideas and thoughts of their peers than their lecturers.

Eventually, students must move away from the ZPD to a **self-directed** learning environment. Self-directed learning can be seen from a collaborative constructive perspective. This means that students take personal responsibility for creating meaning and knowledge whilst confirming learning outcomes with meaningful others. The ultimate learning experience is thus created both personally and socially (Boscolo & Hidi, 2007:9; Garrison, 1997:18-19). With self-directed learning students become independent and active participants responsible for their own learning and have a greater feeling of ownership of the learning process (Tredoux, 2012:5).

Self-directed learning is closely associated with andragogy (cf. §7.9; Merriam, 2001:4-5). In contrast to pedagogy, which is the "art and science of helping children learn", andragogy is the "art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1980:43). Lecturers, who follow an andragogynous approach to teaching, assume that their students are independent self-directed students that are driven to study due to internal instead of external factors; are problem solvers; are concerned with the immediate application of knowledge and have various social roles. Working with these types of students creates a classroom climate of "adulthood" where knowledge acquisition is shared by lectures and students (Knowles, 1980:47). With andragogy it is assumed that if adults can manage other parts of their lives, they are able of directing their own learning.

#### **3.4.4 Summary of the theories**

Even though CTR and behaviourist theories have received plenty of criticism, students do need examples of texts that they have to produce. Especially first-year students also need to learn the basic and quite prescriptive “rules” and need to be made aware of the academic writing conventions as most of them have never been exposed to it.

The cognitive theories are also important, as the various cognitive processes that students go through to produce a written text, should never be underestimated by lecturers. Lecturers should assist students with their decisions and goals that students need to be effective writers. The social cognitive theories highlighted the importance of students attaining self-efficacy as well as the self-regulation skills that students need to produce proper academic texts.

Constructivist theories emphasize the importance of scaffolding students’ knowledge. It also became clear that students learn well through cooperating and collaborating with others so that eventually they can learn and write well by themselves. One of the reasons why the social constructivism theory is described is because one of the main outcomes of AGLA 121 is for students to become self-directed learners and writers (cf. §5.3.2; Van Graan *et al.*, 2014:ix). The concept of andragogy is clearly linked with the learning outcomes prescribed for the case study (§7.9).

### **3.5 Approaches to teaching academic writing**

For a long time, the teaching of academic writing was mostly concerned with rhetorical and linguistics form and the focus was on the final product produced. However, the importance of the individual was realised and the focus turned to the individual writers’ identities and processes, the readers’ expectations, disciplinary conventions, the social features of writing and the larger social context (Curry & Hewings, 2003:32; Raimes, 1991:407). In this section, the product (§3.5.1), process (§3.5.2), and genre (§3.5.3) approaches to the teaching of academic writing are described. The relevance of these approaches for AGLA 121 is described later in the chapter (cf. §3.11).

#### **3.5.1 Product approaches**

With product approaches, the main focus is the finished text as product. This approach to writing can be linked to the current traditional rhetoric as well as the behaviourist theories of

learning (§3.4). Product approaches were (and still are in many cases) mostly concerned with providing students with knowledge about the structure of language. There is an over-emphasis on the significance of the organisation, mechanics and structure of writing, cohesion, various grammatical aspects, syntax and academic style (cf. Badger & White, 2000:153; Butler, 2007a:58; Jordan, 1997:165; Tangpermpoon, 2008:3-4).

Some of the criticism of the product approaches to writing included that students were quite restricted in terms of how and what they could write and often had to imitate a “template design” or model and were then required to reproduce a similar text (Badger & White, 2000:153; Jordan, 1997:164-165). The main criticism against this approach is that the audience is mostly ignored. Some students could also lack motivation in learning and are under a lot of pressure as the lecturers focus only on the language structure accuracy of the texts (Tangpermpoon, 2008:3-4). Even though product approaches face continuous criticism from some researchers and writing lecturers, they do play a significant and positive role in teaching students the basic rules and forms of what is required from them (Badger & White, 2000:157). Delpit (1988:287) feels quite strongly that lecturers should not even implicitly suggest to students that the written product is not important, as students are mostly judged on their written product and not on their writing processes.

### **3.5.2 Process approaches**

In contrast to the product-orientated view of teaching writing where the focus is on correcting finished texts and linguistic knowledge (for example text structure and grammar), a more holistic and inductive view is followed with discovery-based process-orientated approaches to teaching writing (Badger & White, 2000:154; Freedman, 1987:1; Hyland, 2003:17; Pianko, 1979a:275). Zamel (1983:165) defines a process approach as a “non-linear, exploratory, and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning”.

The process approach to writing allows students to showcase more individualism and includes actions such as planning, making drafts, rethinking, and revising (Badger & White, 2000:154; Cho, 2003:166-167; Flower & Hayes, 1981:367; Jordan, 1997:164, 167). The process approach highlights the many writing processes that writers use when they compose and therefore meaning is also foregrounded instead of only form. The approach is also learner-centred and assists students with self-directed learning and writing (Jordan, 1997:104, 167).

The key reason why process approaches are not always implemented is that even though the approach helps students write better with multiple revisions of their texts, unfortunately it is very

time-consuming (Cho, 2003:166). Dyer (1996:312) also mentions that the process approach does not take the students' specific needs into consideration. Process approaches also do not indicate why some writers make certain rhetorical and linguistic choices. Furthermore, the process approach does not clearly state what is to be learnt and produced by the students as the students are expected to discover the relevant forms themselves. With this approach they receive no direct instruction in the structure of various text types. Finally, the approach does not reveal anything about the social dimensions of writing and how meaning is constructed within these dimensions as it "fails to consider the forces outside the individual which help guide purposes, establish relationships, and ultimately shape writing" (Hyland, 2003:18-19).

### **3.5.3 Genre approaches**

Swales (1990:58) defines a genre as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognised by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style."

Genre approaches are closely related to product approaches and can in some cases be viewed as an extension of product approaches. The linguistic aspect of writing is also recognised as important, but genre approaches emphasise the social context in which the writing is produced (Badger & White, 2000:155-156; Hyland, 2003:18).

Examples of genre approaches in practice include Cope and Kalantzis's (1993:11) wheel of genre literacy that includes three main phases. Firstly, by being exposed to samples of the genre that are supposed to replicate, students have to model the target genre. A draft text is then constructed by students with the help of the lecturer. Finally, students have to independently construct their own text. Dudley-Evans (1997:154) also proposes a genre approach in three stages that is quite similar to some product approaches. In the first stage, students are introduced to a specific genre that they then have to analyse. In the second phase, students have to do language exercises that manipulate certain language forms. Finally, students have to produce their own texts.

Criticism of this approach includes that genre approach proponents are often not clear about their theories of learning. With this approach, the writing skills of the students are frequently undervalued and students are seen as passive participants (Badger & White, 2000:156). Kamler (1995:9) feels that the focus on language is too narrow and that not enough attention is paid to the instructional contexts in which the written texts are produced.

### 3.5.4 Is a blended approach a possible solution?

Many lecturers tend to polarise the approaches, preferring one approach over another (Badger & White, 2000:156; Gee, 1997:25; Prosser & Webb, 1994:136). After reviewing all the approaches, it becomes evident that the product, process and genre approaches all have merit and the aspects that are worthwhile could be used by lecturers for writing instruction in courses such as AGLA 121. An eclectic approach seems to be the most effective way to assist students with their academic writing journey.

When writing programme co-ordinators have chosen an approach/approaches (based on the various factors and informed by certain learning theories) to teach academic writing, and after the teaching has been done, assessment of these written tasks needs to occur. In the following section, a brief description of assessment practices is presented.

### 3.6 Assessment of academic writing

Assessment can be described as the process through which students are measured regarding their achievement and progress (Haines, 2004:31). Meyer *et al.* (2010:34) are of the opinion that assessment refers to the measurement of something where information is gathered that will be used for a specific purpose. To assess is to “determine the value, significance, or extent of” something. The origin of the word can be traced to Latin *assidēre* which means “to sit by” (AHD, 1996:111). This reference to the meaning of the word has contributed to the view that assessment should not only be concerned about the assessment **of** learning but rather focus on assessment **for** learning (Young & Avery, 2006:93). Lecturers should also not only assess students but support students and incorporate them in the assessment processes (Hounsell, 1997; Meyer *et al.*, 2010:34).

Assessment can be formative and/or summative. Formative assessment takes place during the learning process (Haines, 2004:35; Marneweck & Rouhani, 2002:280; Topping *et al.*, 2000:149). The main purpose of formative assessment is to develop students’ learning as well as their strong and weak points continuously instead of only determining failure or success afterwards (Haines, 2004:35; Topping *et al.*, 2000:150). In higher education, assessment tends to be mostly summative (Topping *et al.*, 2000:150). Summative assessment refers to assessment that is conducted at the end of a learning experience. Summative assessment usually entails a test or examination at the end of semester or year (Marneweck & Rouhani, 2002:280). In AGLA 121, summative assessment was also used not only for assessment **of**

learning, but also **for** learning purposes such as discussions of examination papers and additional exercises.

In this study, both formative and summative assessments were used. Assessment was done by means of the TAG and a reliable assessment rubric (cf. §6.5.5; §7.6) was used to assess the students' essays.

As previously noted, assessment should not only be used to determine a student's worth, but could also serve as a pedagogical tool. Gipps and Stobart (as quoted by Meyer *et al.*, 2010:34) list some of the main aims of assessment: for screening purposes in order to identify students who are in need of help; to diagnose and identify students' strengths and weaknesses; providing information about students' progress and lecturers' successes; providing students with qualifications and certifying that a specific level of competence was reached; and assisting students with making decisions about their further studies and careers.

Serving different purposes and needs, there are many types of assessment that can be used to assess academic writing, for example teacher or lecturer, self, and peer assessment (Boud, 1990:109). Most assessment at tertiary institutions is still done by lecturers. However, many lecturers incorporate self and peer assessment. Self-assessment can help students to make responsible judgements and decisions about their individual learning processes. Self-assessment is most effective if it is used as part of the learning experience. Self-assessment can have real pedagogical value in that it can increase students' self-confidence about their own writing performance (Boud, 1990:110). It is an important part of students developing into self-directed students (cf. §3.4.3).

Peer assessment allows students to contemplate the quality, worth, and success of the tasks delivered by other students of similar status. Peer assessment has various advantages. For example, peer assessment can allow students to help other students with issues such as misconceptions. Early error identification is another example. Furthermore, guided/structured peer assessment may promote students' communication and social skills where they learn how to have empathy with others, negotiate, accept and give criticism, and justify their own opinions. Additionally, peer assessment can be beneficial to lecturers when students scrutinise and ask for clarification on assessment criteria and marking rubrics (Topping *et al.*, 2000:150-151).

It is clear that self and peer assessments are very beneficial for both the students themselves and for lecturers. In AGLA 121, self and peer assessment can help large numbers where many of the students' initial technical "mistakes" can be identified earlier on and more time can be spent on content. In this study, only lecturer assessment was taken into consideration. In future

evaluations it would be interesting to investigate the effect that self and peer assessment have on students' writing.

### **3.7 Feedback**

Feedback can be considered to be an important influence on learning (Bruton (2005; Hattie & Timperley, 2007:81; Pitts, 2005:218; Young, 2000:409) as students are provided with information on their responses (Clariana *et al.*, 1991:5). Zhao (2013:43) is of the opinion that effective feedback can assist students to make more informed learning decisions. Another benefit of feedback is that it plays an important role in self-regulation skills (cf. §3.4.2; §5.3.2) in learning (Scharf & Baldwin, 2007:33).

Feedback is a very important part of the writing process. If there is no individualised and sufficient feedback especially on errors, then learning and improvement in academic writing might not take place (Myles, 2002). Feedback is typically related to assessment, criticism and receiving marks. Therefore, students frequently associate feedback with anxiety and failure (Granville & Dison, 2009:54). It is thus imperative that feedback is treated carefully in order not to alienate students and possibly cause some of them writing apprehension (cf. §3.3.4.2).

Due to massification (§1.2), overcrowded curricula and large classes, both subject lecturers and literacy lecturers often neglect to give sufficient feedback as it can be very time-consuming (Brennan, 1995:355; Cho & Schunn, 2007:411). Many lecturers question the effectiveness of in-depth feedback as some students do not pay any attention to the feedback. Some students also fail to understand the feedback that they receive (Granville & Dison, 2009:53). Furthermore, many students do not pay any attention to the feedback as they seldom have to revise the texts (Brennan, 1995:353).

For feedback to be effective, it needs to be part of the writing process and should not only be a summative isolated event that takes place at the end of an assessed writing assignment (Granville & Dison, 2009:53). Feedback needs to be formative, continuous, integrated, holistic, and provide students with the opportunity to reflect in order to be helpful for future tasks (Granville & Dison, 2009:53; Meyer & Niven, 2007:125).

It is important to note that not all students have the same attitude to receiving feedback (Young, 2000:409). Hattie and Timperley (2007:82) point out that feedback can be "accepted, modified, or rejected". It is therefore imperative to realise that not all students might respond positively to feedback. Pitts (2005:218) mentions that "it is easy to underestimate the extent to which careless assessment and feedback might affect the development and emotional stability".

Young's (2000:409) opinion is also relevant in this regard: "[a]ssessing students' work is a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, there is the need to grade students' work and provide feedback: on the other, a concern to protect psychologically vulnerable students and foster positive self-esteem."

Unfortunately with feedback there are often communication failures between lecturers and students, and especially first-year students frequently misinterpret the comments of their lecturers as they are not familiar with the academic discourses used in universities. Comments which can seem common to lecturers such as urging students to focus on argument, structure and coherence, can be abstract and difficult to understand for students (Paxton, 1993:60). Comments to students should therefore not be "cryptic" (Parkerson, 2000:127), but explicit, clear and specific (Granville & Dison, 2009:54; Parkerson, 2000:127). Some lecturers do not give verbal or written comments and only provide an often capricious number or a grade that provides students with no real guidance. Some lecturers write only cursory comments and give judgments that are more of a summary than a matter of addressing specific problems (Brennan, 1995:354). Lecturers also need to caution against only pointing out surface errors and grammatical issues, as some students are under the impression that if these types of mistakes are corrected then their essays are perfect when in fact very important aspects of their literacy problems have not been attended to (Paxton, 1993:63).

Dison (1998:11) found that one way of implementing effective feedback could be where lecturers write "interactive comments". These types of comments are usually in the form of a question such as "Can you expand a bit more?" This type of feedback forces students to react more constructively when they have to rewrite their work. Another way to give effective feedback is by incorporating writing centres (cf. §3.2.2) into the feedback process. One-on-one consultations with writing centre consultants can help students when feedback is not only one-sided. Students can become part of the feedback dialogue when they ask questions and are able to receive immediate answers. When written feedback is supplemented with verbal feedback and the feedback is reinforced when students make notes about the verbal feedback, students are more empowered and can have greater ownership of their writing (Parkerson, 2000:126). Lillis (2003:204) also argues against "monologic" discourses:

One relatively simple way of involving students in decisions they wish to make in their academic writing and thus shift towards a more dialogic approach, is to reconceptualise the widespread practice of 'feedback' to 'talkback'. Feedback typically has the following features: a focus on the student as product, a tendency towards closed commentary, including evaluative language such as 'good', 'weak', etc. Talkback, in contrast, would involve focusing on the student's text in process... and attempt to open up space where the student writer can say what she likes and does not like about her writing.

It is apparent that feedback can exist in various forms. Further examples include where lecturers can firstly provide feedback through modelling sample essays. Guidelines for structuring essays

should be made readily available to students. Lecturers can give oral feedback to students in the class individually or the whole class at once. Finally, a process approach (cf. §3.5.2) can be used where feedback is continuously provided throughout the writing process and not only at the end of the writing task (Granville & Dison, 2009:60).

Even though the main focus of this study was not on feedback *per se*, it is important to report, especially with the high number of students that have to complete AGLA 121. Efficient feedback is a vital avenue to explore once more case studies such as this one have been conducted.

### **3.8 General conventions of academic writing**

There are certain generic features that most academic writing entails. First-year students ought to be familiarized with these general so that they can use and refine them in their various disciplines and subjects (Thonney, 2011:347).

Butler (2007a:33-39) proposes the following generic textual conventions of academic discourse: formality, conciseness and exactness, impersonality and objectivity, nominalisation, grammatical correctness, coherent and cohesive (logical) structure and argument, and appropriate use of evidence. Thonney (2011:348) provides the following standard, general “moves” in academic writing. Academic writers have to incorporate and respond to what other writers have written about their topic; describe the relevance of their contribution and provide a plan for the rest of their writing; acknowledge and accept that other writers may not agree with their opinion; must have a voice of authority; focus on evidence; and focus on using generic academic and discipline- and subject-specific vocabulary. Skillen (2006:142-43) lists the following linguistic devices that are typical of academic writing:

- *modality* – allowing writers to express the level of certainty in claims, e.g. ‘the results may indicate that’;
- *nominalisation* – allowing writers to increase the density of information in a sentence by turning verbs into noun constructions;
- *thematic development* – allowing writers to construct cohesive and logical text; and
- *the passive voice in thematic development* – allowing writers to direct the readers’ attention to what happened rather than onto who did something.

What follows is a summary of what is deemed as being generic conventions typically associated with traditional academic writing. The conventions discussed are relevant to this study as the outcomes of the AGLA 121 course that are evaluated in the form of an assessment rubric are

based on these traditional conventions (cf. Appendix E). These conventions are also measured against the argumentative essays examined in the empirical study (cf. §7.6.4).

The **language** used in academic writing is formal. Some of the characteristics of formal language include longer sentences that are syntactically more complex; the lexical density is higher; colloquial words and phrases are substituted with more formal alternatives (Blanpain, 2006:41). The language used by students can also affect the readability of the academic texts they are producing. Academic writing should be clear, concise and easy to read. Readability can be defined as the ease with which texts can be read and comprehended as a result of a specific style of writing (Fry, 2002:286; Harris & Hodges, 1995:203). Academic texts can be made more academically readable by focusing on using the correct discourse relations, syntax and vocabulary (Tanaka-Ishii *et al.*, 2010:205).

It is, however, important to remember that the degree of **formality** varies from discipline to discipline and students should be alerted to these differences, especially if they belong to more than one discipline. The style that an academic writer chooses to project to the perceived audience depends on various factors that include: the function of the text; the cultural context; and the conventions of the disciplinary community they are part of (cf. Hyland, 2000:3; Van de Poel, 2006:124).

Many students, however, struggle to correctly identify their audience, purpose with the text and the disciplinary conventions they need to adhere to. This often results in students' writing not always being 'acceptable', or 'on standard'. Andrews (2003:125) provides the following quote from an undergraduate student on his perception of academic writing: "I have found during my short time at the University that one's own personal style can be an asset or a handicap depending on the assessor. I have tried metaphors and anecdotes (admittedly some too puerile) on some lecturers and have had them dismissed as not academic enough. Consequently I have become more impersonal in my writing."

Even though disciplines have their own ways of writing, it is important that students' academic voices are not completely silenced like the student mentioned in the above quote. For Carter (2013), it is important that students "imprint" themselves on their writing in order to have a sense of ownership in their writing. Elbow (1981:287) defines **voice** as a trait "that captures the sound of the individual on the page" and "an ideal metaphor for individualism" (Elbow, 1999:334). According to Matsuda (2001:40), "voice is the amalgamative effect of the use of discursive and non-discursive features that language users use, deliberately or otherwise, from socially available, yet ever changing repertoires".

Personal pronouns play an important role in the modulation of the writer's voice in academic writing (Lorés-Sanz, 2011:174). One of the main reasons that expert academic writers use first person pronouns is to uphold an impression that they are confident and authoritative (Hyland, 2002a:353). The importance of students portraying an authoritative voice in their writing becomes evident in the assessment thereof (Zhao & Llosa, 2008:154). However, establishing an authoritative voice and making their own voices heard in the discourse communities they are entering, are difficult and challenging actions for many student writers (Thonney, 2011:353). This becomes especially evident when they have to write and incorporate other sources (voices) into their work. Students then often feel disempowered, inferior, powerless and restricted (Hamilton & Pitt, 2009:66). Even though voice is not limited to first-person writing (Richards & Miller, 2005:184), one of the key reasons why the discussion of the use of personal pronouns need to be included in this thesis, is due to the increasing use thereof in various accounts of academic writing, even in fields and disciplines where it was previously discouraged. For the most part of the twentieth century, to ensure objectivity in academic writing, especially in the sciences, the use of personal voice was mostly rejected (Curry & Hewings, 2003:29). The use of personal pronouns in academic writing (by undergraduates and graduates) remains a highly controversial topic (cf. Creme & Lea, 2008:132; Henning *et al.*, 2005:92; Hyland, 2005:187; McKinney Maddalena, 2010:180; Swales & Feak, 2004:17; Thonney, 2011:353; Van de Poel, 2006:124). Hyland (2005:173) mentions that recently words such as "objective", "faceless", and "impersonal", are not always associated with academic writing any longer. Instead, an attempt is made to promote interaction between writers and readers. The distance between the writer and reader has been reduced and the writer has become more visible (Hamilton & Pitt, 2009:72; Lorés-Sanz, 2011:174).

Emerging from the literature, it is clear that there is a huge discrepancy between academic writers and lecturers whether personal pronouns should be allowed in student academic writing or not. The opinions range from lecturers and even promoters and supervisors advising (and in many cases forbidding) undergraduate and graduate students against using personal pronouns (Lourens, 2004:68). On the other hand, many students are encouraged and even expected to use personal pronouns. Whether to use the personal pronouns or not can be quite confusing for many students, especially if they get mixed and inconsistent instructions on the use thereof (Andrews, 2003:125; Berlin, 1982:766; Swales & Feak, 2004:17). Universities' subject lecturers and writing lecturers have a pedagogical responsibility in guiding students in knowing if, when, how and where to use it. It is therefore imperative that generic course lecturers from generic academic literacy courses such as AGLA re-evaluate completely advising all first-year students in not using personal pronouns in academic writing and instead provide students with examples when to use it correctly in their academic writing.

The purposes of using pronouns in academic writing can vary from low-risk functions such as describing research methods or announcing topics, to high-risk functions such as making original claims (Thonney, 2013). The challenge for subject lecturers and writing lecturers is to clearly inform students whether they are allowed and supposed to use it and under what circumstances and in what contexts. Thonney (2011:353) firmly believes that students who receive instruction on how to use personal pronouns will be able to use it correctly in the right contexts.

Thonney (2013) suggests the following rhetorical functions where personal pronouns can be used in students' academic writing: making claims such as statements of judgement, interpretation, or inference, describing procedures, expressing doubt or uncertainty, expressing personal responses to the topic, demonstrating understanding to the lecturer, announcing topics or purposes, and for addressing the reader directly.

One of the reasons why students should be exposed to the correct uses of personal pronouns in courses such as AGLA 121 is because if not then, when and by whom? As students must be able to follow the rules of the discipline or as required by their lecturers, students will be penalized for using first-person pronouns in the intervention assignments of this study as the instructions throughout the AGLA 121 course taught them not to use it.

Linked closely to the use of personal pronouns, using the passive voice is seen by many as a feature of good academic writing, especially as it contributes to the formal objective tone required in many disciplines (Baratta, 2009:1406; Blanpain, 2006:44; Henning *et al.*, 2005:92; Hyland & Milton, 1997:192; Lourens, 2004:68; Street, 2009:64). Even though the use of the passive voice is still preferred by some academics, the use of the active voice is becoming more popular as some writers want to be clearer and more direct with their readers as well as keep their readers' attention as long and complicated sentences written in the passive voice can confuse readers or even make them lose interest (Coffin & Goodman, 2003:138). Currently, in the AGLA 121 course workbook, students are encouraged to use the passive voice and are therefore penalised in the writing interventions (that serves as empirical data for this study), if they do not adhere to the "rule" of utilising the passive voice in their argumentative essays.

Another important aspect of academic writing is **metadiscourse**. Metadiscourse is often seen as a vague and "fuzzy" term with seemingly no clear, specific definition (cf. Dahl, 2004:1810; Hyland, 2000:109; Hyland & Tse, 2004:156; Hyland, 2005; Ifantidou, 2005:1326). For the purpose of this study, Hyland's (2000:109) definition will be used. Metadiscourse can be viewed as certain aspects of a text that serve to organise the discourse and through this organisation indicate the writer's stance towards the content and the reader. Table 3.3 provides an overview of the functions of metadiscourse in academic texts as provided by Hyland (2000:111).

**Table 3.3 Functions of metadiscourse in academic texts (Hyland, 2000:111)**

CATEGORY	FUNCTION	EXAMPLES
<i>Textual metadiscourse</i>		
<b>Logical connectives</b>	Express semantic relations between main clauses	In addition / but / thus / and
<b>Frame markers</b>	Explicitly refer to discourse acts or text stages	Finally / to repeat / here we try to
<b>Endophoric markers</b>	Refer to information in other parts of the text	Noted above / see fig. / in section 2
<b>Evidentials</b>	Refer to sources of information from other texts	According to X / (1990) / Z states
<b>Code glosses</b>	Help readers grasp meanings of ideational material	Namely / e.g. / such as / i.e.
<b>Interpersonal metadiscourse</b>		
<b>Hedges</b>	Withhold writer's full commitment to statement	Might / perhaps / possible / about
<b>Boosters</b>	Emphasise force or writer's certainty in message	In fact / definitely / it is clear
<b>Attitude markers</b>	Express writer's attitude to propositional content	Unfortunately / I agree / X claims
<b>Relational markers</b>	Explicitly refer to or build relationship with reader	Frankly / note that / you can see
<b>Person markers</b>	Explicit reference to author(s)	I / we / my / mine /our

In AGLA 121, mostly **textual metadiscourse** categories are taught to students. Logical connectives, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials and code glosses resonated under the term discourse markers in the AGLA 121 workbook and are mainly used to help students realise the importance of effective cohesion and coherence in academic texts (cf. Bruce, 2008:4; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Jordaan, 2014:18-19; Meintjes, 2015:80; Van Rooy & Esterhuizen, 2011:67; Wessels, 1993:77). The students' use of these discourse markers are investigated in Chapter 7 (cf. §7.6.4; §7.7.3.1.3.5). Even though **interpersonal metadiscourse** is not typically seen as being a traditional academic convention; the use thereof should be considered for AGLA 121 course redesign as it is increasingly used in academic writing. In AGLA 121, hedges and boosters are covered and taught to students. However, in the workbook, students are discouraged to use attitude markers, relational markers, and person markers as it is portrayed as making academic writing subjective.

Writers are expected to position themselves as part of a larger narrative and this can be achieved through the use of appropriate **citation** (Hirvela & Qian, 2013:87; Keck, 2006:262). Explicitly referencing works of other authors and integrating them into their own writing is seen as an essential feature of academic writing that developing student writers need to acquire at university (Hyland, 2000:20). Some of the functions of citations include providing justification for arguments; demonstrating the originality of one's position; displaying loyalty to a certain community; creating rhetorical gaps for research; establishing a reliable writer ethos; and defining a specific context of knowledge or problem (Hyland, 2000:20-22). It is important to teach novice writers how to cite as Hyland (2000:21-22) found that the numbers of items in reference lists and references in text in academic journals have increased significantly.

Students must be taught to use both integral and non-integral forms of citation. With integral forms of citation greater emphasis appears, the cited author appears as part of the sentence. With non-integral forms, the cited author appears in parenthesis (Hyland, 2000:22-23). Students must also be taught how to use reporting verbs (e.g. *observe*, *state*, *analyse*, *suspect*, *ascribe*, *discuss*). The use of certain reporting verbs signifies a writer's rhetorical choices as it signals the writer's attitude towards the information and whether it should be accepted or not (Hyland, 2000:23). The nursing students' integral and non-integral forms of citation and their use of reporting verbs are reported in Chapter 7 (cf. §7.6.8).

Not all students cite and use source texts correctly which sometimes result in **plagiarism**. The "copy and paste" culture among students is quite common (cf. §7.3; Arhin & Jones, 2009:710). Many students learnt this strategy at high school (Scanlon & Neumann, 2002:374). The academic community regards plagiarism as unacceptable. The severity thereof is described by Pecorari (2003:317) as a "heinous crime". Some cases of plagiarism are prototypical where students intentionally plagiarize (Leask, 2006:183). Still, not all students plagiarize with the intent to deceive. In many cases, students copy directly from sources, believing that it is the appropriate way (Gimenez, 2007:143; Leask, 2006:183; Pecorari, 2003:317-318). Some of the reasons that students plagiarize include different cultural attitudes concerning the use of sources; language proficiency; and the context of the written assignment (Keck, 2006:262). Hyland (2001:2013) is firmly of the opinion that some student writers, when they are exposed to "expert" writing, feel so inadequate that they choose to plagiarize.

Ways of addressing plagiarism include guiding students and teaching them techniques such as quoting directly, paraphrasing and summarising (Hirvela & Qian, 2013:87). Even though direct quoting is increasingly found in academic writing (such as journal articles), students are encouraged to find new ways to "capture the gist" of the original source. Instead of verbatim quotes, students are encouraged to rather summarize and paraphrase as these strategies are an important part of original academic writing (Brain, 1989:3; Keck, 2006:261). The link between

reading and writing becomes apparent with summarizing and paraphrasing as students need to be able read sources effectively in order to know what information to use for writing purposes as well as how to integrate the material into their own texts. This also links with the cognitive model of Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) (cf. §3.3.4.1) where they introduce knowledge telling and knowledge transforming. Students must be able to demonstrate their abilities to find and present the material they found in an appropriate manner by transforming the information into their own argument (Hirvela & Qian, 2013:87).

Even after having had instruction on how to cite and reference correctly, students still make many mistakes and struggle to get the balance of acknowledging sources correct. Some students use too few sources and others too many, so that it is difficult to determine their own voice and opinions. It seems that many students are not mindful of the significance that academic place on referencing. Students are also not always aware of the array of functions of referencing. Some of these functions include (Nevile, 1996:46-47):

- Using other writers' research as evidence to back up claims made. This is done to support the academic argument being made.
- Acknowledging the source of ideas or quotations.
- To contextualise writing in relation to what has already been written.
- Providing alternative views.
- To assist the reader with extra detail in other sources.

From the above description of all the general conventions usually associated with academic writing, it is apparent that first-year students have to manage many writing skills. In the following section, a description is given of some of the aspects of academic writing that students struggle the most with.

### **3.9 General student writing issues**

Evans and Morrison (2010:395) mention that first-year students require support with academic writing (particularly grammar, cohesion and style) and general technical vocabulary. Krause (2001:156) provides the following research and writing skills that first-year students find difficult: finding relevant references by searching library computer databases, working out which points to include and which to omit for the essay, putting together ideas from a number of different sources, identifying the most relevant points in their reading, understanding the meaning of the

references they found, organizing the points into paragraphs, and working out which direct quotes to use.

Silva *et al.* (1999:144) categorise the perceived writing deficiencies of students as follows: having no self-confidence, not being organised enough, failing to realise the importance of revisions, having poor sentence structure and grammar, and failing to pay attention to detail.

Regarding the students' **self-confidence** issues, especially at the beginning of writing courses, it was established that many students apologise for their writing abilities and are hesitant to submit their written tasks. Students also struggle to **organise** their writing. For example, they do not know how to provide an outline and how to use topic sentences. Many barely knew what a topic sentence was. Students also seem to struggle with transitions between ideas and especially paragraphs. Students also seem to be unaware of their audiences. Furthermore, students do not seem to comprehend that different writing assignments require different writing styles, and they also do not see the need to write multiple drafts before final submission and to **revise** and rewrite. However, it is not always the students' fault as not all lecturers provide students with multiple opportunities due to time-constraints and big classes. Students also struggle with **grammar** and sentence structure and too often rely on computer spell-check programs. Also, students struggle with referencing. Even after instruction, students seem unable to understand how to use direct quotations and how to paraphrase.

Nevile (1996:40) is of the opinion that students underestimate the demands of academic writing. They submit assignments without much or any **revision** and expect it to be correct the first time which is in contrast to what research states that students who revise their work more attain higher marks. Even "expert" writers in academe write multiple drafts before their works are published. Nevile (1996:41) mentions further that only when students realise how complex academic writing can be will they see the necessity for writing more than one draft.

Nelson Spivey (1990:259) states that "[a]cts of composing from sources are hybrid acts of literacy in which writing influences reading and reading influences writing". Issues regarding reading that students struggle with are that their **reading strategies** are quite limited. Some students do not spend enough time on the reading process. Some students use sources that only cover one side of the argument. Students also include too few sources which are often too out-dated or general. Students further typically take longer to critically understand what they have read and are not always sure what to do with what they had read (Nevile, 1996:42).

Students need to be more perceptive of their **audience's needs** and are often viewed as being insensitive to the expectations and needs of their readers. Some students are further not sure who their audience is and what their needs are (Nevile, 1996:45, 48). Brennan (1995:353)

mentions that many students view their audience as being experts and that this audience could be quite intimidating.

Nevile (1996:44) is of the opinion that many students struggle to **organise** their writing and fail to comprehend the importance of a well-structured introduction and conclusion. Many students do not use explicit cues in their writing. Regarding **content**, students fail to define and clarify key scholarly concepts and terms. Students also do not clarify and defend how these key terms will be interpreted as part of their contextualisation and academic argument (Nevile, 1996:46).

Regarding **how they view their own writing**, Nevile (1996:45-46) mentions that many students do not see their writing as being “academic”. Some students view their written assignments as assessment tools that lecturers use to evaluate their development and learning. Students also focus more on content, where in contrast academics mostly view argument and structure as important. Brennan (1995:351) mentions that for many students essay writing is seen as a task and not as an opportunity to learn.

**Doing academic research** is a relatively new concept for many first-year students. Though they do have research assignments in high school, and in many subjects are expected to do research tasks, they are quite unfamiliar with the type and standard of research expected at tertiary level. To help students with this transition, universities sometimes provide courses like AGLA 121 where basic and generic research skills are taught. However, if these research skills are not applied in their other subjects from the first year on, many students may find the course lacking in relevance for their other courses and their future professions and may believe that they do not need these skills. Subsequently, their motivation for learning might become impaired (Burke *et al.*, 2005:359; Ciliska, 2005:347). Ciliska (2005:347) also found that some students find generic research courses boring and at times frightening. Some students also have a lack of appreciation for learning how to conduct research, especially if the curriculum is more clinically focused (Burke *et al.*, 2005:359). For the current study, it is also highly relevant as the nursing students’ curriculum is focused on clinical work.

Thus, it is clear that being able to do research is a necessary skill for students. However, it seems that not all students appreciate the value thereof. It is, however, not always only the students’ fault in not realising the need. Profetto-McGrath (2005:369) is of the opinion that lecturers can have a direct influence in the motivation of their students regarding research. She mentions that lecturers can either make students excited about research and clearly share the applicability for their current studies and future careers, or lecturers can be responsible for fostering excitement: “[e]ducators can foster excitement about research and communicate its applicability, or they can foster indifference to, and even dislike for, the subject”. The question must be asked whether doing research is a skill that first-year students should be able to apply

and whether it is sufficient enough only to expose them to the concept and not expect them to physically produce in-depth research.

Some of the issues that students sometimes have with academic writing are investigated in Chapter 7 (§7.6.8).

### **3.10 Academic writing genres**

#### **3.10.1 The academic essay**

The traditional academic essay is often the typical default genre used for assessment and learning purposes in high school and in higher education and often has high-stakes implications (Andrews, 2003:117; Lillis, 2006:33; Mitchell & Evison, 2006:68; Nevile, 1996:41; Womack, 1993:42; Zawacki, 1992:33). According to Mitchell and Evison (2006:68) the essay is often idealised and seems to represent “a kind of pinnacle in undergraduate achievement”. Essays also enable students to communicate their ideas with their specific discourse communities (Brennan, 1995:351). Most academic essays can be defined as an “ordered presentation of a distinctive position or point of view well supported by evidence” (Nevile, 1996:41).

Even though the writing of an academic essay is deemed as important by lecturers in various disciplines, many first-year students do not see the need to be able to write essays. This is possibly due to a mismatch of what lecturers focus on and what students see as being important (cf. §3.3.6.1; Norton, 1990:411).

Many students are often quite anxious about writing essays at university (Norton, 1990:411), mostly because they do not exactly know how to write them. Furthermore, students also struggle to find the balance between the strict requirements of essays to write explicitly, rationally, and logically whilst at the same time retain their own idiosyncratic voice and identity. Also, if they do receive marking criteria for essays, they sometimes find it difficult to interpret as the spectrum of criteria varies from subject to subject and lecturer to lecturer (cf. Andrews, 2003:118). One of the definitions that the AHD (1996:627) provides for the term *essay* is “an initial attempt or endeavour, especially a tentative attempt”. This definition perfectly summarises what most first-year students experience when they enrol at universities. Academic literacy lecturers and content lecturers need to take into consideration that most first-year students have never written an academic essay before and therefore their first attempts might not be very well written.

There are many writing genres that undergraduates and graduates are expected to produce at tertiary level. However, efficiently constructing descriptive and argumentative essays of good quality remains one of the main tasks that undergraduate students are expected to produce (Torrance *et al.*, 2000:181). Following is a description of the argumentative essay and the academic argument.

### 3.10.1.1 The academic argument and the argumentative essay

Using the academic argument as part of their academic discourse is an activity that must be used and developed by most undergraduate and graduate students at some point in their academic careers. In academic discourse, the term **argument** can be viewed from and used in various ways. What follows are some of the many definitions of the academic argument:

- “a process of argumentation, a connected series of statements intended to establish a position and implying response to another (or more than one position)” (Andrews, 1995:3);
- “a carefully arranged and supported presentation of a viewpoint” (Irvin, 2010:9);
- “A good argument consists of statements or reasons that support a final conclusive statement. These supporting statements or reasons are called premises (major and minor), while the statement that is supported is called the conclusion.” (Pienaar, 2001:128-129);
- “the sequence of interlinked claims and reasons that, between them, establish content and force of the position for which a particular speaker is arguing” (Toulmin *et al.*, 1984:14);
- “The function of the argument is making the thesis convincing” (Van de Poel, 2006:76); and
- “The term argument can refer to individual claims or the whole text. In reference to individual claims, argument means that a proposition is supported by grounds and warrants.”(Wingate, 2012:146).

Students should be taught how to determine the strength of arguments as it assists students with developing critical thinking skills, helps them with making confident decisions and with problem solving (Pienaar, 2001:129). According to Van de Poel (2006:80), arguments can be based on examples or facts, the deliberations of pros and cons, subjective judgement, consequence and reason, and on authority.

Just as with academic literacy (cf. §2.7) and academic writing (cf. §3.2.2), the question whether the teaching of an academic argument should be generic or more subject-specific in nature is

also frequently asked. On the one side, there are views that support the idea that students cannot model and transfer arguments from one subject to another and that only subject lecturers can teach students how to write an argument (Mitchell & Riddle, 2000:18; Wingate, 2012:147). In contrast, Toulmin (1958:15) reckoned that even though there are certain aspects that are “field-dependent”, there are many aspects that are “field-invariant”. This implies that regardless of the field or discipline, generic academic literacy courses such as AGLA 121 can teach and expose first-year students to generic academic arguments.

Still one of the most influential and practical models used to base research and teaching of the academic argument structure on, is Toulmin’s (1958) model. This model basically consists of three main parts: a claim (the central thesis of the argument), data (evidence that supports the claim), and warrants (assumptions of the author).

The academic argument is found in the most common type of essay that undergraduate students are expected to write, which is the argumentative essay (Wingate, 2012:145; Wu, 2006:330). In a study conducted by Nesi and Gardner (2006:108) of academic writing in 20 disciplines, it was found that displaying critical thinking and developing an academic argument were the most important aspects of writing academic essays.

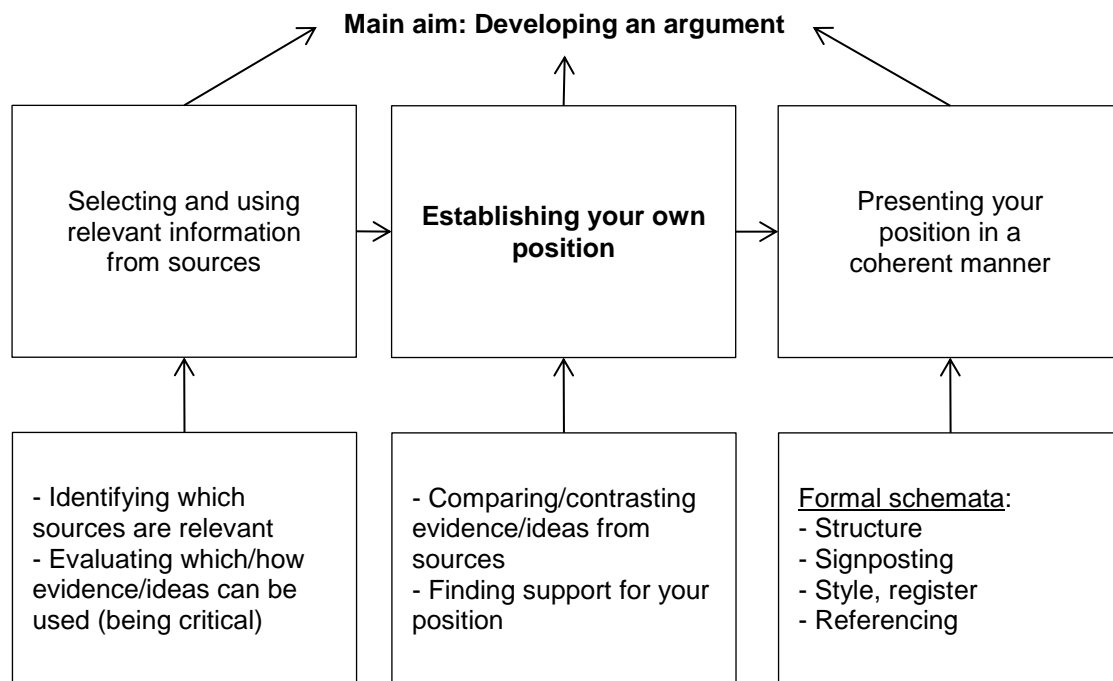
Many students (especially first-year students) struggle with argumentation and writing argumentative essays (Bacha, 2010:229) as many of them have not had adequate exposure to argumentative writing at high school level (Weese *et al.*, 1999:xv). Students should be able to not only present academic arguments in written essays, but are also expected to argue academically and professionally in a wide range of tasks such as comprehending lectures, undertaking research, and doing oral and written presentations (Pally, 2001:279).

To help students produce academic arguments, the typical structure of argumentative essays is often taught to them in academic literacy courses such as AGLA 121. The structure used in AGLA 121 (cf. §5.3.3) is quite similar to a combination of various structures found in Toulmin’s model (1958) and Hyland’s model (1990) as seen in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4 Elements of structure of the argumentative essay (Hyland, 1990:69):**

STAGE	MOVE
<b>Thesis</b> <b>Introduces the proposition to be argued</b>	<b>Gambit:</b> Attention grabber – controversial statement or dramatic illustration
	<b>Information:</b> Presents background material for topic contextualization
	<b>Evaluation:</b> Positive gloss – brief support of proposition
	<b>Marker:</b> Introduces and / or identifies a list
<b>Argument</b> <b>Discusses grounds for a thesis (Four move argument sequence can be repeated indefinitely)</b>	<b>Marker:</b> Signals the introduction of a claim and relates it to the text
	<b>Restatement:</b> Rephrasing or repetition of proposition
	<b>Claim:</b> States reason for acceptance of the proposition. Typically based on: Strength of perceived shared assumptions. A generalization based on data or evidence. Force of conviction
	<b>Support:</b> States the grounds which underpin the claim. Typically: Explicating assumptions used to make claim. Providing data or citing references.
<b>Conclusion</b> <b>Synthesizes the discussion and affirms the validity of the thesis</b>	<b>Marker:</b> Signals conclusion boundary
	<b>Consolidation:</b> Presents the significance of the argument stage to the proposition
	<b>Affirmation:</b> Restates proposition
	<b>Close:</b> Widens context or perspective of proposition

An argumentative essay writing framework as designed by Wingate (2012:153) seems to be an appropriate approach to teach students to develop and produce academic arguments and could be incorporated into the AGLA 121 course. Wingate (2012:152) states that even though developing an academic argument is an important feature to acquire, many lecturers focus more on linguistic or “surface” features. Wingate suggests that both aspects should be treated equally so that students will realise the importance of both and therefore designed a synthesised argumentative essay writing framework (Figure 3.6).



**Figure 3.6 Argumentative essay writing framework (Wingate, 2012:153)**

### **3.11 Relevance and purpose of the literature for this study**

The main aim of this study is to determine the effect of the AGLA 121 course on first-year nursing students' writing. In order to approach the evaluation effectively, a clear understanding of the overall concept of academic writing was deemed necessary. This chapter addressed two of the research questions and aims presented in Chapter 1 (cf. §1.4). Firstly, the characteristics of academic writing was discussed and secondly current trends and views regarding the teaching and learning of academic writing at first-year level were investigated.

From the contextualization in Section 3.2, it is evident that academic writing is a difficult but crucial concept to define. One of the main issues addressed in this chapter was that first-year students in general cannot write academically. Whether this is the case with nursing students is determined in Chapter 7 (cf. §7.3). Another issue that was highlighted in this chapter involves the assumptions that both lecturers and students have about academic writing. This provides a basis to determine the assumptions of the nursing lecturers and students (cf. §7.3; §7.4; §7.5).

The need for interventions such as AGLA 121 is evident. At the NWU, support is provided to students through the availability of a writing centre (called a writing laboratory at the NWU). Consultants assist students with their writing in various modes such as face-to-face consultations and e-tutoring. However, as the main aim of this study is to determine the effect of

the academic literacy course, AGLA 121, on the nursing students' writing, the writing laboratory was not investigated as a variable as not all students were expected to request help from the writing laboratory. The main focus of the evaluation is the effect of the AGLA 121 course on nursing students' writing.

In Chapter 2, the debate whether academic literacy courses should be generic and/or subject-specific was discussed. It was found that a synthesis approach seemed to be the best approach to follow. However, universities' varying needs have to be taken into account. The same debate is raised in this chapter (cf. §3.2.2), where the question is raised whether the academic writing section of AGLA 121 should be presented as generic, subject-specific or as a combination of the two approaches.

Possible influences that could affect student writing in general were discussed. Relevant for the case study is that nursing students encounter types of writing at university that no amount of schooling (cf. §3.3.1), whether good or bad, could have prepared them for. The importance of good reading skills for university students in general were highlighted (cf. §3.3.2; §4.6). For nursing students, reading is also a vital skill needed for academic writing (cf. §3.3.2; §4.6; §7.6.2; §7.7.2.2.3). First-year students also need good technology and information literacy skills (cf. §3.3.3) to help with their academic writing tasks. As a necessary concern for this study, it is important to note that nursing students need good technology and especially information literacy skills (cf. §4.7; §7.7.2.2.1).

As mentioned in this chapter (cf. §3.3.4), academic writing is cognitively very demanding. The various cognitive models (cf. §3.3.4.1) described indicate the various processes that all students have to go through in order to acquire and develop academic writing skills. From the nursing literature it became evident that some of the most important cognitive processes that nursing students need to acquire are knowledge (cf. §3.3.4.2.1), critical thinking (cf. §3.3.4.2.2), and meta-cognitive reflection (cf. §3.3.4.2.3). How these skills and dispositions pertain to nursing students is discussed in Chapter 4 (cf. §4.4).

Together with cognitive aspects, social factors also play a role in the acquisition and development of students' academic writing. It is relevant to this study that nursing students need to be aware of how to apply their cognitive knowledge and communicate effectively in various social environments. Nursing students need to be able to communicate efficiently and effectively in various academic environments and genres in order to prepare them for the different types of writing required professionally (cf. §4.2).

Another aspect that is just as important as cognitive and social factors involves affective factors (cf. §3.3.6). Nursing students' attitude and motivation (cf. §3.3.6.1) towards academic writing

can impact on their learning processes. Some (nursing) students might even have or develop writing apprehension (cf. §3.3.6.2; §4.2). Even though the phenomenon of writing apprehension is not the main focus of the study, it is necessary to discuss this aspect, as any negative attitudes or fear towards academic writing can have an effect on students acquiring and developing their academic writing knowledge and skills. Writing academically at university can also cause nursing students to be anxious and uncertain about their academic writing abilities (cf. §4.4; Table 7.8). One of the reasons that the nursing students who participated in the empirical study of this thesis provided for being uncertain about their writing abilities, was that their high school writing education (cf. §3.3.1) did not adequately prepare them for writing at university (cf. §7.5).

It is evident that students need support in all aspects relating to academic writing. Learning theories relating to academic writing can assist lecturers (both literacy and subject) to teach students academic writing knowledge and skills that they can then apply as necessary. It also became clear that aspects of all the theories discussed can be applied to teaching nursing students academic writing skills. Elements of CTR and behaviourism (cf. §3.4.1), cognitivism and social cognitivism (cf. §3.4.2), and constructivism and social constructivism (cf. §3.4.3) form the basis of the AGLA 121 course and can be further applied to assist first-year nursing students with their academic writing needs (cf. §4.4; Figure 8.4). Nursing students need to learn the correct structures and general “rules” of academic writing conventions. Furthermore, nursing students need to learn through scaffolding procedures to eventually become self-directed writers (cf. Figure 8.4).

There are various approaches to teaching academic writing and in this chapter, the product (cf. §3.5.1), process (cf. §3.5.2), and genre (cf. §3.5.3) approaches were discussed as they are relevant to the study in that some aspects of all three approaches are incorporated in AGLA 121. In AGLA 121, the main emphasis is on surface features as well as the organization and structure of the written texts. In AGLA 121 an attempt at a process approach is incorporated in the writing programme where students are given opportunities to plan, make drafts and to revise their writing. However, for the process approach to truly be effective, the course should be longer as there was neither enough time nor enough manpower. The social context that students are moving into with their academic writing needs to be taken into consideration. For nursing students, a synthesis approach seems to be the best approach for future applications as nursing students need guidance with academic writing that could potentially influence their learning and eventually their future professions.

The assessment (cf. §3.6) of academic writing is a process through which students’ progress and achievement can be measured. Both AGLA 121 and the nursing subjects use formative and summative assessments. In this study, writing rubrics were compared and adapted (cf.

Appendix E; Appendix F) to determine whether the AGLA 121 course had an effect on nursing students' argumentative academic writing.

The importance of effective feedback was stated (cf. §3.7). Though the nursing students were a small sample, they are part of the academic literacy lecturers' large classes. In-depth personal feedback is not always possible. In order to address this, feedback can be reflected in a well-designed marking rubric making clear to the students exactly what will be assessed (cf. Appendix E).

In this chapter, a summary of the traditional, general conventions of academic writing (cf. §3.8) was provided. In AGLA 121, most of these conventions form the basis of the course and are incorporated in the essay assessment rubric (cf. Appendix E). These conventions are taught to all the students (including the nursing students). A comparison is made (cf. §7.10) where these conventions are measured against what is expected of nursing students.

General student writing issues (§3.9) were highlighted in this chapter. These difficulties that especially first-year students experience highlight the plight of many students. Nursing students are no different from other students and also struggle with many of the issues raised in this chapter (cf. §4.4). Once again, the necessity for support interventions such as AGLA 121 is highlighted. The specificity of the support is investigated in this study to determine whether AGLA 121 truly supports and nurtures nursing students' writing skills and abilities.

There are many academic writing genres that students of various faculties and schools need to produce at university level (§3.10). The academic essay (§3.10.1) still seems to be the default academic text that most students are expected to produce at some point in their academic careers. The main focus of AGLA 121 is to expose first-year students to the academic argument and the argumentative essay (cf. §3.10.1.1). Nursing students are also expected to produce academic arguments in argumentative essays (cf. §4.5; §7.7.3.1.3.1). However, nursing students further need to be able to produce other types of essays such as descriptive and reflective essays (cf. Table 4.1; Table 4.2). For possible curriculum re-design for AGLA 121, possibilities of helping nursing students with these types of essays need to be investigated (cf. §8.3).

### **3.12 Conclusion**

As it is part of the main research question, in this chapter, the various aspects of academic writing were discussed. It became evident that the concept of academic writing is not easily definable. There is an array of features associated with academic writing. Consequently, it

seems almost impossible to include an in-depth description of everything. Therefore, only the criteria (that correlate with the writing conventions discussed in §3.8 and the literature review in §7.10) in the assessment rubric (Appendix E) were used to assess the nursing students' academic writing. This was done to determine the effect that AGLA 121 had on the nursing students' academic writing abilities. Furthermore, the affective factors that played a role in the acquisition and development of the nursing students' academic writing skills were investigated and reported in order to determine how the main stakeholders (the nursing students) felt about the effect of the course on their academic writing. The reason why these factors were chosen to be researched is because they align closely with Lynch's approaches (2003) that this evaluation is based on.

Firstly, an attempt was made to define and contextualise academic writing (§3.2). Some of the possible influences that could affect the learning and acquisition of academic writing were raised (§3.3). An overview was provided of the various learning theories (§3.4), and approaches to and techniques for (§3.5) the teaching of academic writing and various types of academic writing assessment (§3.6) were included. Aspects pertaining to feedback were also discussed (§3.7). The general conventions of academic writing (§3.8) were discussed as well as what difficulties (§3.9) students experience with these universal conventions. Finally, academic genres were described with the focus on the academic argument in essays (§3.10).

In the next chapter, an outline of the writing practices that nursing students are expected to produce are provided.

## CHAPTER 4: WRITING FOR NURSING STUDENTS

*“Pity the poor nursing student, who is required to write at times like a sociologist, at others like a philosopher, yet again like a scientist and finally as a reflective practitioner!” (Baynham, 2002)*

### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the different types of writing required of nursing students. This overview provides context for the case study in which the effect of the compulsory academic literacy course (AGLA 121) is evaluated. Firstly, background information and a summary of nursing as an academic discipline are provided (§4.2). Following this, a brief description of the autonomous and ideological academic writing skills (cf. §2.3.1; §2.3.2) of nursing students (§4.3) is given. Evident from the literature, the different types of writing that nursing students must be able to produce at university are discussed (§4.4). Thereafter, the writing genres used in nursing are outlined (§4.5). As the evaluation of the AGLA 121 course includes the reading and computer and information literacy components, the technological and general reading (§4.6) and technological skills (§4.7) required of nursing are also deliberated.

### 4.2 Background to nursing as an academic discipline

Nursing is a fairly young academic discipline and nursing education has only recently (mainly since the 1990s) moved away from training at hospitals and became an academic discipline with a variety of academic styles of writing in higher education (cf. Bochner, 1989:187; Borglin, 2012:611; Gardner & Rolfe, 2013:33; Rolfe, 2009:817; Webb, 1992:747; Whitehead, 2002:498). Not all undergraduate nursing students find this transition to higher education and especially writing at university easy (Bochner, 1989:187). Ratanasiripong *et al.* (2012) describe some of the problems that add to nursing students' anxiety and stress: poor coping skills, insufficient support, adjusting to new cultural experiences, financial difficulties, interpersonal issues, struggling with technological advances, clinical and academic challenges, and also language issues.

It is apparent that first-year nursing students face many hurdles when they enter nursing programmes at universities. Whitehead (2002:498) mentions that nursing faculties lose large numbers of undergraduate nursing students due to “the academic rigor of its educational programmes”. Similarly, Diehl (2007:205) remarks that many institutions overload students and often burden students with extra content in a very full curriculum. Fischer *et al.* (2001:70) comment that also in South Africa, the nursing curricula are overloaded and that many students complain about their perceived extreme workloads. This could be problematic regarding extra

literacy courses such as AGLA 121 as some students might feel overwhelmed by already heavy workloads. The NWU nursing students' perceptions and attitudes regarding their workload and AGLA 121 are discussed in detail in Chapter 7 (§7.4; §7.7.2.1.8).

Furthermore, there is also a vast difference between nursing education and work/practice. Fischer *et al.* (2001:66) state that student nurses suddenly have to enter and survive in two completely different worlds with competing demands. Students must be able to effectively function in the university setting as well as the clinical setting. This division between nursing education and practice is also referred to as the “theory-practice” gap (Borglin, 2012:612; Chant *et al.*, 2002:16). Martin (2002) summarises the gap as follows: “[t]raditional hospital-based nursing education focused heavily on clinical skill acquisition and procedural competence. Baccalaureate education, however, focuses on helping the nurse become a lifelong learner who has the capabilities to keep abreast of new developments in his/her field or speciality.” To assist South African students to bridge the theory-practice gap, nursing students have to complete a year of community service before they are allowed to practice as qualified nurses (Mampunge & Seekoe, 2014:60). However, the main aim of this study is not to investigate the gap that exists for nursing students. It is mentioned to provide the reader with the context of the enormous scope of writing expected from nursing students (cf. §4.4). Writing an argumentative essay forms only a part of the students' writing requirements. It is impossible for literacy lecturers in courses such as AGLA 121 to address all the writing requirements and needs of various subject groups. However, literacy lecturers together with subject lecturers can help with raising awareness about the variations that exist with academic writing tasks.

Following is a description of the types of literacies expected of nursing students.

### **4.3 Autonomous and ideological literacy skills of nursing students**

Autonomous literacy skills (cf. §2.3.1) are very important as nursing students need to be clear, careful writers in preparing reports and papers, drafting professional correspondence, and completing articles and/or books for publication (Kolin & Kolin, 1980:ix). However, many nursing students struggle with autonomous literacy skills such as grammar and spelling (Johnson *et al.*, 2007:169). Exact, clear and accurate communication is essential for nurses, as some of the documents they produce may have legal implications (Leki, 2007:68).

Ideological literacy skills (cf. §2.3.2) are also vital as nurses have to be able to communicate effectively in an academic context, as well as in a professional one. These contexts have multiple audiences and nurses must be flexible enough to know how to function in these various

milieus. Nursing students must have a proper understanding of the writing conventions of the profession they are moving into and should know how to become part of the nursing academic community by adhering to the preferred argumentative structures and styles of academic writing (Johnson *et al.*, 2007:169). The continuum (Van de Poel & Van Dyk, 2015:171) mentioned in Chapter 1 (cf. §1.8) becomes relevant here as students need to know what content is applicable for certain contexts and that it could vary as lecturers' needs change.

#### **4.4 Writing for nursing students**

Developing high levels of academic writing is one of the essential requirements of tertiary education and is particularly important in nursing to help assess and promote undergraduate nursing student scholarship and progress and to assist students to be able to communicate effectively in clinical settings once they have graduated (Lundgren & Halvarsson; 2009:527; Salamonson *et al.*, 2009:414).

Some nursing lecturers place a lot of importance on students' academic writing (Gimenez, 2008a:151). Like countless other lecturers, nursing lecturers complain about the sub-standard writing abilities of nursing students (Diehl, 2007:202-205; Lavelle *et al.*, 2013:60). According to Fischer *et al.* (2001:71) nursing students' academic development and achievements can be adversely affected if their language and writing skills are not on par. Nursing students must be supported and their writing issues must be addressed as writing is recognized as "one of the most important skills that the critical and questioning nurse can adopt" (Lundgren & Halvarsson, 2009:527).

On the other hand, according to Hegyvary (2005:194), some nursing lecturers view writing as an "innate skill" and assume that all students know how to write. Nursing lecturers also have certain assumptions and beliefs that students already have or develop academic writing skills fairly easily and are able to write according to the expected standards (cf. Silva *et al.*, 1999:142). However, for most nursing students writing is difficult and the writing standard requirements are not always clear (Gimenez, 2008a:151). Similarly, Newton and Moore (2010:222) are of the opinion that nursing lecturers cannot expect that undergraduate nursing students are able to produce sufficient writing without proper formal instruction.

The significance of courses such as AGLA 121 is therefore highlighted. The importance of the quality of the course needs to continuously be evaluated especially as writing is seen as an essential high-stakes activity that can be daunting and time-consuming for many nursing students. As already mentioned, nursing students have a heavy workload (cf. §4.2; §7.7.2.1.8)

and many institutions expect nursing students to be able to write in a variety of genres. According to Kolin and Kolin (1980:ix), written communication is central to effective nursing education, research and practice. Oermann and Hays (2010:ix) state that many nursing institutions view writing as one of the main outcomes of their academic programmes. Just as students from other faculties, writing at university level can be quite daunting, agonising, and can create feelings of uncertainty and anxiety for nursing students (cf. Booth, 1996:995; Brennan, 1995:352; Diehl, 2007:202; Lundgren & Halvarsson, 2009:528; Tarrant *et al.*, 2008:460; Whitehead, 2002:504) as they sometimes find tertiary writing confusing, challenging and difficult (cf. Bochner, 1989:187; Price & Harrington, 2010:36; Salamonson *et al.*, 2009:414; Saver, 2011:xx). Some of the **concerns** and **barriers** towards writing that nursing students have include a lack of time (Oermann & Hays, 2010:6), feeling unsure about their abilities to write academically (Whitehead, 2002:502), not understanding what the writing process entails (Booth, 1996:995), a fear and lack of understanding and not knowing what is expected of them, and they have limited prior experience and do not have skills and strategies to fall back on (cf. Bochner, 1989:187; Booth, 1996:995; Oermann & Hays, 2010:6; Price & Harrington, 2010:36). Other issues that students have concerns about include struggling to put new information and their thoughts into their own words (Fischer *et al.*, 2001:71), showing their position as writers (Gimenez, 2008a:160), being unskilled, unfamiliar and unacquainted with the health and nursing literature, not knowing how to use the referencing systems and formats (Diehl, 2007:202; Tarrant *et al.*, 2008:459), making the link between theory and practice (Gimenez, 2008a:160), and distinguishing between the quality of sources and determining what counts as scientific evidence (Gimenez, 2012:408). Some nursing students even have a poor self-image regarding writing (Booth, 1996:995), develop writer's block (Oermann & Hays, 2010:6) and writing apprehension (cf. §3.3.6.2; Tarrant *et al.*, 2008:461) as well as a fear of rejection when writing academic papers (Oermann & Hays, 2010:6).

Most of the appraisal of nursing students' academic writing is done through essay writing (Brennan, 1995:351). However, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, nursing students find academic writing at tertiary level quite difficult. Further reasons why they find essay writing so complicated are because they are unacquainted with the processes and sub-processes that academic writing entails as well as the assessment techniques and procedures followed by their nursing lecturers (Brennan, 1995:351). Relevant to this study, the nursing students are quite aware that they have inadequate linguistic and vocabulary structures to support them with the new writing demands expected from them (cf. Table 7.8; Bochner, 1989:187). Furthermore, it is evident that students and lecturers differ about what is important in academic essays. For students, how they present their writing is essential, whilst lecturers focus more on structure and argument (Brennan, 1995:354). For nursing students to not be confused about what is expected

of them or to develop writing apprehension, lecturers need to explicitly make the nursing students aware of the requirements and expectations regarding the criteria (such as style, language, content and argument) they will be assessed on (Brennan, 1995:352). Brennan (1995:352) also proposes that students be exposed to bad and good examples of essays so that they know what is expected of them (cf. §8.4.4).

The theory-practice divide is especially evident in the different types of writing expected of nursing students as they need to be able to produce formal academic tasks and assignments as well as concise clinical-type writing. This “dichotomy” between writing as a student and as a professional nurse can be confusing for some nursing students as one of the main differences is that for formal academic writing the nursing faculty expect nursing students to construct grammatically correct fully developed sentences and paragraphs (Johnson *et al.*, 2007:168-169). In contrast to academic writing, with clinical writing nursing students are expected to write in a type of shorthand, fragmented way (Diehl, 2007:203; Johnson *et al.*, 2007:168). Saver (2011:xx) captures the essence of clinical writing as follows: “[o]ne of nursing’s biggest handicaps is that we are in a field where your basic practice requires that you never write in complete sentences.” To further complicate matters, many nursing students do not follow academic careers after they graduate and many struggle to even comprehend the relevance of academic writing (Johnson *et al.*, 2007:169). It is therefore imperative that with cooperation and support from within the Subject Group Nursing, students need to be clearly informed why courses such as AGLA 121 are relevant (cf. §6.5.6).

Academic writing for nursing students and practising nurses can also be used for the following reasons: reflecting for critical and evaluative purposes (cf. Ely & Scott, 2007:179; Gimenez, 2007:46; Lavelle *et al.*, 2013:60; Mason-Whitehead & Mason, 2008:173; Richardson & Maltby, 1995:235), improvement in nursing practice as nursing students are provided with abilities and skills to better patient care at the institutions they work (Johnson *et al.*, 2007:172), enabling nursing students so that they can share and communicate their skills, knowledge, ideas, expertise and new approaches and methods with others in the academic and healthcare environments (Johnson *et al.*, 2007:172; Newton & Moore, 2010:222; Oermann & Hays, 2010:4-5), encouraging higher order organized thinking needed for nursing practice (Booth, 1996:995) as well as helping with critical thinking skills (§3.3.4.2.2; Booth, 1996:995; Sorrell *et al.*, 1997:12-14). According to Mangena and Chabeli (2005:292), “[c]ritical thinking is an essential component of practice, communication, problem-solving ability, theoretical and conceptual understanding of nursing concerns and research endeavours that advance the knowledge base of nursing”. Academic writing can also be used to help nursing students develop personal skills and knowledge and for personal gain and satisfaction (Oermann & Hays, 2010:4-5).

In nursing education, writing is progressively acknowledged as a valuable tool for learning and is also viewed as a critical self-regulated learning task (cf. §3.4.2; Booth, 1996:995; Brennan, 1995:351; Diehl, 2007:202; Lavelle *et al.*, 2013:60; Lundgren & Halvarsson, 2009:528). Sorrell *et al.* (1997:13-14) support this view and state that academic writing assignments can be used not only for nursing students to “learn to write” but also to “write to learn”. However, nursing students do not always see academic writing, especially the writing of academic essays, as an instrument of and for learning (Brennan, 1995:351). Instead, they only see it as a task or as a “technical exercise” and a “mechanical process” and do not always see the value of academic essay writing (Lundgren & Halvarsson, 2009:530).

To assist students with all their writing issues and needs, universities worldwide provide support through academic support units which are usually generic in nature (§2.7; Salamonson *et al.*, 2009:414). Even though there is some support for these types of units, there are some criticisms against them as Chanock (2007:273) describes these generic academic support units as “crash repair shops where welding, panel-beating and polishing can be carried out on students’ texts”. One solution proposed by Salamonson *et al.* (2009:414) is that language skills be embedded and integrated into nursing programmes. However, Salamonson *et al.* (2009:414) realise that not all nursing staff are trained in helping their students with the conventions of writing, or might not have the time to spend on grammar and developing the nursing students’ academic writing skills. Salamonson *et al.* (2009:414), therefore, propose that writing experts and content lecturers collaborate to assist nursing students with their academic writing skills. Thus, a blended approach (cf. §2.4.3; §8.3), with both generic and subject-specific support, seems to be the best possible solution to assist the nursing students with their academic writing. Content lecturers could support writing experts by stressing the importance and including the academic writing conventions that are taught in the generic courses by giving formal academic writing assignments (Newton & Moore, 2010:225) and by including aspects taught in the generic courses in their assessment criteria as well as by stressing the importance of general literacy skills in subject-specific writing. On the other hand, writing experts could assist content lecturers by providing not only support for nursing students during their first year, but also follow-up supplementary workshops to help nursing students meet higher level writing specifications (cf. §7.3; §8.3; Johnson *et al.*, 2007:172).

However, as nursing students need assistance and guidance to differentiate and use various discourses and genres it is the responsibility of both writing experts and nursing content lecturers to make nursing students explicitly aware of the various types of writing discourses and genres and their conventions that they will be expected to produce (Borglin, 2012:612).

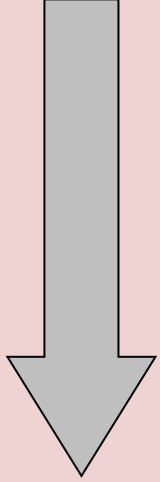
#### 4.5 Writing genres in nursing

Nursing students must learn and employ a vast range of literacies to survive in the academic and professional world. Thus, the writing requirements of nursing students and nurses are demanding as they must be able to write for various and diverse contexts and readers such as lecturers, dentists, physicians and other nurses (Kolin & Kolin, 1980:2). Nursing students need to be able to produce a wide range of writing formats and genres. Examples of the diverse writing genres of nursing students and professional nurses include: care critiques, descriptive essays, reflective essays, arguments, action plans, care plans, portfolios, reports, research proposals, anecdotal notes, journaling, and clinical documentation (cf. §7.3; Gimenez, 2007:vi; Newton, 2008:81; Price & Harrington, 2010:36).

Regarding the teaching of the various genres expected of undergraduate nursing students, Gimenez (2008b:25) raises an important issue about which genres should be taught at what stage of the undergraduate nursing degree. According to Gimenez (2008b:29-30), for nursing students to write effectively, it is important for nursing lecturers to know which genres are expected at what level from the nursing students and not to include tasks and content which are “only tangentially related to their needs” as it can be quite demotivating for students to learn genres that they are not yet expected to produce. Diehl (2007:203) mentions that it is important that elemental writing such as summaries, descriptive and reflective writing be covered before nursing students are exposed to higher level writing such as critiques, analyses and arguments. Gimenez (2008b:30) supports Diehl’s view and states that a scaffolding principle (cf. §3.4.3) should be followed where the cognitive and linguistic skills learnt to produce easier genres can be used to produce more difficult genres at a later stage.

In Table 4.1, Gimenez (2008b:27) indicates the progression from descriptive writing to argumentative writing expected at various levels from nursing students. Even though these levels have been developed for British universities, they coincide with first-year level writing in South Africa. This statement was confirmed in an interview with the first-year programme facilitator at the NWU who stated that they expect basic descriptive writing from first-year students and only expect argumentative writing from their third year onwards (cf. §7.2). The levels in the table below refer to the respective years at university.

**Table 4.1 Nursing writing genres and levels (Gimenez, 2008b:27)**

		DESCRIPTIVE WRITING
<b>GENRES</b>	<b>LEVELS</b>	
Care plans	1	
Reflective essay	1-2	
Discharge summaries	2	
Article reviews	2-3	
Portfolios	2-3	
Literature review	2-3	
Argumentative essay	3	
Dissertation	3	

In Table 4.2, Gimenez (2008b:28) provides a list of the most common assessment criteria used by nursing lecturers when marking the above-mentioned genres.

**Table 4.2 Most common assessment criteria in nursing assignments (Gimenez, 2008b:28)**

CRITERIA	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3
Work neatly presented and easy to read	X	X	X
Correct spelling and grammar	X	X	X
Correct in-text referencing	X	X	X
List of references included	X	X	X
Well-structured texts	X	X	X
Logical development of arguments		X	X
Balanced argument		X	X
Critical evaluation			X

From Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 it is evident that during their first year at university, nursing students are only expected to acquire basic literacy skills (such as correct spelling and grammar), know basic structures of academic writing and are mostly expected to write descriptively and reflectively. As highlighted in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2, it is clear that nursing students are not required to produce argumentative writing in their first year. This has some serious implications for the literacy lecturers of the AGLA 121 course at the NWU as argumentative writing is the main writing outcome that is taught and assessed. The course designers of AGLA 121 may need to adapt the curriculum to expose students to a wider range of academic writing genres (cf. §7.3).

Gimenez (2007:177-180) designed a writing achievement chart that students at various levels, subject, and literacy lecturers can use as a checklist to determine if all the writing outcomes has been achieved. Table 4.3 is an expanded representation of the chart. The chart was supplemented with guidelines for students as found in Gimenez (2007). This chart is thus included not only to provide the reader with information about the broad spectrum of writing activities and skills that nursing students' have to acquire, but also serves as a practical referencing guide for students. This chart can also be used to inform AGLA 121 course redesign (cf. §8.3).

**Table 4.3 Writing tasks for nursing students**

TASK	OBJECTIVE
<p><b>The basics of planning in academic writing</b></p>	<p><i>Recognize the basic principles of academic writing</i></p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="text-align: center; margin-right: 20px;"> <p>General</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Specific</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 300px;"> <p><b>TOPIC</b> (what) / <b>AUDIENCE</b> (for whom)</p> <hr/> <p><b>FOCUS</b> (what exactly) / <b>RATIONALE</b> (why)</p> <hr/> <p><b>SIGNPOST</b> (how)</p> <hr/> <p><b>SUPPORTING EVIDENCE / EXAMPLES</b></p> </div> </div>
	<p><i>Identify verbs in essay questions</i></p> <p>Students should know the meanings of the various <b>verbs</b> used in essays questions in order to know how to develop their written response. Some of these verbs are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• analyse,</li> <li>• argue,</li> <li>• demonstrate,</li> </ul>

- discuss,
- evaluate,
- and examine.

#### *Follow marking criteria*

It is important that students be aware of how they will be assessed and should pay attention to the criteria from the beginning of the writing assignment. Some of the technical aspects that are typically included are:

- font style and size,
- line spacing,
- margins,
- paragraphing,
- spelling and grammar,
- and referencing.

#### *Gathering information*

Students must search for and use appropriate, relevant and reliable sources. The sources used must be objective and balanced. This can be achieved by using sources that supports the writer's position, but also sources that challenge it. The sources must vary in nature (such as books, journal articles and internet sources). The following are principles that can be followed when selecting the most appropriate texts / information:

- The topic
- The focus
- How closely it is related to the written assignments' focus
- The quality
- If it is evidence based

#### *Focus on text cohesion*

Students must realise the importance of text cohesion so that the text flows and that ideas, paragraphs and the macro-text are closely linked together.

Text cohesion can be accomplished by using:

- Cohesive devices
- Related concepts
- Reference to previously mentioned points
- Substitution

- Words that are related

*Focus on punctuation*

Students must know how to correctly use the:

- comma,
- colon,
- dash,
- hyphen,
- full stop,
- parenthesis,
- quotation marks, and
- semicolon.

**Processes in Reflection**

**academic writing**

Being able to reflect critically is an important concept that nursing students must be able to do. Through reflection, students can learn from previous experiences in order to make better future decisions.

*Critical thinking*

The following phases are important for critical thinking:

- Identifying other people’s arguments, positions, and conclusions.
- Evaluating evidence for alternative views.
- Fairly weighing up opposing arguments and evidence.
- Drawing conclusions to decide whether arguments are justifiable and valid.

**Writing genres in Description and argumentation**

**nursing**

The most frequent essays that undergraduate nursing students are required to produce are descriptive and argumentative essays. In the first year of their academic programme, nursing students are expected to write descriptively. Sometimes a small quantity of analysis is also expected at first-year level. Only in the final stages of their degree do nursing students cognitively start developing higher-level skills that they can critically apply in their argumentative writing. Description also underlies many of the other types of writing such as reflective essays as it is usually the first step in the planning process.

*Hint for descriptive writing:*

- Descriptive writing “entails depicting what something is like or the facts about it” – the reality around it.

- Words frequently used in descriptions:
  - Relating verbs (have, there is)
  - Action verbs (discover, compare, contrast, report, show)
  - Describing words (essential, informed, static)
  - Words that describe actions (well, slowly, hard)

#### *Structure arguments effectively*

The following aspects should be included in structuring an argumentative text:

- Introduction: What is the topic? What is the aim? What claims can be made?
- Main points: Give reasons to justify claims and support conclusions.
- Supporting statements: Are there points that contradict the argument posed? How will the statements be balanced?
- Summary: Review the discussion and highlight main points.
- Conclusion: Link with the main issues identified in the conclusion. State the implication of the conclusions made. Make recommendations based on the conclusions made.

#### *The language of arguments*

A common feature of arguments is the use and choice of words that show the position of the writer in relation to the argument. Some of the linguistic tools that can be used are:

**Adverbials:** “certainly”, “possibly”, “probably”

**Connectives:** “consequently”, “for the reason that”

**Modal verbs:** To indicate degrees of possibility: “may”, “could” / To indicate degrees of probability: “should”, “would”

#### *Reflective essays*

There are various types of reflection models and the ones most frequently used by nursing students are:

*Van Manen (1977)* – This model is usually used for professional development and contains three levels of reflection:

- Evaluating a performance
- Analysing the consequences
- Critically examining any associated issues

*Gibbs (1988)* – This model is probably the most widely applied model used by nursing students. The following stages are proposed:

- Description
- Evaluation

- Analysis
- Conclusion
- Action

*Durgahee (1996)* distinguishes between three levels of reflection:

- On the **macro**-level: recall experience
- On the **meso**-level: identify issues
- On the **micro**-level: understand the experience through personal views and feelings

#### *Care critiques*

A care critique can be defined as a critical, systematic, and impersonal analysis of the care provided. The validity and worth of care are also discussed and evaluated in a care critique.

The structure of the care critique is as follows:

- Introduction (topic, focus and signpost)
- Body (identify main issues that connect with the topic and clinical practice)
- A conclusion that summarises the main issues and shows a connection with the main focus
- Provide recommendations on how care can be improved

#### **Other genres**

##### *Writing action plans*

Action plans lay out the tasks that nursing students need to concentrate on. Firstly, an in-depth description of the steps that students have to take to execute the task effectively needs to be included. Students must also provide a deadline when the task has to be completed. The main function of action plans is to help students to assess and monitor their own progress. The style and language used in action plans are simple. Students only need to make notes and writing complete sentences are not required.

##### *Writing care plans*

Care plans provide a thorough description of the plan of care that needs to be given to patients. Care plans are written in various stages. Firstly, a description of the need or problem needs to be stated. This is usually written in the present tense. Articles such as “a” or “the” are not used. Next a goal must be set in simple terms. Thereafter deadlines must be set and written in the future tense. Students then have to plan and state possible actions and interventions in simple terms and by using verbs in their base form. The final stage is the re-evaluation of the care written in simple terms, stating what had happened. The

present perfect tense is used.

### *Writing portfolios*

Portfolios can be either a student portfolio or a professional portfolio. The content of each is summarised below:

<b>Student portfolio</b>	<b>Professional portfolio</b>
State the main reasons for writing the portfolio	State the main reasons for writing the portfolio
Provide personal information such as name and contact details	Provide personal information such as name, contact details and registration details.
Give an overview of clinical experience such as work experience and clinical placements	Give evidence of education such as examination results, certifications and qualifications
Provide examples of academic assignments to indicate progress made	Provide record of employment
Critically write a reflective essay indicating what progress was made	Provide evidence of professional development such as conferences and seminars attended and participated in; research work; and memberships of professional bodies.
Provide a personal development plan	Write a critically reflective document where there is evidence that development had occurred.
Provide an action plan	Provide a personal development plan
	Provide an action plan

It is clear that with writing portfolios, being able to reflect critically is crucial for both students and professionals.

### *Writing reports*

Just as with portfolios, writing reports can be both academic and professional. These reports are written for different audiences and purposes which will

impact the content and structure of the report. **Academic reports** are usually written by nursing students as assignments. This type of report is typically theoretical in nature and is written in a formal style as required by the academic institution. On the other hand, **professional reports** are more practical in nature and its main aim is to solve a problem by making certain recommendations. The style of the report is determined by the workplace for which it is written.

As academic reports are the most frequently required pieces of writing in a nurse's academic life, the following table provides the main sections that the nursing student will have to include in the report:

<b>Preliminaries</b>	Cover sheet
	Title page
	Acknowledgements
	Table of contents
	Abstract or summary
<b>Body</b>	Aims and purposes
	Literature review
	Methodology
	Results
	Analysis
	Conclusions
	Recommendations
<b>End matter</b>	References
	Appendices

**Variety in** *Textual variety*

**academic writing**

In academic writing, variety is a very important concept. Textual variety makes texts easier to read and more interesting. Text variety can be achieved by:

- varying sentence structure and length by using connectives;
- making sentence lengths different;
- creating lexical threads by using related vocabulary items like word synonymous expressions and word families;
- changing the word order;
- using different subject forms; and
- using cohesive variety such as related words, cohesive devices, related

	concepts, referencing previously mentioned remarks and through substitution.
<b>Plagiarism</b>	<p><i>Know what plagiarism is</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Borrowing or buying other people's work</li> <li>• Building on other people's ideas without giving credit</li> <li>• Copying without citing</li> <li>• Handing in other people's work as own work</li> <li>• Not using quotation marks</li> <li>• Only changing a few words from the original text</li> <li>• Paraphrasing without citing</li> </ul>
	<p><i>Know how to paraphrase</i></p> <p>The following are some hints that students can use for paraphrasing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read the original text until it is completely understandable</li> <li>• Highlight or underline main and secondary ideas</li> <li>• Focus on the main ideas</li> <li>• The main ideas must be written in their own words</li> <li>• The original should be compared with the paraphrase</li> <li>• If more than 10% of the original was used, it is not a paraphrase and the original must be read again</li> <li>• Remember to signpost paraphrases using phrases that refer to the original text and by using appropriate verbs or verb phrases</li> </ul>
<b>Referencing</b>	<p><i>Know the basic principles of referencing</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With academic writing, being able to reference correctly is essential. Referencing is the link between what is being written and what has already been written about a topic. Referencing is necessary to indicate to the reader that: the work of others was acknowledged; the writer is well read in the field and can display this knowledge; the work of others was not plagiarized.</li> <li>• Know the main referencing conventions of the Harvard system and the American Psychological Association (APA) system</li> <li>• Be familiar with bibliographic software programmes such as EndNote and RefWorks.</li> </ul>

Table 4.3 is not only valuable as a summary of all the types of writing that nursing students should be able to produce, but also serves as a summary that students can use as a checklist

throughout their nursing education as needed (cf. §7.3). The chart can also serve as a tool to make students aware of the principles of academic discourse variation (cf. §2.7.3).

Almost all the aspects described in the chart that nursing students should be able to do are covered in the AGLA 121 course. Especially the basics of planning in academic writing are relevant not only to nursing students, but also to all first-year students. All students must focus on the specific topic and know who they are writing for. In order to help with the affective aspect of writing, the rationale of the writing should be clear to the students (cf. §3.3.6). The academic argument structure (cf. §5.3.3) is important so that students keep the focus of the topic. To assist with this focus, students need to supply examples and provide evidence and remember to signpost (cf. §5.5.3) their work, keeping their audience in mind.

Also relevant to all students are the processes involved in academic writing. Though many of the aspects in the chart are covered in AGLA 121, more attention could be paid to reflection and critical thinking exercises (cf. §3.3.4; §7.3). Reflection can help students think about what they write about. Students can also reflect on their feedback that could help improve their academic writing. Critical thinking strategies can also help students with forming their academic arguments.

Another aspect that can assist students is that they should be informed about how to identify various verbs in essay type questions. In Chapter 7 (cf. §7.9), the verbs that AGLA 121 teaches students, are compared to what is expected of nursing students in their first year by means of a study guide analysis.

The marking criteria highlighted in the chart are similar to those used in AGLA 121 (Appendix E). Students are allocated marks for line spacing, font style and size, paragraphing, spelling and grammar and referencing. In the nursing assessment rubric used by nursing lecturers (Appendix F), however, the focus is not on technical aspects such as font style and size and line spacing. In the nursing rubric the focus is more on language use and referencing. AGLA 121 can assist nursing students with language use, punctuation and referencing. AGLA 121 can also help students with textual variety and textual cohesion in their academic writing.

The only task not covered in the course is the writing of reflective essays, care critiques, action plans, care plans, and reports. However, it is not currently the aim of AGLA 121 to assist students with these types of writing. What AGLA 121 can do is to make them aware of the principle of discourse variation that implies that various types of writing require various styles and approaches.

An analysis of the content covered in the AGLA 121 course workbook compared to that found in the nursing literature is discussed in Chapter 7 (cf. §7.10). Together, the chart and the analysis

can help to determine whether AGLA 121 supports the academic writing needs of the nursing students at the NWU.

#### **4.6 General reading skills required from nursing students**

As seen in Chapter 3 (§3.3.2), reading plays an integral role in the writing process. Newton and Moore (2010:222) mention that if undergraduate nursing students have poor reading and writing skills, it will be difficult for them to acquire essential writing outcomes. Furthermore, Newton and Moore (2010:224) point out that if the nurses' reading aptitude is sub-standard, then reading and comprehending the literature will be difficult and transferring their understanding into a formal academic paper will be challenging. Some nursing students do have difficulties with reading and Gallagher *et al.* (2001:134) state that these reading deficiencies can be addressed by including support for reading strategies and skills.

As reading plays such an important role in nursing students' writing abilities; it is necessary to determine if AGLA 121 has an effect on their reading skills (cf. §7.6.2). It is also vital to determine the nursing students' opinion on whether AGLA 121 helped with their reading needs (cf. §7.7.2.1.3; §7.7.2.1.4; §7.7.2.2.3).

#### **4.7 Information technology skills required from nursing students**

In the healthcare field there has been a rapid integration of information technology and nursing students as potential nurses need to be equipped with skills to use the technologies available to them (McDowell, 2007:30). To learn about the new developments in the nursing field, nurses need to be able to use technology effectively, not only for their academic student experience, but also once they are qualified practising nurses (Bond, 2004:169). Tarrant *et al.* (2008:459) mention that nurses need to be technologically well-informed and also need to be "information literate". Information literacy can be broadly defined as having the skills "to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (Breivik, 1998:121-122). Barnard *et al.* (2005:505) state that "the amount and complexity of information nurses are expected to manage continues to increase exponentially". Moreover, Wallace *et al.* (1999:136) point out that "for nurses to provide safe and effective care, they need the knowledge and skills to be able to incorporate research findings into practice".

A very important aspect of the information literacy that nursing students must possess is that of EBP (cf. §3.3.4.2.2). Ciliska (2005:345) defines EBP as "the integration of the best research

evidence with clinical expertise and patient values to facilitate clinical decision making”. Initially there has been some criticism against EBP and some claimed that it was just “the flavour of the month” and that it would be short-lived in nursing education. However, many countries have passed policies demanding that EBP be implemented in the nursing curricula (Ciliska, 2005:346). In this study, the research participants mention that they have to incorporate EBP in their written assignments (cf. §7.8).

The stages of EBP involve the following: asking clinical questions; searching the literature for relevant research; critically appraising what has been found; if changes are warranted, implement the changes in practice; and evaluate the change in practice. Nursing students are not expected to reach all of these stages at once. First-year students should firstly be taught how to structure clinical questions. They should also be taught how to search and assess databases for relevant information. They should then learn to critically appraise quantitative and qualitative interventions, reviews and research (Burke *et al.*, 2005:360; Ciliska, 2005:345-347).

Why is EBP relevant to this study and why should EBP be explored and implemented by academic literacy lecturers? Ciliska (2005:347) is of the opinion that an evidence-based curriculum should not only be taught in nursing classes, but should also be embedded “across courses and across years in the academic and clinical settings”. Relevant to this study, EBP is highlighted as being important by the research participants (cf. §7.8).

It is evident that nursing students need to be information literate and in Chapter 7, the RINL examination results (cf. §7.6.3) of the nursing student participants of this study are provided. The nursing student participants also gave their opinions on their own information and technological abilities as well as their thoughts on RINL (cf. §7.7.2.1.1; §7.7.2.1.2; §7.7.2.2.1).

#### **4.8 Relevance and purpose of the literature for this study**

The relevance and purpose of the literature discussed in this chapter was to attend to the research question and aim that pertained to the nature and characteristics of academic writing practices of nursing students. In order to provide a broad overview of the everyday academic world that nursing students find themselves in, the background of nursing as an academic

discipline was described. Regarding academic writing assignments, the review of literature once again highlighted the continuum (cf. §1.8) that nursing students have to balance.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

The main function of this chapter was to present an overview of the type of writing required of nursing students in nursing education. From the background regarding nursing as an academic discipline it is clear that the move to the university context has had the effect that writing requirements for nurses have changed and that academic writing can be challenging for many nursing students (cf. §4.2). Both autonomous and ideological literacy skills (cf. §4.3) are expected of nursing students. Reasons were provided why academic writing and knowledge of different writing genres are important for nursing students (cf. §4.4) as well as a description and examples of some of the genres (cf. §4.5) that nursing students have to produce. As the AGLA 121 course includes the reading and computer components, the general reading (cf. §4.6) and technological skills (cf. §4.7) required of nurses were also examined. Nursing literature also supported the importance of reading and technological skills.

In the following chapter, a detailed outline of the academic literacy course, AGLA 121 that is evaluated, is provided.

## **CHAPTER 5: AN OVERVIEW OF THE ACADEMIC LITERACY COURSE (AGLA 121) AT THE NWU'S POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS**

*"We are students of words: we are shut up in schools, and colleges, and recitation-rooms, for ten or fifteen years, and come out at last with a bag of wind, a memory of words, and do not know a thing." (Emerson, 1844)*

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter determines where the NWU's Potchefstroom Campus places itself within the world-wide context of addressing all types of literacy, academic literacy and ultimately academic writing. This chapter is also the first step in describing the narrative of the case evaluation. An overview of the way that the NWU's Potchefstroom Campus approaches academic literacy is provided with a brief description of the assessment used to determine the first-year students' academic literacy levels (§5.2) and the course description (§5.3) (including the main aims of the course, procedures and methods of instruction, content, and assessment). A brief outline of the computer (RINL) (§5.4) and reading (LEES) (§5.5) components is also provided as these components form part of the AGLA 121 course and could also potentially influence students' writing.

As previously stated (§2.2), various universities' approaches to addressing the poor literacy levels differ. In this section, the NWU's Potchefstroom Campus's strategy and approach to address and support the academic literacy inadequacies of the first-year students are discussed.

### **5.2 Determining of academic literacy levels**

In order to provide all their students with adequate academic literacy support, the NWU firstly must determine the type of support needed by individual students. This is done by using a true diagnostic testing instrument. All students registered at the NWU must write either the TALL or the TAG. The TALL and TAG were designed by the Inter-Institutional Centre for Language Development and Assessment (ICELDA) which is a partnership of the following South African universities: Pretoria, Stellenbosch, North-West and Free State (ICELDA, 2015). The test is in multiple-choice format, which is marked electronically due to the logistical advantage of testing large populations and obtaining the results quickly (cf. McCoubrie, 2004:709; Van Dyk,

2010:146; Weideman, 2006b:84-85). The test is also valid as it tests what it is supposed to test, which is academic literacy at tertiary level and is also reliable as it has “an average alpha value of 0.93 across fifteen administrations” (Petersen-Waughtal & Van Dyk, 2011:105). This test is a medium to low-stakes placement test (Weideman & Van der Slik, 2008:162). In this study, the value of the TALL and TAG as a placement test is not doubted, questioned or contested, since intensive research has been conducted regarding various aspects of the test such as the need, impact, validity and reliability of the TALL/TAG (cf. Van der Slik & Weideman, 2005, 2008, 2009; Van der Walt & Steyn, 2007; Van Dyk, 2010).

At the NWU’s Potchefstroom Campus, the Centre for Academic and Professional Language Practice (CAPLP) organises and administers the test to all the first-year students. The test is written at the beginning of the academic year during first-year student orientation. The only feedback students receive is the code level they had achieved for the test. At-risk students who receive levels 1-3 have to complete AGLA 111 / AGLE 111 (the basic academic literacy module) as well as AGLA 121 or AGLE 121, which is a module all students who receive a level 4 or 5 have to complete. No individual or detailed feedback regarding their tests is provided. The results of the main research participants are provided in Chapter 7 (§7.6.1).

The NWU chose to use the TALL/TAG tests instead of the NBT, which is a high-stakes test, as the purpose of the test is to place students in classes to support unprepared students and not as access mechanism. The NWU also stopped using the English Literacy Skills Assessment for Higher Education and Training (ELSA-Plus) in 2004. The main criticism against the ELSA-Plus was the logistics involved and the fact that it was quite expensive to administer. Furthermore it was “based on an outdated and restricted view of language ability, which equates language ability with knowledge of sound, form, vocabulary and meaning” (Van Dyk, 2005:43).

The TAG/TALL sets out to assess components of academic literacy in a number of task types in seven different sections of the tests (Van Dyk & Weideman, 2004b:18). Though they may vary slightly from one version to the next, the sections are:

- **Section 1: Scrambled text** (in which a scrambled paragraph is presented which students have to restore to its original order).
- **Section 2: Interpreting graphs and visual information** (which tests, among other things, the student’s ability to interpret either a graph or a diagram and to demonstrate a capacity for quantitative literacy (numeracy) related to academic tasks).
- **Section 3: Text type**. Here the students are presented with a number of sentences or phrases taken from a variety of text types or genres, which they have to match with a list of sentences or phrases from the same text types.

- **Section 4: Academic vocabulary.** Even though academic vocabulary is tested separately (and fairly traditionally) here, there are also vocabulary questions in some of the other sections.
- **Section 5: Understanding texts.** This section normally consists of one or more extended reading passages, followed by questions focusing on critically important aspects of the construct, such as distinguishing between essential and non-essential information, or cause and effect, as well as inferencing, sequencing, defining, handling metaphor and idiom, and so forth.
- **Section 6: Text editing.** This part of the test, which relies on the cloze procedure, normally has three sub-sections, though the text continues from the first to the last. In the first, a word is omitted, and students have to indicate the place where it is missing. In the second, the place where the missing word has been taken out is indicated, and students have to choose the appropriate word. In the third, students have to indicate both place and missing word.
- **Section 7: Writing.** This section is used to test the ability of the student to make a brief argument, which is normally connected to the theme of the text(s) that the student has read, as well as the topic of the scrambled paragraph and the text edit question. The test therefore contains (academic) information that is potentially useful in completing the writing section.

Due to logistics and time-constraints, Section 7 is no longer tested. Curry (2004:56-57) remarks that “writing skills can be assessed directly or indirectly. Indirect tests, such as multiple-choice grammatical usage tests, measure students’ ability to manipulate discrete components of language. Because they do not ask students to write, indirect tests reveal little about writing competencies”. However, the nature of the design of the TAG/TALL can give an indication of students’ writing when the tested abilities are combined for written texts. For example, they should know how to make a text coherent as found in Section 1 of the test. Academic writing also requires students being able to interpret graphs and visual information (Section 2), identify and produce various text types (Section 3), have a broad academic vocabulary (Section 4), showing an understanding of texts by making inferences for example (Section 5), as well as being able to edit texts (Section 6). The reason why the TAG results (cf. §7.6.1) are included in this study of nursing students’ writing is because “any intervention that aims to develop students’ abilities in academic writing should have access to ways of determining students’ levels of ability in regard to academic literacy and writing” (Butler, 2007a:42).

### **5.3 Course description: AGLA 121**

In this section, a description is provided of the compulsory academic literacy course (AGLA 121) offered to first-year students at the North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus. AGLA 121 is managed by CAPLP.

#### **5.3.1 Aims**

According to Richmond *et al.* (2008:53), “[a] good literacy programme is one that is accessible, relevant, useful and leads to learning outcomes that participants can put to use in their daily lives and for further learning”. This definition of a literacy programme summarizes the main aim of the compulsory academic literacy programme offered to all first-year students at the NWU. All students, not only nursing students, could be made aware of the relevance of AGLA 121 for their academic and future careers.

The main aim of the course is to address students' needs and to help students to bridge the gap between high school and university and to adapt to the academic environment where it is expected of them to function effectively. Students are exposed to academic language and are expected to use it appropriately in various academic contexts. Though the course mainly uses a generic approach to teaching academic literacy, another aim of the course is that students can use these generic skills and apply it in their own subjects thus also focusing on subject-specific outcomes (cf. §2.7).

#### **5.3.2 Procedures**

As soon as the students arrive at the university for the orientation process at the beginning of the academic year, the TALL/TAG test is written. After the results are provided to the students, they are registered for either AGLA 111 or AGLA 121 for Afrikaans-speaking students and AGLE 111 or AGLE 121 for English-speaking students. Due to the vast numbers of students that have to be accommodated each year, students are divided into mixed subject classes. Fortunately for this study, all the nursing students could be grouped together in a class with no students from other disciplines.

Students are required to attend two 50 minute lectures per week for 13 weeks. Students are also required to complete a reading (LEES) and computer and information literacy (RINL) course on their own and at their own pace before the end of the semester that the student takes AGLA 121.

In the contact AGLA 121 class, various pedagogical techniques are used to accommodate all learning styles. A mix of assessment procedures, techniques and instruments are used to assess the various assignments. Most of the administrative communication and even some assessment tasks are conducted on eFundi, the NWU's e-learning environment and Learning Management System (LMS). The nursing students' perceptions about the AGLA 121 eFundi-site are provided in Chapter 7 (§7.7.2.1.5).

The method of instruction used in AGLA 121 is one of assisted independent study. This means that even though students receive instruction, lectures are facilitated so that students can take responsibility for their own studies. The academic literacy lecturers act as "literacy mediators" (Baynham, 1995:39; Scott & Turner, 2009:153) facilitating the process where the students have to bridge the gap between high school literacy and the literacies expected from them at tertiary level. Furthermore, in AGLA 121, students acquire and develop their academic writing skills through individual assignments and with help from the lecturers and peers in group work assignments.

### 5.3.3 Content

According to Van der Walt *et al.* (2012:vii), the module is a skills-based module where every first-year student is expected to acquire the following skills:

- academic reading skills;
- academic writing skills;
- academic listening skills;
- academic computer- and information skills;
- study skills;
- academic seminar skills and;
- research skills.

The study and learning material is presented in the prescribed workbook, *Gevorderde Vaardighede in Akademiese Geletterdheid (Advanced Skills in Academic Literacy)* (Van der Walt *et al.*, 2011). An overview of the content of the chapters in the workbook is provided:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction to learning strategies and study skills**

This chapter deals with basic important learning principles, planning and time management, making students aware of different learning styles and how effective learning takes place. The main focus of this chapter is to introduce students to the SQ5R

study skill technique. The technique includes: survey (S); questions (Q); Read to learn (R); Recite (R); Read to check (R); Review (R); and Reflection (R). Students are also shown techniques for summarising, active listening and taking notes in classes and how to prepare for examinations. Students are also made aware of strategic planning skills for the academic semester as well as time management skills. Thus, this chapter provides students with basic tools, tips and techniques for study skills that students can potentially apply in their various subjects.

- **Chapter 2: Strategic reading**

Even though students must complete the compulsory reading module called *LEES*, practical tips for academic reading are provided in this chapter. The outcomes that students must reach include using and demonstrating different reading strategies; demonstrating an understanding of the relationship between the different parts of a text; identifying topic sentences in paragraphs; and answering comprehension questions. Students are taught the following reading techniques: scanning, skimming, and comprehensive reading. There are ten practice comprehension tests (which are subject-specific) that can be done throughout the module. Furthermore, for assessment purposes, students are required to complete comprehension tests on eFundi.

- **Chapter 3: Academic language use**

In this chapter, students are made aware of the differences between formal and informal language and to apply the requirements of good academic language. The following characteristics of academic texts are also covered:

- Nominalisation
- Passive voice
- Clarity and accuracy in academic writing
- Objectivity and factual language usage
- Fact, opinion and informed opinion
- Concrete and abstract concepts
- Correct punctuation, spelling and abbreviations
- Subject-specific vocabulary
- Conciseness in academic writing
- Text cohesion
- Definitions

An appendix is also added for students regarding punctuation and common errors as well as words and phrases to avoid in academic language.

- **Chapter 4: Critical thinking and argumentation**

Even though there are various types of academic writing, in the AGLA course the *argument* is mostly introduced to and practiced by the students. This chapter deals with the definition of an academic argument, presenting students with vocabulary to help them to construct and write arguments and assists students in the verification of facts and accessing accurate and relevant information. Furthermore, this chapter presents the different types of arguments (deductive and inductive). Finally, it provides students with steps and guidelines to construct a basic and extended argument.

The following are the steps that students are told to follow when constructing an academic argument (cf. §3.10.1.1):

- **STEP 1: Problem statement**
  - What is the problem? (*Research question*)
  - What can be done about the situation? (*Claim / thesis statement / central argument / main idea / theme*)
- **STEP 2: Data (evidence)**
  - Why do you say this (*Quote source*)
  - How do you arrive at your statement? (*Warrants*)
  - What other arguments can you use to present your argument? (*Quote source*)
- **STEP 3: Counter-arguments / qualifiers / reservations**
  - Are there exceptions to the rule? Are there people who differ from you? (*Quote source*)
  - Is your statement still true? (*Rebuttal*)
- **STEP 4: Conclusion**
  - What conclusion can be made? / Is your claim still valid?

- **Chapter 5: Planning and structuring an academic text**

Chapter 5 introduces students to the process of planning and producing an academic text. A brief overview of genres (narration, description, explanation, discussion, classification and comparison and contrast) is also covered. The following components of the structure of an academic text are provided: the identification of a research problem, making a thesis statement, designing a preliminary framework and table of

contents, producing a preliminary/working title, the body of the text. In-text referencing and the compilation of a bibliography are also done with the students.

- **Chapter 6: Empirical research and the research paper**

The basics of empirical research are covered in this chapter. The following aspects of empirical research are done with the students: quantitative and qualitative research; the style of empirical research texts, the use of visual information, writing research reports, examples of research reports and using questionnaires and case studies.

- **Chapter 7: Seminar skills**

Throughout the course, students learn how to read and write in a tertiary environment. They must, however, also know how to communicate verbally via seminars for example, as certain subjects require that students have the skills to present speeches in front of fellow students and lecturers. Many employers also expect future employees to be able to make presentations or speeches. Thus, it is important that students are taught seminar skills. After completion of this chapter, students should be able to: understand why it is important to be able to communicate effectively in a tertiary environment and in the workplace; do a presentation based on sources and to ask questions to explain, clarify or critique.

- **Chapter 8: Writing programme**

The writing programme comprises extra exercises of all the aspects covered in the previous chapters. These exercises serve as supplementary exercises and can be used for individualised differentiation purposes. The exercises include formulating compound and complex sentences; using indirect speech; practicing nominalisation; editing texts; arranging paragraphs in logical order; writing summaries; and using the argument structure correctly.

#### **5.3.4 Assessment**

Various assessment types and procedures are used to include all learning styles. Assessments include class tests, class assignments, semester tests, examinations, online assessment (eFundi tests and assignments) and essays.

Through various exercises in the workbook and on eFundi, *self-assessment* takes place. Students are thus aware at all times of their own progress. Peer-assessment is also used in contact classes where students assess each other's work in various assignments.

Lecturer-assessment still remains the main means of assessing students' written work and is used to evaluate the course.

#### 5.4 Course description: RINL

The RINL section of the AGLA 121 course is completely computer-based and is situated on eFundi. During Orientation, first-year students have a one-day introductory computer induction. Thereafter, students complete RINL at their own time and pace with certain due dates that they have to comply with. The course is divided into two main sections, namely Computer Skills and Information Skills. There are 15 tests after every unit. These tests are only for practice purposes and are not compulsory. The semester test is written at the students' own pace and time. The examination is written under strictly controlled conditions.

A few years ago the RINL unit conducted a study and received extremely positive feedback on how the course had improved the students' computer skills and familiarized many of them with computers who have not previously been exposed to computers at home and school. However, some of the findings of their study indicated that there were some students who were opposed to the compulsory nature of RINL. Some of the research participants felt that they were computer literate enough as they had been exposed to computer skills at school level. However, the head of the RINL component stated that the RINL course provided all students with a safety net that ensured that they at least had a basic computer and information technology skills set that they could build on (Van Aswegen, 2013).

The nursing students' RINL results are discussed in Chapter 7 (cf. §7.6.3) as well as their opinion about RINL in general (cf. §7.7.2.1.1; §7.7.2.1.2; §7.7.2.2.1).

Table 5.2 provides an outline of the module outcomes and assessment criteria that students need to complete the computer component, RINL.

**Table 5.1 Module outcomes and assessment criteria of RINL**

MODULE OUTCOMES	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrate an understanding of key concepts pertaining to computer apparatus and the functioning of the personal computer as well as a personal computer operating system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>identify and describe the components of a personal computer, Information and Communication Technologies and the Windows desktop and effectively use the Windows environment;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>effectively describe and use input and output mechanisms and describe storage apparatus;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>send and receive electronic mail messages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>skilfully use relevant hardware and software that grant access to the Internet and World Wide Web (WWW) and communicate using electronic mail;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>execute projects or write assignments by making use of standard word processing software</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrate an understanding of the principles of word processing;</li> <li>create, open, format, edit, save and print a Word document;</li> <li>insert graphics and create and edit tables,</li> <li>headers and footers, page breaks and bulleted or numbered lists.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>perform calculations and produce graphs by using spread sheet processing software</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>identify basic characteristics of electronic spread sheets in the Excel environment and create a basic spread sheet, edit, format, save and print it;</li> <li>create formulae and functions and alter the presentation of spread sheet and sort and filter data.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>use presentation software to create well-formatted presentations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>create a PowerPoint presentation, execute a slideshow on the computer screen and options for printing.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrate the value of scientific information for the learner researcher by recognising, defining and determining the scope of information needs in order to be able to construct a search strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explain the concept and types of information, distinguish between information, data and knowledge and provide practical examples;</li> <li>demonstrate how a researcher uses search methods to research a topic</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>display knowledge about different types of printed and electronic information sources and should be able to use them to find relevant information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>differentiate between, explain and use: books, the Library catalogue, subject and popular journals, national and international databases, newspaper databases, conference papers, dissertations and evaluate them as sources of information.</li> </ul>

## 5.5 Course description: LEES

To address the reading-related issues that could influence students' academic success, the NWU included a reading component as part of the AGLA 121 academic literacy course as reading skills required for tertiary studies cannot be acquired "if they have not been explicitly taught" (Carrell, 1998). To improve students' reading speed and comprehension, the reading laboratory included a reading component with compulsory reading classes for all the first-year students taking the AGLA 121 course. Initially, the reading course was voluntary, remedial of nature and focused specifically on at-risk students. However, due to the extremely low reading

levels of first-year students, it was decided by the university's Senate that a reading course for all first-year students should be made compulsory.

At the time of the research, the reading laboratory was using the *ReadOn* software. The university had to change to the *Readers are Leaders* software, due to IT server problems. First-year students were expected to attend thirteen sessions where they were allowed to read and complete two texts per lesson per day. After the completion of the thirteen lessons, an examination opportunity was available to the students. According to international standards, first-year students are expected to read 280 words per minute with 70% comprehension (Nel, 2012:7). However, due to the fact that the reading course was only for one semester, the requirements were reduced. At the NWU, first-year students were expected to read 220 words per minute with 80% comprehension (Grade 10 school level) as determined by the reading programme coordinators. These requirements are based on international guidelines as determined by the *Taylor National Norms* (Educational Development Laboratories, Inc.) as seen in Table 5.3. Table 5.4 provides the reading proficiency levels of first-year students at the NWU Potchefstroom Campus over ten years.

**Table 5.2 Taylor National Norms (words per minute with comprehension)**

Grade level													Advanced				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Col	1	2	3	4	5
80	115	138	158	173	185	195	204	214	224	237	250	280	340	400	480	560	620

**Table 5.3 Reading proficiency levels of first-year students at the NWU (Nel, 2012; Nel 2015)**

Year	Number of students tested	Words per minute	Comprehension %	Grade level
2002	1921	222	70	Gr 10
2003	2128	249	69	Gr 12
2004	3314	214	76	Gr 9
2005	3421	221	76	Gr 10
2006	3301	230	73	Gr 10/11
2007	3476	199	68	Gr 7/8
2008	3878	214	74	Gr 9
2009	3576	218	58	Gr 9/10
2010	3641	180	50	Gr 5/6
2011	3540	178	50	Gr 5/6
2012	3414	171	52	Gr 5
2013	5683	165	52	Gr 4
2014	4819	168	62	Gr 5
2015	4423	187	68	Gr 6

Though the main focus of the study is on academic writing, it is important to take note of the low reading scores of the students as it can have a direct influence on their academic writing. The results for the reading scores of the nursing students for the empirical study are discussed in Chapter 7 (cf. §7.6.2) as well as how the nursing students felt about the reading component (cf. §7.7.2.1.3; §7.7.2.1.4; §7.7.2.2.3).

## **5.6 Relevance of the chapter**

In order to determine the effect that AGLA 121 has on nursing students (cf. Chapter 7), as outlined in the research aims and questions, an overview of the AGLA 121 course was provided.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

The main purpose of this chapter was to give a description of the academic literacy course (AGLA 121) that serves as part of the case evaluation research for this study. Firstly, an overview of the testing practices that determine the first-year students' academic literacy levels was provided (cf. §5.2). Secondly, a description of the AGLA 121 course was given with the focus on the aims, procedures, content and assessment procedures of the course (cf. §5.3). Course descriptions of the RINL (cf. §5.4) and LEES (cf. §5.5) components were also provided. Once again, both the scope and nature of the course are overwhelming for the brief amount of time allocated to the course. It can be a challenge for first-year students to meet all the requirements described in thirteen weeks, especially as many of them have never been exposed to many of the aspects covered in the course.

In the following chapter, the research approach, design and methodologies used in the case study evaluation are discussed.

## CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH APPROACH, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

*“The paradigms war”: finding the “radical middle.” (Patton, 2014)*

### 6.1 Introduction

To empirically determine whether the AGLA 121 course had an effect on first-year nursing students' academic writing, this chapter deals with the research approach, design, and methodology utilized for the empirical investigation conducted in this study. The research was conducted based on the pragmatist, constructivist, interpretivist and positivist paradigms (§6.2.1). The chosen research design for this study was an evaluation case study design (§6.3; §6.4). As both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used, a justification is provided for combining qualitative and quantitative methods in a mixed methods research design (§6.3.2). To conclude, an in-depth description of the qualitative and quantitative methodologies used is presented (§6.5). An account of all the ethical considerations that was necessary to conduct the research is also provided (§6.6).

### 6.2 Research paradigms

#### 6.2.1 Pragmatist, constructivist, interpretivist and positivist paradigms

In this study, the research is embedded in the pragmatist, constructivist, interpretivist, and positivist paradigms.

Datta (1997a:34) defines **pragmatism** in evaluation to mean “the essential criteria for making sure design decisions are practical, contextually responsive, and consequential”. As the study is an evaluation of a writing programme, the research is conducted from a pragmatist paradigm as pragmatism focuses on “what works” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003:713) and “what does not work”, which links it closely to evaluation (Patton, 2008:5). Rallis and Rossman (2003:492) support this view and state that evaluators and pragmatists are quite similar as they view research as a sequence of decisions that are founded on: “logistics, feasibility, stakeholder interests, the value stance of the evaluator, time, and other resources”.

The study also relies on the **constructivist** research paradigm. Constructivist researchers do not start with a theory but they "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings" (Creswell, 2003:9) with a range of participants as the study progresses. This was the main reason for including several phases (cf. §6.5) in this study. In terms of constructivism, qualitative data collection methods are mostly used. However, quantitative data can be used to expand on

qualitative data to develop the description of the case study. Data-collection tools typically used by constructivists include interviews and document reviews (MacKenzie & Knipe, 2006). These tools were implemented in this study (cf. §7.2; §7.4; §7.7; §7.9; §7.10).

This study is also rooted in an **interpretivist** paradigm. Lynch (2003:26) states that the interpretivist paradigm “approaches the programme as something to be observed and interacted with”. As the interpretivist paradigm supports qualitative methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003:705), a qualitative approach is also employed in this study as qualitative research explores attitudes and experiences and attempts to get an in-depth opinion from participants (Dawson, 2009:14-15).

Regarding the data gathering, participants and procedures of interpretivist designs, Lynch (2003:26) observes that the developing nature of the design is in direct contrast to the set, *a priori* nature of positivist research approaches. With interpretivist research, researchers respond to processes and participants as the need arises. As interpretivist researchers’ comprehension of the programme evaluation also develops, information is gathered from multiple sources (Yin, 1994:23) and with various methodologies at various times. Information was collected from all the important stakeholders that included nursing students and lecturers.

In contrast to interpretivism there is the **positivist** paradigm. The positivist paradigm is defined by Atkinson and Hammersley (1994:251) as a “scientific method that consists of the rigorous testing of hypotheses by means of data that take the form of quantitative measurements”. Many researchers are of the opinion that “positivism is dead” (Lynch, 2003:3) and that one should rather use the term *postpositivist*. Lynch (2003:4) states that he chose not to use the term postpositivist and still prefers to use the term *positivist*, as many people confuse the term with postcolonialism, postmodernism and poststructuralism. As Lynch’s evaluation model (1996; 2003) serves as the preferred evaluation model for this study, the term positivism is preferred. In this study, quantitative measurements were used to determine whether the writing programme had an effect on the first-year students’ writing after the intervention of the AGLA 121 course. The design used was a quasi-experimental design (§7.6) where pre- and post-tests determined whether a statistically significant improvement in the students’ academic literacy and writing had been achieved.

### **6.3 Research approach**

In this study, a mixed methods design was used to conduct the programme evaluation of the AGLA 121 course.

### 6.3.1 Evaluation research

Royse *et al.* (2001:1) describe the importance and relevance of evaluation:

Everyone in the fields of social work, psychology, counselling, public administration, **nursing** and **education**, will be concerned with providing services to clients at some level (individuals, families, couples, small groups, organizations, or communities), and every human services practitioner will be intensely interested in learning whether the services provided really do help the clients they are intended to serve.”

Within the context of this study, this quote highlights the importance of evaluating university courses such as AGLA 121 for nursing students’ academic and future professional careers.

Weiss (1998:4) defines evaluation as the organised and efficient assessment of the outcomes and processes of policies or programmes, compared to certain standards in order to contribute to improving policies or programmes. Evaluation differentiates what works from what does not (Patton, 2008:xvii). Evaluations are also systematic attempts to collect information to enable stakeholders to make certain decisions or judgements (Lynch, 1996:2). Evaluations typically assess what the intended aims and objectives of something (such as language programmes) are, and describe aspects that were implemented as well as intended and unintended results and outcomes that were achieved (Patton, 2008:5).

In this study, the term **programme** refers to the writing programme that forms part of the AGLA 121 course (that includes LEES and RINL) that is being evaluated. One of the most important functions of programmes is that the intervention should have some sort of effect on the programme participants (Lynch, 1996:2; Royse *et al.*, 2001:5). The main and common goal of the AGLA 121 course is to improve the first-year students’ academic literacy levels (including writing) and therefore it is necessary to reflect on the effectiveness thereof.

Programme evaluations are thus typically used to determine whether a programme was effective (Alderson, 1992:276; Patton, 2008:5); achieved its goals and objectives (Lynch, 2003:10; Nunan, 1988:119; Patton, 2008:5); justified the costs (Alderson, 1992:276; Patton, 2008:5) and very importantly, met the needs of the stakeholders (Patton, 2008:5). Programme evaluations are also used to establish the strengths and weaknesses of courses (Patton, 2008:5) and to inform decisions (Patton, 2008:40) whether courses should be modified (Nunan, 1988:118). Van de Poel and Gasiorek (2010:120) highlight the benefits of evaluation as both “a validation process and a guide for course revision”, which are two of the main purposes of this study. In this study, the main aim of the evaluation was to determine whether the AGLA 121 course was effective in supporting nursing students with their academic writing skills.

According to Lynch (1996:2), there is a constant need to evaluate language programmes. Van de Poel and Gasiorek (2010:120) are of the opinion that even though evaluating language courses is critical, unfortunately it is not commonly used in language course development processes. Evaluating programmes should not be a once-off action, but should be an ongoing process (Lynch, 2003:10; Van de Poel & Gasiorek, 2010:120) as academic literacy programmes can and should continuously be developed. This should be done as it is our role as reflective practitioners to continuously evaluate our courses. According to Brown (1995:233), evaluation is also seen as a “never-ending needs analysis” where the main objective is to continuously gather information in order to enable course designers to improve programmes and to meet the needs of all the stakeholders.

When programmes are evaluated, they can be either **formative** or **summative** in nature. Formative evaluation takes place during programme implementation and development. With formative evaluation, the focus is on the processes followed in the programme and is usually done to improve implementation (Lynch, 2003:10; Patton, 2008:118). In contrast, summative evaluation occurs at the end of a programme. The main aim of summative evaluation is to make an ultimate judgement (Lynch 2003:10) about the programme’s “merit, significance, quality, value or worth”. Typical outcomes of summative evaluations are formal reports that can be used for high-stakes decisions such as whether the programmes should continue in the current format or whether major changes are necessary (Lynch, 2003:10). Even though both formative and summative evaluations have merits and are used for various purposes, many evaluation designs incorporate both types of evaluation (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998:17; Lynch, 2003:10; Nunan, 1988:119). Dudley-Evans and St John (1998:17) are also of the opinion that courses should be evaluated at the beginning, during and after the course has ended and most importantly a while after the course. The longitudinal type of evaluation can be useful for course designers to determine whether students used what they had learnt in the course and also to establish what was still needed and not addressed in the course. This is one of the main reasons why information for this study was not only gathered from one set of participants at one particular time, but from various participants over a period of time. With this type of research approach, most if not all evaluation issues can be identified and addressed.

The programme evaluation conducted in this study was done to determine whether the AGLA 121 course was effective in assisting first-year nursing students with their academic writing needs, and to establish the strengths and weaknesses of the course. The data extracted from the evaluation could serve as recommendations for AGLA 121 course redesign that could benefit not only nursing students (cf. §8.3) but first-year students in general in order to improve the entire course for all students (cf. §8.4).

There are a number of key questions (what, who, when and how) that form part of most programme evaluations (Nunan, 1988:121). The evaluator needs to consider which elements in the curriculum should be evaluated, who should conduct the evaluation, when the evaluation should take place, and by what means. Table 6.1 is a brief summary of the key questions usually asked in programme evaluations as described by Nunan (1988:119-129) as well as Dudley-Evans and St John (1998:130-131). These questions formed the basis of the evaluation and informed the formulation of the questions asked in this study (cf. Table 6.4; Table 6.5; Table 6.6; Table 6.9; Table 6.10).

**Table 6.1 Key questions in evaluation**

NUNAN (1988:119-120)	DUDLEY-EVANS AND ST JOHN (1998:130-131)
<p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the goals and objectives derived from needs analyses?</li> <li>• If not, where were they derived from?</li> <li>• Are they appropriate for the specified groups of students?</li> <li>• Do the students think the content is appropriate?</li> </ul> <p>Methodology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the materials, methods and activities consonant with the prespecified objectives?</li> <li>• Do the students think the materials, methods and activities are appropriate?</li> </ul> <p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the resources adequate / appropriate?</li> </ul> <p>Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do students practise their skills outside the classroom?</li> <li>• Do the students appear to be enjoying the course?</li> <li>• Is the timing of the class and the type of learning arrangement suitable for the students?</li> </ul>	<p>Audience and purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are the stakeholders?</li> <li>• What do you want to evaluate?</li> <li>• What do you want to change?</li> </ul> <p>Criteria for evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the objectives you are evaluating against?</li> </ul> <p>Criteria for analysis of results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will you do with the answers?</li> <li>• What can you change?</li> </ul> <p>Sources of information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who can provide useful information?</li> <li>• When will it be appropriate for them to do that?</li> </ul>

### 6.3.2 Mixed-methods research

Royse *et al.* (2001:85) mention that “while numbers and statistical analyses tell us that one programme worked better, case studies of individual successes and failures give an

understanding of how these results came to pass". In this study, both qualitative and quantitative methods are used as it is quite common for evaluation researchers to use both methods (Massey, 2011:21). By using both methods, the data could be triangulated in this study. Traditional quantitative research designs and approaches include surveys, causal comparative, correlational, experimental and quasi-experimental research. Qualitative approaches typically include ethnographic research, participatory models of research, and case studies (Mertens, 2003:146). In this study, quasi-experimental research with one group and no control group (cf. Table 6.7), as well as a case study design is used.

As with most forms of research, evaluation research is usually quantitative in nature (Royse *et al.*, 2001:83). However, in recent years, qualitative methods have more frequently been used in evaluation research. Weiss (1998:252) makes the following statement: "[w]here once they were viewed as aberrant and probably the refuge of those who never studied statistics, now they are recognized as valuable additions to the evaluation repertoire. Qualitative methods accomplish evaluative tasks that were previously done poorly or entirely scanted." Rogers and Goodrick (2010:429) are also in favour of using qualitative data instead of only looking at numbers and statistics. For them, qualitative data provide more convincing accounts of failure or successes of programmes. It is thus evident that for evaluation purposes, both quantitative and qualitative methods can be useful to determine whether a programme is successful or not in reaching its outcomes.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative research has become increasingly common (Bryman, 2008:253). Rallis and Rossman (2003:492) mention that "combining quantitative and qualitative information is not only advisable but inevitable". Regarding programme evaluation, Datta (1997b:347) mentions that using both qualitative and quantitative designs answers "formative, process, descriptive, and implementation questions". Royse *et al.* (2001:85-88) state that qualitative findings are often presented along with the quantitative findings and if carried out effectively, can supply "the best of both worlds". According to Alderson (1992:274) there is no "One Best Way" of conducting a language programme evaluation as a lot depends on variables such as the nature and purpose of the evaluation, the individuals involved and the availability of timescales and resources. Lynch (1992:62) is also in favour of a "balanced approach" where both quantitative and qualitative methods are used. Nunan (1988:119) is also in favour of involving both quantitative and qualitative descriptions.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches is variously named: mixed-methods (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003), multi-methods (Brannen, 1992), mixed methodology (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), or a multi-strategy research approach (Bryman, 2004). For the purpose of this study a mixed-methods design approach was used as an

umbrella term for mixed-method and mixed-model research, as suggested by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003:11) and Patton (2008:435). This implied that the study involved quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques in parallel phases. This approach thus entails that it is possible to have two or more paradigms and designs in a single research project (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003:11).

The justification for using an integrated combination of qualitative and quantitative methods could be to complement, conclude, develop, expand, initiate and/or triangulate data (Bryman, 2008:262; Greene *et al.*, 1989:259; Rogers & Goodrick, 2010:429). In this study, “equal status” (Patton, 2008:438; Rogers & Goodrick, 2010:429) was given to qualitative and quantitative data. This means that both are regarded as equally important. The qualitative and quantitative methods were used for *triangulation* purposes. Denzin (1978:291) broadly defines triangulation as “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon”. According to Jick (1979:107), quantitative and qualitative methods should be viewed as “complementary rather than as rival camps”.

For the purposes of this study, triangulation is used to “improve the accuracy of the judgements made by the researcher by collecting different kinds of data bearing the same phenomenon... as well as forming part of the validation process” (Jick, 1979:108) of this study. Furthermore, Bouchard (1976:268) mentions the following: “[t]he convergence of agreement between two methods enhances our belief that the results are valid and not a methodological artefact.”

#### **6.4 Research design: case study design**

In this study a case study evaluation design (Lynch, 2003:27) was used.

Using case studies has become a major research approach for thoroughly evaluating social and educational programmes (Royse *et al.*, 2001:97; Simons, 2009:13; Yin, 2003:15). According to Yin (2003:13), a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context”.

One of the key strengths of case study designs is that researchers are able to incorporate various techniques and sources when gathering data. These data can be qualitative, quantitative or a combination (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:76). As mentioned in Section 6.2.1, the researcher used qualitative one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews, and quantitative pre- and post-tests (as part of a quasi-experimental design) for this study.

There are various steps that can be followed in conducting case study evaluations. These steps often include determining what needs to be evaluated, identifying the stakeholders, specifying evaluation and programme objectives, finding variables, choosing research design(s), implementing research measurements, analysing and interpreting findings, reporting results, making recommendations, and implementing results (De Vos, 2002:376). All the steps were followed in this study, except the implementation of the results. The implementation of the results can be suggested for further research (cf. §9.3).

For the planning and the eventual execution of the case study evaluation for this study, a combination of Martinson and O'Brian's (2010:165) and Lynch's (2003:4) context-adaptive model (CAM) steps were followed as presented in Table 6.2.

**Table 6.2 Key steps in case study evaluations**

Key steps in case studies as set out by Martinson and O'Brien (2010:165):	Steps in Lynch's CAM (2003:4)
<b>1. Design the case study</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define research questions</li> <li>• Determine the unit of analysis</li> <li>• Determine a case design</li> </ul>	1. Audience and goals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define the main goals</li> <li>• Determine the stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>2. Conducting the case study</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop protocols</li> <li>• Implement strategies for collecting data, typically from multiple sources</li> </ul>	2. Context inventory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A context inventory will include a variety of dimensions (cf. Lynch, 1996:5-6) that detail the resources available for the assessment or evaluation, the time requirements, features of the language classroom or programme, and characteristics of the language learner or programme participants.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Analysing the data</b>	3. Preliminary thematic framework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making a list of major themes that relate to or even help clarify the assessment or evaluation goals</li> </ul>
<b>4. Preparing the report</b>	4. Data-collection design / system
	5. Data collection
	6. Data analysis
	7. Evaluation report

Based on the steps of Martinson and O'Brien and Lynch's CAM key steps in case study designs, an in-depth summary of the case study evaluation research design that was followed in this study is provided in Table 6.3.

**Table 6.3 Summary of the case study evaluation design**

<b>WRITING PROGRAMME EVALUATION: AGLA 121</b>	
1.	<p><b>Research questions were designed:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the current views and definitions of literacy and academic literacy?</li> <li>• What are the characteristics of academic writing?</li> <li>• What are the current trends and views regarding the teaching and learning of academic writing at first-year level?</li> <li>• What are the nature and characteristics of academic writing practices of nursing students?</li> <li>• Is the academic literacy course (AGLA 121) effective in assisting and developing first-year nursing students' writing?</li> <li>• What proposals can be made regarding the content, teaching and learning methods, materials and assessment of student writing in the writing programme in the academic literacy course in general and specifically for nursing students?</li> </ul> <p><b>Based on the research questions, the preliminary thematic framework was established:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The writing programme of the academic literacy course, AGLA 121, has an effect on first-year student writing.</li> </ul>
2.	<p><b>The unit of analysis was identified:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The attitudes, perceptions and writing abilities before and after an intervention of a group of nursing students enrolled in the academic literacy course (AGLA 121) at the NWU's Potchefstroom Campus.</li> </ul>
3.	<p><b>The goals of the study were stated:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To explore the terms <b>literacy</b> and <b>academic literacy</b> as contextualisation for the study;</li> <li>• To define academic writing;</li> <li>• To determine 'best practice' in the teaching and learning of academic writing at first-year level;</li> <li>• To describe the writing practices of nursing students;</li> <li>• To ascertain the effectiveness of the AGLA 121 course in assisting and developing first-year nursing student writing; and</li> <li>• To propose a redesigned or adapted writing programme regarding the content, teaching and learning methods, materials and assessment of nursing student writing in the academic literacy course.</li> <li>• To determine the attitudes and opinions of the participants about the course in general, addressing all possible variables, as well as to establish whether the participants felt that the course had an impact on their writing skills and abilities and if these skills and abilities could be transferred to their subject-specific writing in their other modules.</li> <li>• To provide statistical evidence that the AGLA 121 course had an effect on first-year nursing student writing.</li> </ul>
4.	<p><b>The stakeholders that could benefit directly from this course evaluation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nursing students</li> <li>• Nursing lecturers</li> <li>• AL lecturers</li> </ul>
5.	<p><b>Context inventory:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Checking for availability of a comparison group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As no control group or comparison group was available, a programme group only design was decided upon.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Checking for the reliability of valid and reliable measures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The reliability of the TAG tests and marking rubric was established.</li> <li>- The interview questions and marking rubric were piloted.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Determining the timing of the evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The pilot interview questions were done at the beginning of the first semester in 2011.</li> <li>- The main research (interviews and pre- and post-tests) was conducted during the first semester of 2012.</li> <li>- To determine whether the course had an effect over a period of time, follow-up</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<p>one-on-one interviews were conducted with the participants of the original pilot group in 2013 who were in their third year of study.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describing the characteristics of the programme students and staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The programme students were nursing students who were enrolled in the AGLA 121 course during the first semester of 2012.</li> <li>- The programme staff were all full-time nursing and AL lecturers. The researcher was also a lecturer of the course and fulfilled the role of overt participant researcher and observer.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Describing the size and intensity of the programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All first-year students have to complete the AGLA 121 course annually at the NWU.</li> <li>- The course lasts for thirteen weeks with two fifty-minute lessons per week.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Description of resources and materials available to the programme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A course workbook (designed by the AGLA 121 lecturers) combined with online materials is used.</li> <li>- The NWU e-learning environment, <i>eFundi</i>, is also used for class preparation and assessments.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Purpose of the programme is stated <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The outcomes of the AGLA 121 course are provided in Chapter 5 of this study.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
6.	<p><b>The case design was determined:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A case study evaluation design was decided upon viewed from the pragmatist, positivist and interpretivist paradigms</li> </ul>
7.	<p><b>Data-collection methods identified:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative one-on-one interview and focus group interviews</li> <li>• Quantitative quasi-experimental programme group only pre- and post-tests</li> </ul>
8.	<p><b>Data-analysis procedures were determined:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative data were analysed with <i>Atlas.ti</i> software</li> <li>• Quantitative data were analysed with SPSS software.</li> </ul>
9.	<p><b>The findings of the qualitative and quantitative data were written up:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phase 1: Interview with the first-year student nursing facilitator</li> <li>• Phase 2: Online questionnaire for nursing lecturers</li> <li>• Phase 3: Pilot study focus group interviews</li> <li>• Phase 4: Main study: AGLA 121 questionnaire</li> <li>• Phase 5: Main study: TAG and essay results</li> <li>• Phase 6: Main study: Focus group interviews</li> <li>• Phase 7: Longitudinal value: pilot study follow-up questionnaire</li> <li>• Phase 8: Study-guide analysis</li> <li>• Phase 9: Literature review and AGLA-workbook analysis</li> </ul>
10.	<p><b>Recommendations were made based on the findings of the qualitative and quantitative analyses:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapter 8 of this study</li> </ul>

## 6.5 Research methodology

As mentioned, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used for the programme evaluation of AGLA 121 (cf. §6.3.2). To obtain multiple perspectives of the case (Lynch, 2003:27), the research was conducted in several phases, with multiple participants and with various documents. This was done to get a broad view of the case study. The research methodologies of the various phases are discussed in the following section.

### 6.5.1 Phase 1: Interview with the first-year students' nursing facilitator

Interviewing is the predominant method of data collection in qualitative research. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews are defined as “those interviews organised around areas of particular interest, while still allowing considerable flexibility in scope and depth” (Greeff, 2002:298). Semi-structured interviews are frequently used by evaluation researchers to obtain a detailed picture of participants' accounts or perceptions of and/or beliefs about a certain topic.

When conducting semi-structured interviews, researchers usually follow an interview schedule with predetermined questions. However, the interview must not be dictated by these questions, but rather be guided by them. The research participant can, for example, suggest other points of interest to the researcher that is relevant to the study. Therefore, in semi-structured interviews, the questions are almost always open-ended (Greeff, 2002:302).

In this study, a semi-structured one-on-one interview was conducted with a facilitator from the Subject Group Nursing. This particular lecturer was selected as she was the programme facilitator for all the first-year nursing students and knew what writing was expected from them as first-year students. This interview was conducted right at the beginning of the study as preparation for the rest of the study. The researcher wanted to establish what the perceptions and expectations about the AGLA 121 course were from the Subject Group Nursing. The researcher also wanted to determine what type of writing was expected from first-year nursing students as well as how the writing is assessed. The findings of this interview are discussed in Chapter 7 (cf. §7.2). The interview schedule is provided in Table 6.4.

**Table 6.4 One-on-one interview schedule: nursing facilitator**

Original Afrikaans questions	Translated questions
1. Wat weet jy van die akademiese geletterdheidskursus, AGLA 121?	1. What do you know about the academic literacy course AGLA 121?
2. Watter soort skryfwerk word van eerstejaarstudente verwag?	2. What type of writing is expected from first-year students?
3. Moet eerstejaarstudente argumentatiewe skryfstukke kan skryf?	Should first-year students be able to write argumentative essays?
4. Watter ondersteuning bied julle vir die studente ten opsigte van hulle skryfwerk?	4. What type of support do you offer to first-year students in terms of their writing in assignments?
5. Gebruik die verpleegkunde dosente merkskemas (rubrieke) met die assessering van skryfstukke?	5. Do the nursing lecturers make use of rubrics when assessing written assignments?
6. Watter aspekte word in die merkskemas geassesseer?	6. What aspects are covered in the rubrics?

## 6.5.2 Phase 2: Online questionnaire for nursing lecturers

An online questionnaire was sent to nursing lecturers (cf. Appendix B; Table 6.5). Both open and closed types of questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:194) were used in this instrument.

The participants (n=5) who completed the online questionnaire by means of Google Docs, represented various years (from first to fourth) and modules from the Subject Group Nursing. The participants were assigned by the Subject Group Nursing undergraduate programme facilitator. The questions were based on the literature described in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 that pertained to academic writing skills that nursing students need to be successful at university.

**Table 6.5 Online questionnaire questions**

Original Afrikaans questions	Translated questions
1. Vir watter jaargroep(e) gee u klas?	1. Which year group(s) do you teach?
2. Watter modules bied u aan?	2. Which modules do you teach?
3.1-3.4 Watter van die volgende soorte skryfwerk word by die NWU van voorgraadse verpleegstudente verwag en in watter jaar? (Eerste, tweede, derde en vierde jaar) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deskriptiewe referaat</li> <li>• Reflektiewe referaat</li> <li>• Argumentatiewe referaat</li> <li>• Aksieplanne</li> <li>• Versorgingsplanne</li> <li>• Portefeuljes</li> <li>• Persoonlike dagboeke</li> <li>• Verslae</li> <li>• Navorsingsvoorstelle</li> <li>• Voorgraadse skripsies</li> <li>• Ander</li> </ul>	3.1-3.3 Which of the following types of writing is expected from nursing graduate students of the NWU and in which year? (First, second, third and fourth year) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive essay</li> <li>• Reflective essay</li> <li>• Argumentative essay</li> <li>• Action plans</li> <li>• Care plans</li> <li>• Portfolios</li> <li>• Personal diaries</li> <li>• Reports</li> <li>• Research proposals</li> <li>• Graduate mini-dissertations</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul>
4. Indien 'ander' in vraag 3 gekies is, beskryf asseblief.	4. If you chose 'other' in question 3, please provide details.
5. Wat is u algemene indruk van u studente se skryfwerk?	5. What is your general impression about students' writing?
6. Waarmee sukkel studente die meeste met hulle skryfwerk?	6. What do most students struggle most in terms of their writing?
7. Gebruik u 'n merkskema wanneer u studente se skryfwerk nasien?	7. Do you use a marking rubric when assessing student writing?
8. Kry studente die merkskemas voor die tyd? Hoekom?	8. Do students receive marking rubrics beforehand? Why?
9. Watter algemene kriteria verskyn gewoonlik in u merkskemas?	9. What general criteria are usually found in your marking rubrics?
10. Is taalgebruik en spelling belangrik om te assesser in u skryfstukke? Hoekom?	10. Is language use and spelling important in the assessment of written work? Why?
11. Wat weet u van die verpligte taalkursus, AGLA, wat alle eerstejaarstudente moet neem?	11. Are you aware of the compulsory language course, AGLA 121 that needs to be completed by all first-year students?

12. Wat dink u is die doel van AGLA 121?	12. What do you think is the purpose of AGLE?
13. Dink u dat verpleegstudente AGLA 121 nodig het? Hoekom?	13. Do you think that nursing students need AGLA 121? Why?
14. Sou u 'n meer vakspesifieke verpleeg-AGLA wou hê waar daar slegs op die skryfvaardighede wat verpleegstudente nodig het, gefokus word?	14. Would you prefer a more subject-specific nursing AGLA 121 where the focus is only on the writing skills necessary for nursing students?
15. Sou u belangstel in werksinkels wat ondersteuning vir verpleegstudente se skryfvaardighede bied?	15. Would you be interested in workshops that would provide support for nursing students' writing skills?

### 6.5.3 Phase 3: Pilot study focus group interviews

Conducting focus group interviews are frequently used as qualitative means of acquiring data (Litosseliti, 2003:1; Massey, 2011:21; Morgan & Spanish, 1984:253; Rabiee, 2004:655). A focus group is a small, homogeneous group of participants who have mutual interests or characteristics that discuss a topic that relates to the specific focus of the research (Krueger & Casey, 2009:2; Morgan & Spanish, 1984:253; Singh, 2008:284). For this particular pilot study, the focus group participants have in common that they are all students from the Subject Group Nursing taking AGLA 121 during the first semester. To prepare for the pilot focus group interview, the researcher attended a focus group interview as a participant. The researcher also co-facilitated other non-related focus group interviews with a colleague to be adequately prepared for the study.

The sizes of focus groups vary, anything from between four to twelve participants. However, some of the literature suggests that smaller groups “show greater potential” (Rabiee, 2004:656). Krueger and Casey (2009:6) also mention that “the group must be small enough for everyone to share insights and yet large enough to provide a diversity of perceptions”. Six participants (that were available) formed the focus group for this pilot study.

The focus group pilot study was conducted during the first semester of 2011 with a group of six first-year nursing students taking the academic literacy course, AGLA 121. The questions were piloted to ensure that all the questions were understood and that any confusing questions could be revised and clarified and to increase the reliability. The questions used for the pilot study are found in Table 6.6. The findings of the pilot study are included and summarised in Chapter 7 (§7.4) as researchers frequently use some or all of their qualitative data collected from pilot studies as part of their main studies as it forms part of the case narrative (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

**Table 6.6 Pilot focus group questions**

Afrikaans questions	English translation
1. Dink julle dat julle hoërskooltaalonderrig julle voorberei het om op universiteit te kan skryf?	1. Do you think that your high school language teaching prepared you for writing at university?
2. Is julle die verskil tussen formele en informele styl in skryfwerk geleer en het julle dit in julle skryfwerk toegepas?	2. Were you taught the difference between formal and informal writing and did you apply it in your writing?
3. Het AGLA 121 julle skryfvermoë en skryfvaardighede verbeter of nie?	3. Did AGLA 121 improve your writing abilities and skills?
4. Dink julle dat julle, in die toekoms, dit wat julle in AGLA 121 geleer het kan toepas in julle ander verpleegkundevakke?	4. Do you think that in the future, you will be able to apply what you have learnt in AGLA 121 to your other nursing subjects?
5. Wat van AGLA 121 het julle die meeste geniet?	5. What did you enjoy the most about AGLA 121?
6. Wat het julle die minste geniet?	6. What did you enjoy the least?
7. Wat is julle algemene houding teenoor AGLA 121?	7. What is your general attitude towards AGLA 121?

#### 6.5.4 Phase 4: Main study: AGLA 121 questionnaire

In order to get an overall impression of the research participants, a closed and open-ended questionnaire (cf. Appendix G) was completed by the participants. All the students in the class were mother-tongue Afrikaans nursing students who had to take the compulsory AGLA 121 course during the first semester of 2012. The course lasted for thirteen weeks (two contact sessions per week). The entire population of nursing students who had to complete AGLA 121 were used for this study (n=24).

#### 6.5.5 Phase 5: Main study: TAG and essays

The same research participants (n=24) used in Phase 4 were used for this phase. Quantitative data can tell how well a programme is working through the comparison of the TAG and essay scores before and after the intervention. In this study, the quantitative data can indicate whether the AGLA 121 course had an effect on the first-year nursing students' academic writing. The basic designs used in positivist evaluation designs are true experimental and quasi-experimental. As no comparison or control group were available for this study, a quasi-experimental programme group-only design was utilized. This design involves one programme group with pre- and post-tests (Lynch, 2003:22-24). Table 6.7 is an illustration of the quasi-experimental programme group only design.

**Table 6.7 Quasi-experimental programme group-only design**

Programme group: Nursing students taking AGLA 121	Pre-instruction		Post-instruction	
		Pre-test: TAG test 1	Intervention: AGLA 121	Post-test: TAG test 2
	Pre-test: Essay 1		Post-test: Essay 2	

Regarding quasi-experimental designs, it is important to mention that “[a]ny change in the pattern of measurement from the pre-intervention period to the post-intervention period cannot be unambiguously claimed as being the result of the programme. Other factors may have been present in the instructional (and wider community) context that could explain the change” (Lynch, 2003:25). In this study, it is acknowledged that AGLA 121 is not the only influencing variable on students’ academic literacy and writing skills. For example, students are exposed to academic reading and writing in their other nursing subjects. However, AGLA 121 is the only intervention that actively and solely focuses on developing students’ academic literacy skills. Therefore, to account for the potential other influences, multiple sources and methods were used during the various phases to determine what the perceived effect was.

The results of the TAG tests that were written by all first-year students at the beginning of the academic year were obtained and the nursing students’ results were isolated as pre-tests. After the intervention (the AGLA 121 course) had taken place, students wrote a TAG test for examination purposes and these results were used as a post-test. The use of the TAG tests as pre- and post-tests was intended to determine whether the AGLA 121 course had an overall effect on the students’ acquisition of general academic literacy skills.

Reliability, in terms of quantitative research is described by Cohen *et al.* (2007:146) as “a synonym for dependability, consistency over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents”. According to Kumar (2005:153), validity is “the ability of an instrument to measure what it is designed to measure”. Cohen *et al.* (2007:133) make the following observation with regard to validity: “[i]n quantitative data validity might be improved through careful sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical treatments of the data”.

Regarding the reliability of the TAG/TALL tests used as pre- and post-tests, Weideman (2006:82-83) mentions the following: “[t]he two outstanding features of the TALL are that it is efficient and reliable. For a low to medium-stakes test, it has shown a remarkable degree of reliability.” Table 6.8 summarises the TALL test’s reliability indices across seven recent versions of the test (Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ , as calculated by Iteman).

**Table 6.8 TALL: Reliability measures (as provided by Weideman, 2006:83)**

Date and version of the test	Alpha
2004 (University of Pretoria)	0.95
2005 (North-West University)	0.94
2005 (University of Stellenbosch)	0.89
2005 (University of Pretoria)	0.93
2006 (University of Pretoria)	0.94
2006 (University of Pretoria)	0.91
2006 (North-West University)	0.93
Average	0.93

Before the quantitative assessment of the students' essays took place, the assessment scale (rubric) was piloted on ten essays written by students from Health Sciences on the topic *Should the drinking of alcohol be banned on campus?* To ensure inter-rater reliability, the piloted essays were rated by the researcher and an experienced colleague who also rated the essays for the pre- and post-tests. The scale was also sent to some of the AGLA 121 lecturers for analysis and critique. After the rubric has been adapted, it was used to rate both the pre-test and the post-test essays.

To test whether the AGLA 121 course had an effect on first-year nursing students' writing, before the intervention started a pre-test essay was given to all the students. The results did not form part of their course marks / results, as no instruction had taken place yet. For the pre-test, the students were told that they had to write an argumentative essay on the given the topic, *Should nursing students be allowed to drink alcohol?* The topic formed part of a generic theme used for all the other students and classes that the lecturer as participant observer had. The theme was adjusted for the nursing students to make the topic more subject-specific. The students were given the topic and they had to submit it a week later via e-mail. The students were told that they were allowed to use sources. For the post-test, the topic of the essay was *Should smoking be allowed on campus?* The choice of the topics was an attempt to make the writing more subject-specific.

To assess the essays, an assessment instrument had to be designed. Weigle (2002:109) distinguishes among three types of marking scales: primary trait scales, holistic scales and analytic scales. The main difference between the scales is that analytic and holistic scales are generalizable and can be used for marking various writing assignments, while a primary trait scale is specifically applicable to a particular writing assignment (Weigle, 2002:110).

For the purposes of this study, an analytic scoring scale was used as assessment instrument (cf. Appendix E) that was provided and explained to the participants before they wrote the essays. In contrast to primary trait and holistic scoring, where only a single score is given, analytic scoring rates several criteria or aspects of writing, depending on the purpose of the assessment. Even though using an analytic scale can be time-consuming, there are various advantages of using analytic scoring instead of holistic scoring. Analytic scoring is more reliable than holistic scoring. Analytic rating scales also provide more “detailed” and “diagnostic” information about the writer’s performance and abilities in various aspects of writing. Furthermore, for many raters, analytic scales are easier to use than holistic scales (Weigle, 2002:109-121).

The analytic marking scale (Appendix E) is based on Archer’s (2008:262) “template for measuring improvement from students’ first drafts to final essays”, the original marking scale used for AGLA 121 essays (Appendix D), and the nursing assessment rubric that was provided by the first-year student nursing facilitator (Appendix F). With all the items, a four-point score range was used, namely: very poor, poor to fair, average to good and very good to excellent. A ten-point scale was used for the item *Logical organization: Body*. For all the other items a five-point scale was used. The marks allocated to the various items are based on the AGLA 121 course content and on the marking scales provided by the first-year student facilitator. Two raters (the researcher and an experienced academic literacy colleague) were used to assess the pre-essay and post-essay.

In addition to the marking scale, some additional essay-related variables were also included in the statistical analysis (cf. §7.6.4; §7.6.5). Firstly, the readability (cf. §3.8) of the pre- and post-essays was also analysed by means of the Flesch Reading Ease formula (cf. Flesch, 1948) and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (Kincaid *et al.*, 1975). This was done to determine the overall readability of the written texts. A text analysis (Cheng, 2012:6) of the pre- and post-essays were also compared in terms of the use of personal pronouns and discourse markers (cf. §3.8). Finally, a similarity index was reported where the correspondences between the individual essays and existing works in the Turnitin database are provided; in this way the number of sources included per essay could be reported. This also indicates whether students committed plagiarism (cf. §3.8).

Furthermore, an analysis of the before-and-after essays (cf. §7.6.7) was done to expand on and support the quantitative data. By looking at examples from the participants’ written texts, the researcher could conduct a document analysis of the essays. Document analysis entails a

systematic procedure where relevant documents are evaluated by skimming and reading the document and then interpreting the relevant data (Bowen, 2009:27-32). The essays were examined and examples were provided of the participants' writing before and after the AGLA 121 intervention. Other documents that were also scrutinised include study guides (cf. §6.5.8; §7.9) and the AGLA 121-workbook (cf. §6.5.9; §7.10).

### **6.5.6 Phase 6: Main study: Focus group interviews**

The same research participants (n=24) used in Phase 5 were used for this phase. For the main study three focus group interviews (consisting of five to nine participants per group) were carried out. The number of focus groups that must be conducted depends on when the "point of theoretical saturation" has been reached (Krueger & Casey, 2009:205; Rabiee, 2004:656). The researcher searches for themes and patterns across the various focus groups conducted and saturation is reached when the researcher gains no more new insights or the information repeats and becomes redundant (Krueger & Casey, 2009:201-205). One of the limitations of focus groups is that the results are not representative or generalizable (Krueger & Casey, 2009:203; Litosseliti, 2003:22).

Focus groups should be composed of homogeneous groups of people (Krueger & Casey, 2009:204). In this case, the focus group participants have in common that they are all Afrikaans students from the Subject Group Nursing taking AGLA 121 during the first semester in 2012 and were chosen as they could provide the researcher with information about their overall attitudes towards the AGLA 121 course and whether they thought the course had an effect on their writing skills and abilities that they could use in their other nursing modules.

Every focus group interview was led by the researcher as moderator and overt participant observer (Dawson, 2009:33). The participants were welcomed and thanked for their time. The purpose of the focus group was once again explained to the participants. The researcher also explained to the group that the session was being video-recorded for transcription purposes.

The following are the procedures that were followed in planning the focus group interviews:

- The topic for the study was chosen.
- From the literature review and inductive research, questions were designed.
- Participants were chosen through purposeful and convenience sampling.
- The researcher trained and participated in other focus groups both as facilitator and participant to get a feeling for what it is like as a moderator and as a participant.

- Questions were piloted on a focus group a year before with exactly the same characteristics as the group in the main study (nursing students).
- The questions were changed as to not guide the participants about the effect of the course on their writing abilities.
- Participants were informed of the nature of the research and consent forms were signed as well as verbal permission were given.
- The focus groups were conducted.
- The focus group interviews were transcribed and analysed.

In Table 6.9 the interview schedule for the focus groups used for qualitative data collection is provided.

**Table 6.9 Focus group interview schedule**

Afrikaans questions	English translation
1. Wat is julle houding teenoor AGLA 121?	1. What is your attitude towards AGLA 121?
2. Waarvan het julle die meeste gehou?	2. What did you enjoy the most?
3. Waarvan het julle die minste gehou?	3. What did you like the least?
4. Kan julle die vaardighede wat julle in AGLA 121 geleer het, toepas in julle ander verpleegkundevakke?	4. Can you apply the skills that you learnt in AGLA 121 to other nursing subjects?
5. Enige ander kommentaar?	5. Any other comments?

The focus group questions in the pilot study were deliberately changed for the final focus group questions used in this study as seen in Table 6.9. In the pilot study, many of the questions pertained directly to writing. However, even though the main purpose and rationale for this study was to explore whether the academic literacy course, AGLA 121, had an effect on the first-year students' writing, the researcher felt that these questions guided the participants too much and wanted a more natural response where the participants themselves mentioned the effect of the course on their writing. According to Krueger and Casey (2009:57), the facilitator must be cautious about giving examples. Also, to minimize the risk of bias, the moderator must guide against leading the participants (Litosseliti, 2003:43). Furthermore, Patton (2008:435) states the following: “[q]ualitative data in programme evaluation is aimed at letting people in programmes express their reactions in their own terms rather than impose on them a preconceived set of limited response categories.” If the participants did not mention writing in their responses, it could have indicated that the AGLA 121 course did not support students with their academic writing skills and needs.

All the other comments not relating to writing (such as the reading and computer components) are also important for evaluation purposes as negative perceptions and attitudes can have an effect on student motivation and learning (Pickens, 2005:43-76) and can even cause writing apprehension as mentioned in Chapter 3 (§3.3.6.2). Yin's (2003:13) comment is also relevant: "[y]ou would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions – believing they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study."

The questions started with the participants' attitudes (cf. §3.3.6) towards the AGLA 121 course. Exploring the participants' attitudes is essential as Brunton (2009:29) mentions that "attitude affects levels of motivation and can make long term differences in a student's academic career" and "having a positive attitude is vital to successful learning". Questions two and three posed to the participants were concerned with what they enjoyed and disliked the most about the AGLA 121 course. These questions relate to the core of what an evaluation is, i.e. what works and what does not work in a programme (§6.2.1). Question four had to do with the application value of the AGLA 121 course and whether the participants could transfer the skills and whether they saw the significance of the course for subject-specific nursing purposes. Question five was an open question so that the participants could feel free to voice any other opinions about the AGLA 121 course not yet mentioned during the focus group interview.

When analysing qualitative data, Nieuwenhuis (2007:100) mentions that: "[t]he goal is to summarise what you have seen or heard in terms of common words, phrases, themes or patterns that would aid understanding and interpretation of that which is emerging. The aim is not to measure, but to interpret and make sense of what is in the data."

For data analysis, all the focus group interviews were transcribed. In this study, content analysis (Dawson, 2009:122) was done where the researcher worked through all the transcripts and assigned codes. *Inductive codes* were developed where the researcher had a master list of possible codes. *A priori codes* were also developed where the codes emerged from the data or from the literature reviewed (Dawson, 2009:122; Nieuwenhuis, 2007:105-107). After the transcribed data had been coded, the codes were organised into themes. The identified themes are discussed in detail in Chapter 7 (§.7.7).

The qualitative focus group data analysis was done through utilizing computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). The choice of software for this study was *Atlas.ti*. The researcher was aware that the computer could not do the data analysis for the researcher, but that the software could be used for structuring, ordering, retrieving and visualising of data (Smit, 2002:74). The software was used to support and assist the researcher in managing and analysing large data sets through coding and annotating (Hwang, 2008:524; Smit, 2002:65).

Royse *et al.* (2001:98) make the following statement: “[d]uring data collection and analysis, the researcher must resist the inevitable temptation to let personal bias influence the study. Qualitative enquiry is vulnerable to concerns about such bias – particularly since the researcher is the instrument of data collection and interpretation.”

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants. The moderator did not influence or guide participants during the interviews. Furthermore, by triangulating the data, the accuracy of the interpretations are enhanced (Royse *et al.*, 2001:98). Krueger and Casey (2009:115) mention that “[a]nalysis is verifiable if another researcher is able to arrive at similar findings using the same forms of data.” Armstrong *et al.* (1997:597) state that *inter-rater reliability* is “where data are independently coded and the codings compared for agreements.” Another rater also analysed the qualitative data in this study. Thus, for the sake of inter-rater reliability, Cohen's Kappa was calculated to determine consistency among raters (Cohen, 1960:37). The result is discussed in Chapter 7 (cf. §7.7).

### **6.5.7 Phase 7: Longitudinal value: pilot study follow-up questionnaire**

To determine whether nursing students thought the AGLA 121 course had an effect on their writing over a period of time, an electronic questionnaire (cf. Table 6.10) via e-mail was completed by three third year nursing students (who were part of the initial pilot study). All six of the participants of the pilot group were contacted, but only three were still studying at the NWU.

The participants were in their third year of study and in the third year of studying nursing, students are expected to write a major research assignment. It was evident from the results from the focus group interviews that the nursing students had issues with LEES and RINL (cf. §6.5.3; §6.5.6). The researcher wanted to determine whether the participants saw the relevance of LEES and RINL later in their academic careers. The researcher also wanted to establish whether the participants had used the writing skills taught to them in the AGLA 121 course up to then in their studies and whether they thought they could and would use the writing skills in their nursing research assignments. Furthermore, the researcher wanted to determine what types of academic writing were required from nursing students during their final years of studies (cf. §4.5). Also, the researcher tried to ascertain which general conventions (as covered in AGLA 121) (cf. §3.8) were being used by the nursing students in their third year. As it became clear in Chapter 4 (cf. Table 4.3) that various types of academic writing requires various structures (especially regarding the introductions and conclusions), the participants were asked to reflect on how they were expected to write introductions and conclusions.

**Table 6.10 Longitudinal study – Online questionnaire**

Afrikaans questions	English translation
1. Was LEES en RINL nodig en bruikbaar in julle eerste jaar?	1. Was LEES and RINL necessary and useful in your first year?
2. Gebruik jy enige van die skryfvaardighede wat jy in AGLA 121 geleer het?	2. Do you use any of the writing skills that you learned in AGLA 121?
3. Watter soort skryfwerk word daar van julle in die verpleegmodules verwag?	3. What kind of writing is expected from you in the nursing modules?
4. Moet julle 'n akademiese argument kan voer in julle skryfwerk?	4. Do you have to have an academic argument in your writing?
5. Watter soort bronne gebruik jy vir jou opdragte?	5. What kind of sources do you use for your assignments?
6. Kan jy die skryfvaardighede wat julle in AGLA 121 geleer het, toepas in jou verpleegkundemodules?	6. Can you apply the writing skills that you learned in AGLA 121 to your nursing modules?
7. Is jou dosente ernstig oor taalgebruik wanneer julle opdragte nagesien word?	7. Are your lecturers serious about language use when your assignments are marked?
8. Watter soort inligting moet daar in julle inleidings en slotte geskryf word?	8. What kind of information should be included in your introductions and conclusions?
9. Enige ander kommentaar?	9. Any other comments?

### 6.5.8 Phase 8: Study guide analysis

In this phase, a document analysis was made with the nursing study guides (Lynch, 1996:107; Nieuwenhuis, 2007:102). The focus of the analysis was that the researcher searched for all aspects that pertained not to the content covered, but to all aspects related to academic writing that are also addressed in AGLA 121. All writing-related aspects that were not covered in AGLA 121 could be included for course redesign purposes. The study guides that were analysed included: *Introduction to community nursing* (VPGI 111) (Watson, 2009:xi-xii) and *Fundamental nursing science* (VPFB 121) (Van der Walt, 2012:xi) and *Nursing research process* (VPNN 323) (Pretorius & Coetzee, 2013).

### 6.5.9 Phase 9: Literature review and AGLA 121-workbook analysis

Lynch (1996:139) proposed that evaluations can also be conducted by analysing available programme documents. In this phase, the AGLA 121 workbook (Van der Walt *et al.*, 2011) was used to analyse, compare and contrast the content covered in the course with the literature found relating to nursing students' needs. The workbook content includes study skills, strategic reading, academic language use, critical thinking and argumentation, planning and structuring an academic text, empirical research and the research paper, and seminar skills. It is relevant to

explore as all these aspects assist (nursing) students with their general academic literacy and academic writing acquisition and development.

## **6.6 Ethical considerations**

The research adhered to normal ethical procedures as stipulated by the NWU's research ethics requirements. Ethics approval was granted by the NWU's Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-RERC). Participants were not disadvantaged in any way. Informed consent was obtained from all parties concerned before the commencement of the research to allow the lecturer as participant-observer to use the TAG test results and essays as part of research conducted for this study.

Participation was completely voluntary and the participants' right to privacy was respected and their anonymity ensured during all stages of the study. The participants were informed that the findings of the evaluation would be made available to all participants after the study had been completed.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the research approaches, designs and methodologies utilized for the empirical investigation conducted in this study were discussed. The research was conducted based on pragmatist, constructivist, interpretivist and positivist paradigms (§6.2.1). The chosen research approach and design for this study was an evaluation case study design (§6.3; §6.4). As both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used, a justification was provided for combining qualitative and quantitative methods in a mixed methods research design (§6.3.2). An in-depth description of the qualitative and quantitative methodologies used in the various phases was presented (§6.5) as well as an account of all the ethical considerations that was necessary to conduct the research (§6.6). In the next chapter, the findings of the various empirical research phases are presented.

## CHAPTER 7: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

*“Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted.”*

*Cameron (1963)*

### 7.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, the research approach, design and methodology used in this study were discussed as well as a justification for using the particular approach, design and methodology. In this chapter, an analysis and discussion on the findings of the various phases of the mixed method research are provided. Firstly, the responses from the interview with the first-year student nursing facilitator is analysed and discussed (§7.2). This is followed by examining the responses from the nursing lecturers' questionnaire answers (§7.3). The findings from the pilot study focus group interviews (§7.4) are explored and the AGLA 121 questionnaire from the main study is analysed (§7.5). Thereafter, the TAG and essay results (§7.6) as well as the focus group interviews (§7.7) from the main study are discussed. The longitudinal value of the course is explored by analysing the responses from the pilot study follow-up questionnaire (§7.8). In order to get a complete picture of what exactly is expected of first-year nursing students at the NWU Potchefstroom Campus, an analysis of the students' study guides is made (§7.9). Finally, to determine whether the NWU Potchefstroom Campus adheres to national and international writing expectations of nursing students, a comparison was made between the AGLA 121-workbook and what the literature expects (§7.10). Any shortcomings (from all the phases) were identified to be addressed in future course evaluation and redesign (cf. Chapter 8).

### 7.2 Phase 1: Interview with the first-year students' nursing facilitator

This section explores the responses from the first-year student nursing facilitator. Firstly, the research participant was asked what she knew about the AGLA 121 course. She replied that she did not exactly know what was covered in the course. All that she assumed was that they did not have to teach the nursing students any language and writing related content as it was already covered in the AGLA 121 course. The participant was then asked what type of writing was expected of their first-year students. She replied that they were expected to write a range of genres such as essays, care plans and reports. When asked if students were expected to write argumentative essays, she replied that they only wrote argumentatively during their third year. At first-year level they are expected to write more descriptively. The support offered to students is minimal as already mentioned. Students are given guidelines but written assignment

guidelines are not specifically taught. However, students are advised to use various types of recent sources. It is also recommended that students make use of paraphrasing and summarising and to cite correctly. The importance of compiling a correct source list is also highlighted (cf. §3.8.4). The nursing subject group does provide students with rubrics that are quite similar to those used in AGLA 121 (cf. Appendix F).

It seems that some lecturers from other subject groups and faculties are only vaguely aware of the AGLA 121 course, but do not always know exactly what the course entails. This could be problematic if both parties (such as nursing and AGLA) assume that students receive certain kinds of writing instruction which is not always the case.

### 7.3 Phase 2: Online questionnaire for nursing lecturers

In this section, the responses from the nursing lecturers that completed the online questionnaire are provided and discussed.

Most<sup>2</sup> of the participants stressed the importance of correct language usage in academic writing of the nursing students as well as their concern about the way their students write:

*“The superficial manner in which students use language makes me wonder if language acquisition has occurred.” / “Die oppervlakkige wyse waarop studente taal gebruik laat my wonder of taalvaslegging plaasgevind het.”*

*“When students cannot spell and they use poor language, it reflects on our profession.” / “Wanneer studente nie kan spel en hul taalgebruik swak is, weerspieël dit op ons profesie.”*

*“Nurses’ professionalism and skill are often linked to the nursing reports they write, so writing assignments have to prepare nursing students for this.” / “Verpleegkundiges se professionaliteit en vaardigheid word dikwels gekoppel aan die verpleegverslae wat hulle skryf, dus behoort skryfstukke verpleegstudente hierop voor te berei.”*

The participants also indicated that students struggle to write academically:

*“Scientific writing style is very rare.” / “Wetenskaplike skryfstyl is baie raar.”*

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<sup>2</sup> The number of participants is not mentioned in the qualitative reports. In this mixed-methods study, the term **quasi statistics** informs the way the qualitative data is presented. Quasi statistics include terms such as *some*, *usually* and *most* to make statements more precise (Maxwell, 2010:476).

One of the participants provided the following explanation of why she thought students' writing is of such poor quality:

*"It seems students are no longer taught to spell, cell phone language is used in writing work."/* / "Studente blyk nie meer geleer te word om te spel nie, selfoontaal word ook gebruik in skryfwerk."

According to the participants, the nursing students struggled mostly with spelling, sentence structure, using correct terminology, logical argumentation, critical thinking, plagiarism, referencing in text and compiling source lists. The participants also commented on the "copy and paste" (cf. §3.8) culture of the students. These identified issues were not only of first-year students, but of second-year, third-year and fourth-year students.

When asked if they used assessment rubrics to mark, the participants stated that they used rubrics to mark the students' work and stressed the importance of using these rubrics. The rubrics are used to serve as a guideline for the writing assignments as well as making students aware of the expected outcomes so that they know what will be evaluated. The criteria that were mostly used included: *a cover page, table of contents, introduction, conclusion, logical and integrated argument, referencing and source list, language aspects, technical editing, and neatness*. Most of these aspects are included in the AGLA 121 rubric (cf. Appendix E) except for the "neatness" criterium.

When asked about the different types of writing that nursing students are expected to produce, the participants identified the following genres: *descriptive essays, reflective essays, argumentative essays, action plans, care plans, portfolios, personal diaries, reports, and research proposals*. These genres coincide with those identified and discussed in the literature review (cf. §4.5). It is evident that nursing students are required to do a wide range of writing assignments. Therefore, it could be valuable to introduce them to the idea of discourse variation (cf. §2.7.3), where they know that different types of writing require different types of assessment criteria.

The participants also highlighted the importance of critical thinking (cf. §3.3.4.2.2) when writing academically:

*"Students only reproduce information and have limited critical, analytical thinking skills."/* / "Studente gee slegs inligting weer en beskik oor beperkte kritiese, analitiese denkvaardighede."

*"Students have to critically and analytically engage with information."/* / "Studente moet krities analities omgaan met inligting."

The lack of argumentation skills (cf. §3.10.1.1) of their students was underlined by the participants:

*“There is little argumentation, mere regurgitation.”* “Daar is min argumentasie, blote regurgitasie.”

These quotes regarding critical thinking and argumentation corresponds with the literature, especially from Chapter 3 (§3.3.4.1), where the knowledge-telling model of writing and the knowledge-transforming model of writing of Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987:5-6) explain that at some point in their academic writing, students need to move away from only telling or describing information, but to internalize it and become part of the knowledge-making process. Though first-year nursing students are mostly required to write descriptive texts at first (cf. §7.2), they do need exposure and practice with argumentative texts as they will eventually have to produce such texts (cf. §4.5). AGLA 121 can therefore be a starting point where students are gradually exposed to critical thinking exercises and then eventually implement it in their own writing.

The next few questions on the questionnaire pertained to the participants' knowledge and opinions of the AGLA 121 course. Not all the participants knew what the course entailed. Those who did know gave the following views of what they thought the students were being taught:

*“To get students at a general standard to take on academe.”* / “Om die studente op 'n algemene standaard te kry om die akademie aan te pak.”

*“AGLA attempts to prepare the student for academic writing.”* / “AGLA poog om die student voor te berei vir wetenskaplike skrywe.”

*“The facilitation of the overall communication skills of students, including reading, writing, learning, speaking and listening.”* / “Die fasilitering van algehele kommunikasievaardighede van studente wat lees, skryf, leer, praat en luister insluit.”

*“So that students can learn better, study better, make summaries, improve language use as well as reading speed so that greater volumes of work can be worked through with comprehension.”* / “Sodat studente beter kan leer, studeer, opsommings maak, taalgebruik, sowel as leesspoed verbeter sodat groter hoeveelheid inligting verstaanbaar deurgewerk kan word.”

What the participants stated in the above quotes actually corresponds with what is taught in AGLA 121.

When asked if they thought the nursing students needed the course, some of the participants indicated that they thought the course was valuable to the students:

*“Please! The writing of the first years needs tremendous guidance and assistance!” / “Asseblief! Die skryfwerk van die eerstejaars benodig geweldig baie leiding en hulp!”*

*“Yes, because students should be taught the basic principles of language, writing, reading and learning, because it is no longer done at school” / “Ja, want studente moet die basiese beginsels van taal, skryf, lees en leer geleer word omdat dit nie meer op skool gedoen word nie.”*

The participants were asked whether they would prefer the course to be generic or more nursing subject-specific (cf. §2.7). The responses were quite varied. One participant who supported a subject-specific course stated that if it was more subject-specific, the students would learn how important subject knowledge and terminology is. In contrast, another participant opted for a more generic approach:

*I suspect scientific writing style includes basic principles that should be communicated without limiting it to a certain discipline” / “Ek vermoed wetenskaplike skryfstyl het basiese beginsels wat deurgegee word sonder dat dit beperk hoef te word tot ’n sekere vakgebied.”*

Another participant noted that the most important issue to address was that students should be provided with proper communication skills so that they could independently search for information and use it accurately in their writing assignments.

Finally, almost all the participants stated that they would be grateful if the AGLA 121 course was not the end of the students’ exposure to language-related learning and would appreciate follow-up workshops with students from various years. It is clear from the responses that the nursing lecturers are interested not only in the content they are teaching but also in the academic writing abilities of their students.

#### **7.4 Phase 3: Pilot study focus group interviews**

In order to test the focus group questions, a pilot study was conducted. The data received in the pilot study were reported as it could be used for comparison purposes (as no control group was available) with the main study as all the variables (type of students, lecturers, content) were the same.

Regarding the first question, whether the students' high school language education prepared them to write at tertiary level, some of the participants felt that they were not adequately prepared. A participant stated that at school she had learnt how to write an introduction, body and conclusion, however, not in as much detail or as structured as she had learnt at university. One participant reported that they did not have to include a source list. Another participant agreed and also mentioned that they did not have to reference. In reply to the previous statement, one participant commented that she thought that she might have plagiarized in high school but also indicated that she did not do it anymore as the AGLA 121 course had taught her not to do it.

The second question posed to the participants was also related to their high school language experience (cf. §3.3.1). The participants were asked whether they were taught the difference between formal and informal writing styles (cf. §3.8) and whether they applied it in their writing. One participant declared that they did receive instruction, but were told by the teacher to choose more informal topics for examination purposes as they would then get better marks. Another participant agreed and commented that they were given examples and the option in the examination to write an argumentative essay but that she chose the "story one" as all the teachers told them to write it. Another participant made the observation that at university they no longer had a choice and had to know how to write in a formal style when appropriate, which was most of the time.

Thirdly, participants were asked if they thought the AGLA 121 course improved their writing skills. All the participants nodded in agreement. One participant stated that she could now write a formal text, could reference and compile a source list. Another participant indicated that she now knew what discourse markers (cf. §3.8; §7.7.3.1.3.5) were and could use them to make the text more "coherent" (note, the participant used the word "*samehangend*", which could be an indication that the participant tried to show that she could apply her newfound formal language). Furthermore, a participant stated that she received better marks in the second assignment that she handed in for one of her nursing subjects as her writing had improved due to the skills she had learnt in AGLA 121 (cf. §7.7.3.2.3).

The fourth question asked to the participants was whether they thought they could apply what they had learnt in AGLA 121 to their other subjects (cf. §7.7.3.2.1). All of the participants agreed. One participant stated that she used the skills to write a nursing assignment and felt that if it was not for AGLA 121, she surely would have done very badly. Even though speaking skills are not the focus of this study, the participants also felt that the seminar skills instructed in the AGLA course helped them a lot in a nursing subject that deals with patient care and communication.

When asked the question about what the participants enjoyed most, the participants agreed that it was the seminar skills mentioned above. The researcher did not even have to ask what the participants enjoyed the least. It seemed that the participants enjoyed the opportunity to have a platform to complain and raise their concerns about the course as they spoke quite excitedly. Varied responses were given for what they enjoyed the least. One participant expressed the opinion that she did not enjoy writing essays as it was too much work and took up a lot of time. There were some opposing utterances from other participants to this comment where some of the participants stated that they did not agree and that they did enjoy writing essays. In reply to the essay comment, one participant, quite vehemently, shouted that she did not enjoy the reading component (LEES) (cf. §7.7.2.1.3). However, after some discussion with the other participants, she reflected that her reading had improved. One participant voiced the opinion that she would like the reading programme to be in Afrikaans. Another issue raised about the reading component was that one participant felt that the reading programme must use a British English version and not an American one.

The final question about the participants' overall attitude towards the AGLA 121 course revealed interesting information about the participants' initial motivation and attitude about the course. A lot of the participants revealed that their seniors at their residences told them it was a "*schlep*" (laborious) subject and that they had to just try and pass it because they do not need "*stuff*" like that in their second year of study. However, even with the perceptions of the senior students passed on to the participants, the participants did see the value of the course. One participant raised the issue of the full schedule of nursing students (cf. §4.2) and stated that at the beginning of the year she thought the AGLA 121 course was going to be a waste of her precious time and just another thing to worry about (cf. §7.7.2.1.8). However, at the end of the course, she was glad that she had done the course. Concluding the interview, another participant concurred that the course was not a waste of time and stressed that if a student wanted to do well at university (cf. §7.7.3.2.3), the AGLA 121 course was absolutely necessary.

After the pilot study had been completed the questions were refined for the main study (§7.5). This was done so that the questions did not lead the participants to state that AGLA 121 assisted them with their academic writing. The researcher wanted to naturally determine from the participants whether AGLA 121 had an effect on their academic writing. In the following section an analysis and discussion of the findings of the main study is provided.

## 7.5 Phase 4: Main study: AGLA 121 questionnaire

In order to get as much as possible information about the main participants' literacy and academic literacy, the questionnaire was completed by the participants during the first contact session before the AGLA 121 course started. The first part of the questionnaire required the personal details of the participants. All the participants (n=24) were Afrikaans mother-tongue speakers and first-year students studying B.Cur.

The participants were asked to provide their Grade 12 results for Afrikaans. Table 7.1 provides the distribution of their results. The participants seemed to have done well.

**Table 7.1 Distribution of participants' Grade 12 Home Language results**

> 90	1
81-90	6
71-80	13
61-70	4
51-60	
41-50	
< 40	

As the TAG / TALL is the first experience associated with AGLA 121 that students have at the NWU (cf. §5.2), the participants were asked about their TAG experience.

The participants were asked to indicate what level they had received for the TAG. The participants' results are provided in Table 7.2.

**Table 7.2 Distribution of TAG results**

<b>Level 1</b>	
<b>Level 2</b>	
<b>Level 3</b>	
<b>Level 4</b>	24
<b>Level 5</b>	

All of the participants received a Level 4. However, their results were mostly not very high for the first TAG (cf. §7.6.1) as a Level 4 does not necessarily indicate that they did very well in the test.

The participants were also asked how they had experienced the TAG and their rating of the difficulty level of the TAG is provided in Table 7.3.

**Table 7.3 Difficulty of the TAG**

Very easy / Baie maklik	0
Easy / Maklik	5
Difficult / Moeilik	16
Very difficult / Baie moeilik	3

Most (n=16) of the participants found the TAG difficult. This could perhaps be due to the fact that they were not adequately prepared for the test as is evident from the question where they were asked whether they had known what to expect in the test. Most of the participants indicated that they had not known what to expect from the test.

**Table 7.4 Knowledge about the content of the TAG**

<b>Yes / Ja</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>No / Nee</b>	<b>21</b>

In Table 7.5 the participants' opinions are given on whether they thought their high school education had prepared them to be able to do well in the test. Interestingly, some (n=13) of the students indicated that they were sufficiently educated in high school to be prepared for the test. However, the results clearly indicate that clearly they were not adequately prepared.

**Table 7.5 The role of high school in preparing for the TAG**

<b>Yes / Ja</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>No / Nee</b>	<b>11</b>

Table 7.6 gives an indication of how the students initially felt (cf. §3.3.6) about the course.

**Table 7.6 General attitude towards AGLA 121**

<b>Neutral / Neutraal</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Positive / Positief</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Negative / Negatief</b>	<b>1</b>

Many (n=14) participants chose the *neutral* option as most of their replies indicated that they had had no idea what to expect from the course and what they would be learning. Many of the participants stated that they thought it might help them but mentioned the concern that it would be extremely time-consuming (cf. §7.7.2.1.8).

*“I don’t yet know if it will help me in future.” / “Ek weet nog nie of dit my gaan help in die toekoms nie.”*

*“I’d be happy if the subject can help me, but it takes a lot of time.” / “Ek sal bly wees as die vak my kan help, maar dit vat baie tyd.”*

*“I don’t know what to expect!” / “Ek weet nie wat om te verwag nie!”*

Quite a few (n=9) of the participants were *positive* about the course. Some of the reasons were:

*“I believe that it will help me with my studies very much.” / “Ek glo dat dit my baie sal help met my studies.”*

*“Because it will help me in future.” / “Want dit gaan my in my toekoms help.”*

*“I heard that it helps a lot and improves skills like reading and writing.” / “Ek het gehoor dit help baie en verbeter jou vaardighede soos lees en skryf.”*

*“I look forward to improving my language skills.” / “Ek sien daarna uit om my taalvaardighede te verbeter.”*

Only one participant felt *negative* about the course and explained her response:

*“It feels like a burden subject that just requires more of my time.” / “Dit voel soos ’n las vak wat net nog meer tyd vereis”.*

The overall attitude of the participants seems positive. However, their true attitude could only be determined after the course was completed (cf. §7.7.2.1; §7.7.2.2).

As the main focus of this study is on academic writing, the participants were asked whether their high school education had prepared them adequately to write effectively at university (Table 7.7).

**Table 7.7 High school writing as preparation for writing at university**

<b>Ja / Yes</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Nee / No</b>	<b>12</b>

The participants felt equally prepared and underprepared for their writing requirements at university. This could be due to the unequal schooling mentioned in Chapter 1 (cf. §1.2) and Chapter 3 (§3.3.1).

The participants were asked whether they thought they were good writers.

**Table 7.8 Being a good writer**

<b>Ja / Yes</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Nee / No</b>	<b>16</b>

In Table 7.8, sixteen of the twenty-four participants stated that they did not view themselves as good writers. The participants indicated that they were unsure about their writing abilities at university level. Some participants also expressed the concern that they wrote differently in high school and strongly felt that their high school education did not adequately prepare them for tertiary writing.

## **7.6 Phase 5: Main study: TAG and essays**

This phase of the study involves a comparison of an academic literacy test (TAG), hereafter known as the pre-test, conducted prior to students' starting with the academic literacy course as well as an equivalent post-test (the TAG was also used in this regard) as a test conducted at the end of the semester. Furthermore, essay marks of essays written at the beginning of the semester and written after some instruction are compared in terms of set assessment criteria by two separate raters. Moreover, this phase involves an overview of the participants' reading scores, and computer literacy scores. In addition, the pre- and post-essays were also explored in terms of spelling errors, the Flesch Reading Ease as well as the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Levels. Finally, a text analysis was done in terms of personal pronoun usage, discourse marker usage as well as the Turnitin similarity index. These variables were investigated to determine the difference between the pre- and post-essays and whether the course intervention had an effect on the nursing students' academic writing. Finally, a document analysis was conducted to provide examples from the participants' before-and-after essays.

Paired t-tests were used to compare the pre-test and post-test for all data. For the purpose of this comparison equivalent tests (TAG) were used. The tests were reliable as they respectively had Cronbach alpha coefficients of 0.78 and 0.88 (Van der Walt & Steyn, 2014:112). Though the widely-accepted criterion is 0.80 (Weir, 2005:29), the reliability of the first test was only slightly lower and therefore still used.

In the test, alpha ( $\alpha$ ) is set at 0.05 and consequently any p-value that is less than the alpha value denotes a statistically significant difference between variables compared. The t-test or Student's t-test was used to test the difference between the pre-test and post-test results (cf. Kothari, 2004:160; Pietersen & Maree, 2011:225, 228). Elliott and Woodward (2007:9) make the following observation with regard to the p-value: "The p-value is the probability of obtaining results as extreme or more extreme than the ones observed given that the null hypothesis is true. Thus, the smaller the p-value, the more evidence you have to reject the null hypothesis". Here the assumption is that the null hypothesis states that there is no difference between the means. In addition, Cohen's d value was calculated in order to determine the effect size when comparing pre- and post-tests. In terms of Cohen's d, a value of higher than 0.8 is considered practically significant (cf. Cohen, 1988).

The statistical analysis was done by using SPSS statistical software and in consultation with the NWU's Statistical Consultation Services.

### 7.6.1 Intervention results of the standardized TAG

The TAG (cf. §5.2) was conducted prior to the start of the module and a similar test was used in the middle of the semester. These two tests were compared in order to determine the extent of the improvement in terms of general academic literacy.

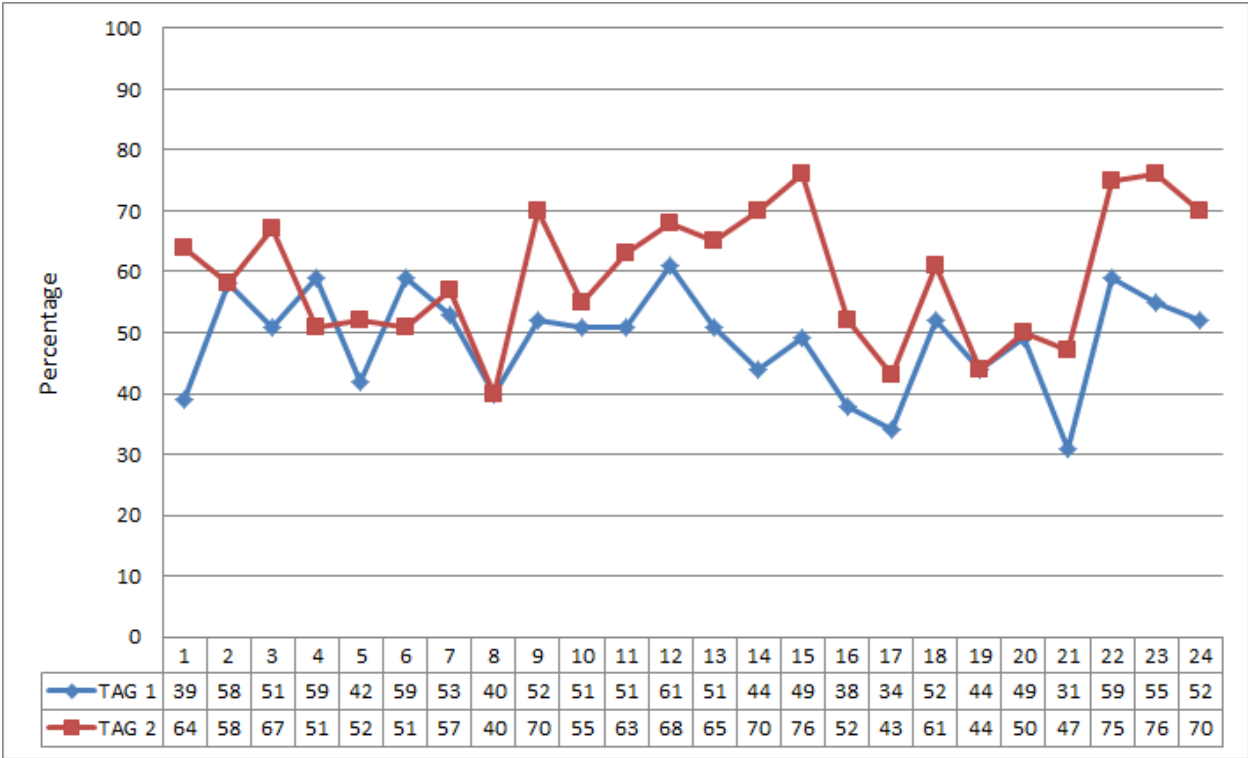
The result of the TAG tests comparison was as follows:

**Table 7.9 Comparison of TAG tests**

Data	t-value	Degrees of freedom	p-value	Effect size
TAG 1 TAG 2	-5.157	23	<0.001	1.27

In this t-test it is evident that  $p < 0.05$  and this result can be considered as statistically significant. Furthermore, when calculating the effect size, expressed as Cohen's d value, a value of 1.27 is higher than 0.8 and this result is therefore also practically significant.

The raw results of the first and second tests are as follows (for the sake of comparison the numbering of participants is consistent throughout the study):

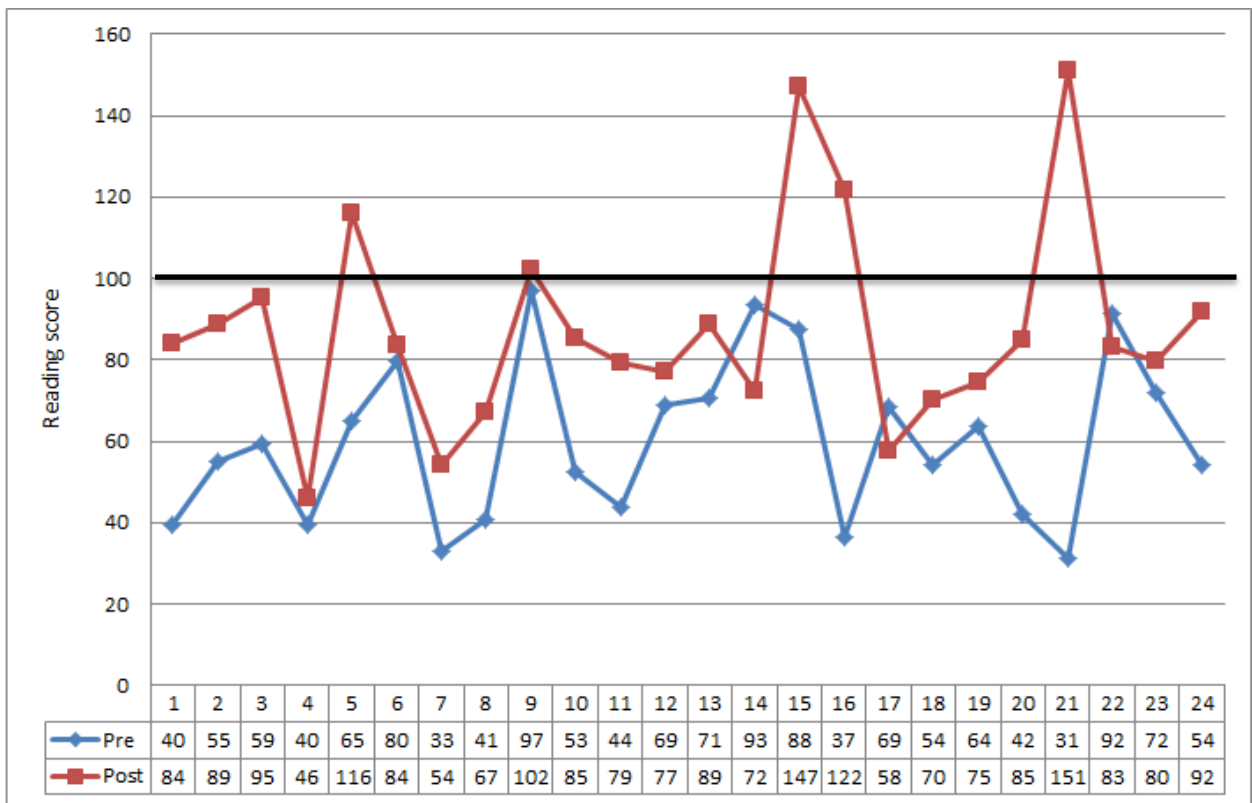


**Figure 7.1 Comparison of TAG tests**

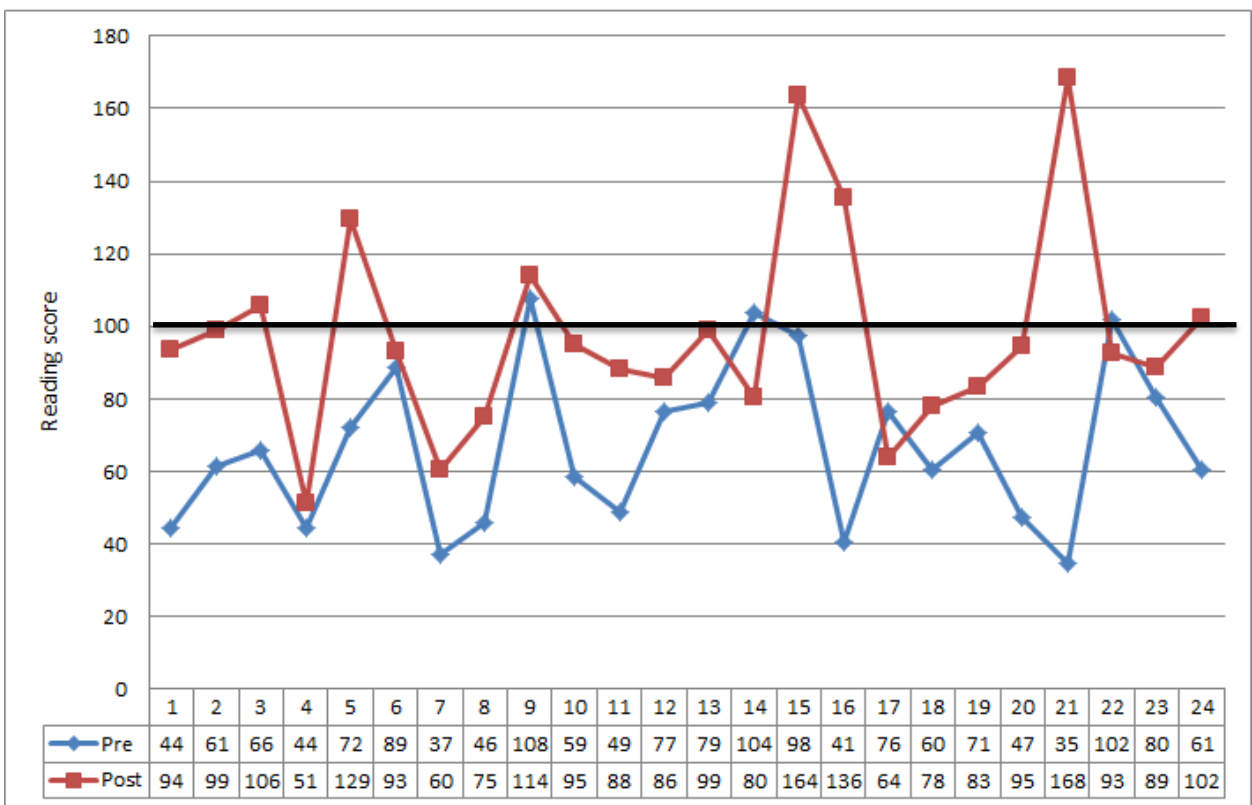
In addition to the test comparison, the reading scores (cf. §3.3.2; §4.6; §5.5) of the participants were also considered. Reading was done prior to and after the intervention.

**7.6.2 Reading**

From the reading scores, based on both international (cf. Figure 7.2) and NWU (cf. Figure 7.3) standards (cf. §5.5), it is clear that the majority of participants are ranked below the standard of 100. The reading scores are calculated based on a word per minute score of 280 and comprehension at 70% for the international standard and a word per minute score of 220 and comprehension at 80% for the NWU (Nel, 2013).



**Figure 7.2 Pre- and post-reading scores compared based on international standards (280 words per minute; 70% comprehension)**



**Figure 7.3 Pre- and post-reading scores compared based on NWU standards (220 words per minute; 80% comprehension)**

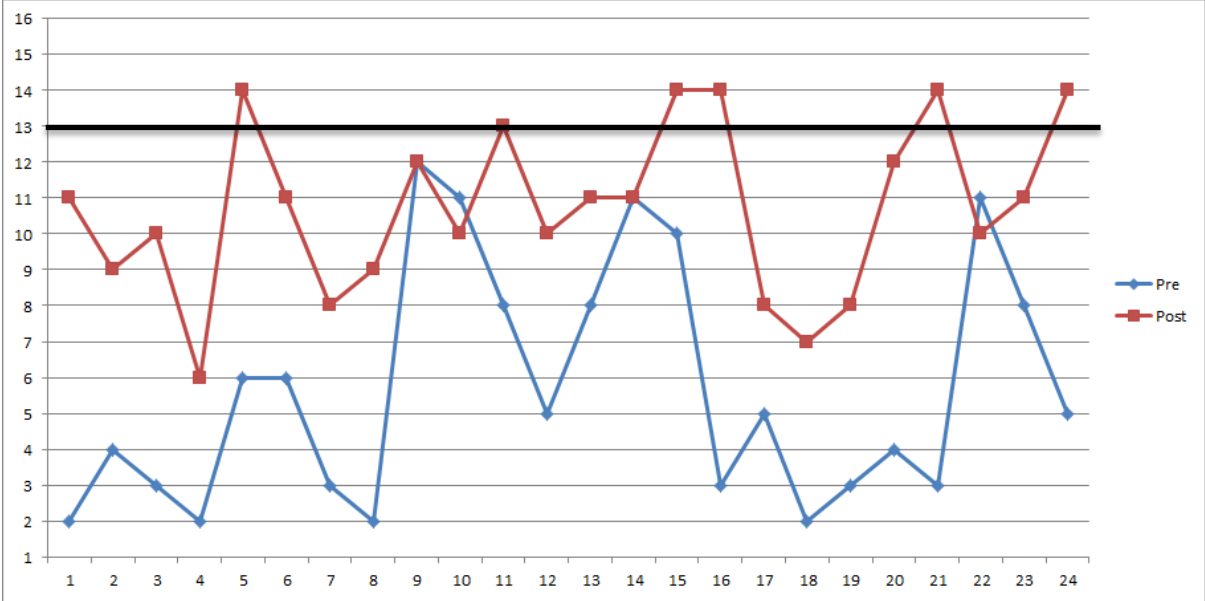
When the reading scores were compared by means of a *t*-test the following results were found:

**Table 7.10 Comparison of tests**

Data	t-value	Degrees of Freedom	p-value	Effect size
Pre-/post International standards	-4.338	23	<0.001	1.39
Pre-/post NWU standards	-4.337	23	<0.001	1.39

In this test it is clear that  $p < 0.05$  for both standards and this result can be considered as statistically significant. Furthermore, when calculating effect size, expressed by Cohen’s *d* value, a value of 1.39 was obtained and this is higher than 0.8 and the result is therefore also practically significant.

Using the Taylor National Norms (cf. §5.5), grade levels were assigned to the reading speeds of the participants. The first twelve numbers on the y-axis refer to grade 1 to 12 at school level, followed by 13 to 16 for first-year up to fourth-year level.



**Figure 7.4 Pre- and post-reading grades according to the Taylor National Norms**

From Figure 7.4 it is evident that most of the participants improved in terms of their reading. However, only a few reached the required level (indicated in the figure by means of a line at level 13) that a first-year student should attain (cf. §5.5). Therefore, more practice would be advised.

Another aspect also considered in the empirical study was computer literacy scores of participants as derived from assessment in the RINL121 component.

### 7.6.3 Computer literacy scores (RINL121 module)

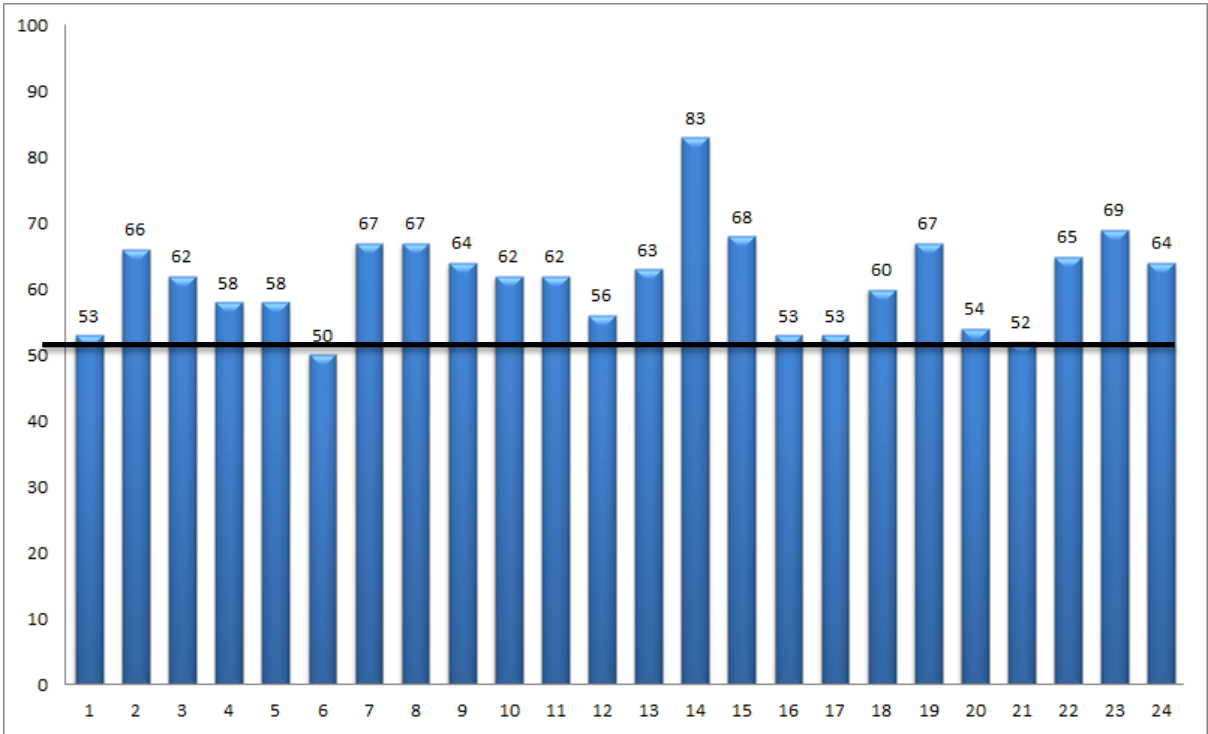


Figure 7.5 Computer literacy scores as a percentage

The mean for the sample (n=24) was 61.5%, while the mean for the whole semester group (N=1582) was 52%, represented by the black line in the graph above. Generally the participants performed above the mean, however, there are still individuals who may require further support due to their low computer literacy scores.

Of specific importance to this study was the nature of writing and hence the assessment of pre- and post-essays of the academic literacy intervention was compared.

#### 7.6.4 Analysis of pre- and post-essays

Two essays were completed by the participants in this research. The first essay was completed at the start of the module and the second after the intervention. In this section the following aspects are discussed: the reliability of the assessment instrument, inter-rater reliability as well as a comparison between the scores of the two essays. Finally, the essays are also compared in terms of spelling errors, Flesch Reading Ease scores and Flesch-Kincaid grade levels.

To determine the reliability of the assessment instrument, Cronbach's Alpha was determined with the scores obtained by rater A. In order to be able to interpret the Cronbach's Alpha value the guideline of lower limit of 0.7 and 0.6 for exploratory research is used (Hair *et al.*, 2014:123). With  $\alpha$  at **0.747** for the pre-test and  $\alpha$  at **0.845** for the post-test, this assessment can be considered as being reliable as it has good internal consistency.

In order to determine the inter-rater reliability of the inter-rater assessment of the essays the Pearson Correlation is calculated while also using the Fisher Z transformation, as suggested by Lynch (2003:86-87). From the Pearson Correlation strong relationships between the values of both raters in the pre- and post-essays were observed with Pearson's  $r$  close to 1. In the pre-essay Pearson's  $r$  was 0.942 and with the post-essay it was 0.960 (cf. Table 7.11 and Table 7.12). In both instances the correlations were statistically significant with the  $p$  values of less than 0.05 – in this case 0.001 for both sets of essays.

**Table 7.11 Pearson Correlation as measure of inter-rater reliability: pre-essay**

		Rater A Pre Total	Rater B Pre Total
Rater A	Pearson Correlation	1	.942**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Pre Total	N	24	24
Rater B	Pearson Correlation	.942**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
Pre Total	N	24	24
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

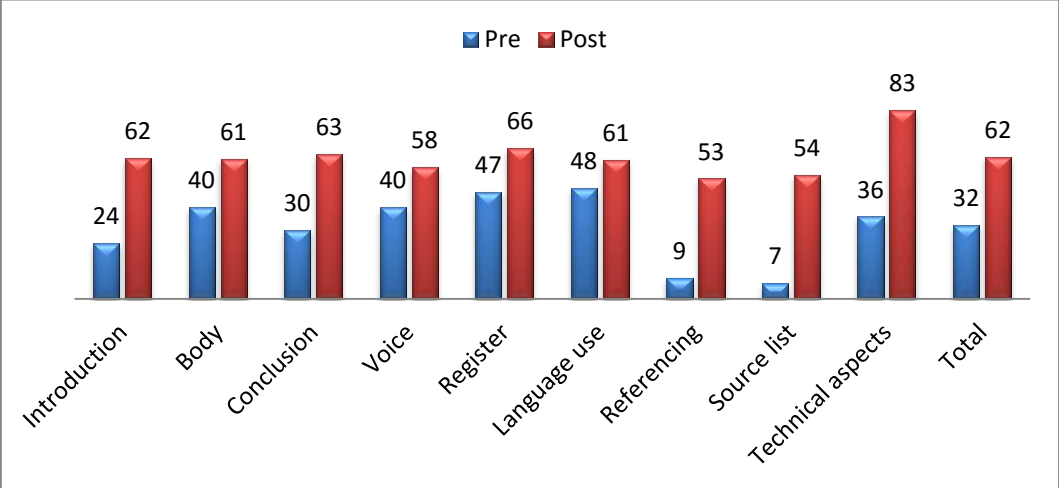
**Table 7.12 Pearson Correlation as measure of inter-rater reliability: post-essay**

		Rater A Post Total	Rater B Post Total
Rater A	Pearson Correlation	1	.960**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Post Total	N	24	24
Rater B	Pearson Correlation	.960**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
Post Total	N	24	24
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

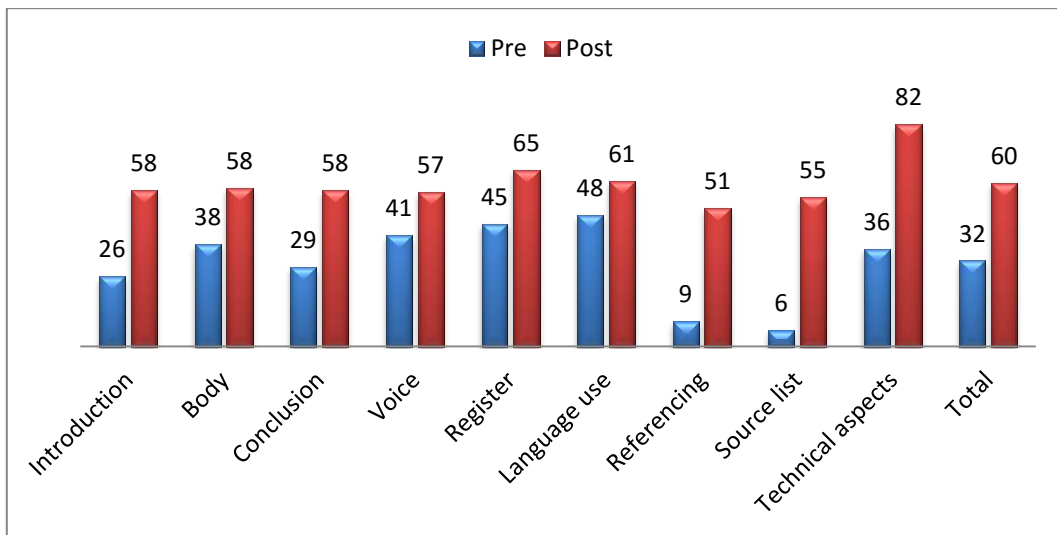
Lynch (2003:86) suggests the use of the Fisher Z transformation. The formula for the Z transformation is as follows:  $R_{tt} = n r_{AB} / 1 + (n-1) r_{AB}$

If the values of the tables above are used in this formula (cf. Lynch, 2003:87) and are transformed back to the Pearson scale the pre-essay results in a  $R_{tt}$  value of 0.847. This means that 84.7% of the variability of the observed test-score could be attributed to the true-score variability. The post-essays scores resulted in an  $R_{tt}$  value of 0.867 or 86.7% of the variability in this case. Hence, this supported the positive relationship between the sets of inter-rater scores and therefore these scores can be used for the purposes of this study.

If the means of ratings per assessment criterium are compared by rater the improvement between the pre- and post-essays are clearly visible. Both rater A (cf. Figure 7.6) and rater B (cf. Figure 7.7) noted quite dramatic improvements in the *Referencing*, *Source list* and *Technical aspects* criteria.

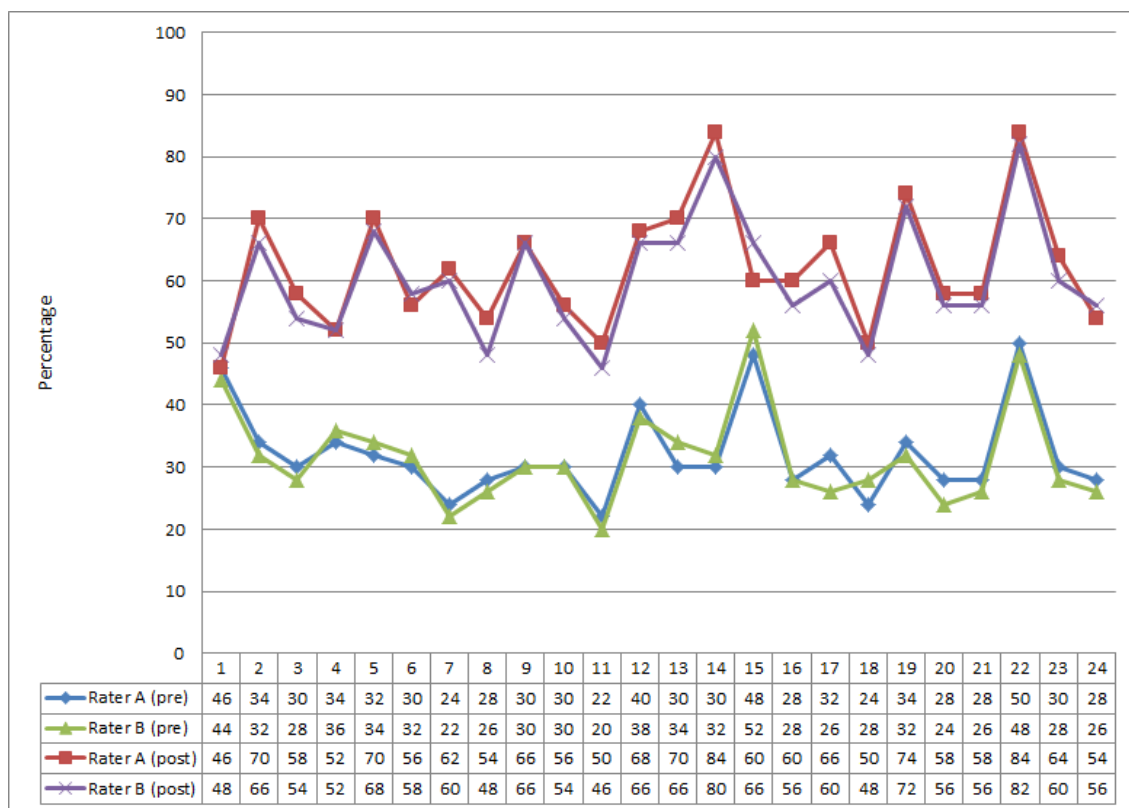


**Figure 7.6 Means for rater A per assessment criteria**



**Figure 7.7 Means for rater B per assessment criteria**

The results of the pre- and post-essay assessments were also compared by means of *t*-tests in order to determine if any statistically significant improvements were achieved (cf. Table 7.13). Firstly, however, the total values for both pre- and post-essays per rater are summarised in a graph (cf. Figure 7.8) for comparison purposes.



**Figure 7.8 Comparison of the pre- and post-essay assessments**

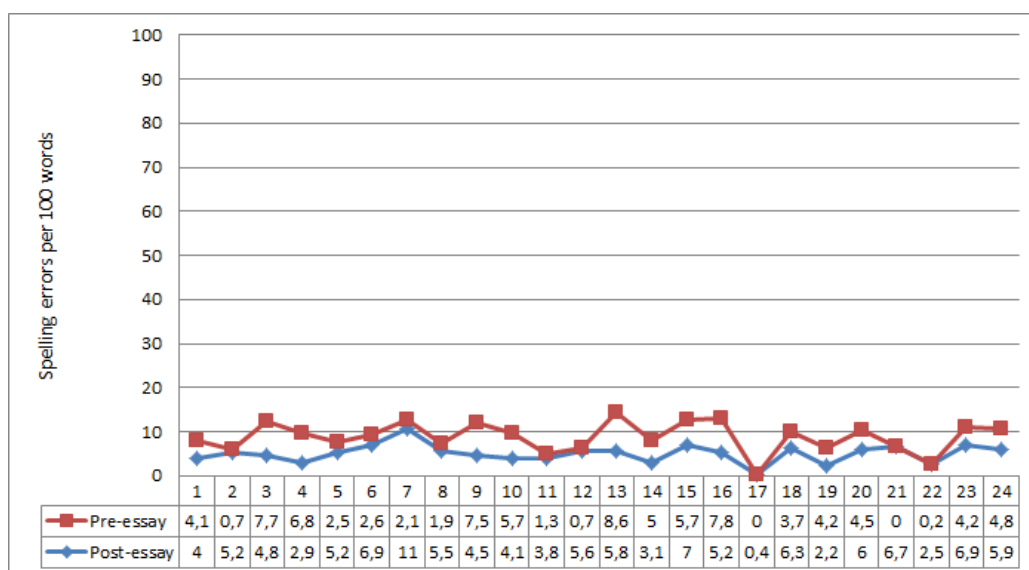
Apart from the clear visual difference between the pre- and post-essays in terms of the separate assessment criteria the t-tests also indicate a clear difference as shown below.

**Table 7.13 Comparison of the pre- and post-essay assessments: t-tests**

Data	t-value	Degrees of freedom	p-value	Effect size	t-value	Degrees of freedom	p-value	Effect size
	RATER A				RATER B			
Introduction	-11.519	23	<0.001	3.19	-8.353	23	<0.001	2.54
Body	-9.332	23	<0.001	2.17	-9.630	23	<0.001	1.81
Conclusion	-9.405	23	<0.001	2.83	-6.818	23	<0.001	1.96
Voice	-5.376	23	<0.001	2.97	-9.349	23	<0.001	2.21
Register	-7.523	23	<0.001	1.7	-7.430	23	<0.001	2.26
Language use	-4.733	23	<0.001	0.81	-4.307	23	<0.001	0.87
Referencing	-9.399	23	<0.001	2.78	-8.961	23	<0.001	2.67
Source list	-8.864	23	<0.001	2.74	-8.917	23	<0.001	3.28
Technical aspects	-4.609	23	<0.001	1.18	-8.857	23	<0.001	2.94
<b>Total</b>	<b>-14.131</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	<b>4.17</b>	<b>-15.286</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>&lt;0.001</b>	<b>3.7</b>

In the comparison of all the assessment criteria for both raters (cf. Table 7.13) it was found that  $p < 0.001$  and therefore less than the required p value of 0.05 in all instances and this result can be considered as statistically significant. Furthermore, when calculating the effect size, expressed as Cohen's d value, all values are higher than 0.8 and the results are therefore also practically significant (Cohen, 1988).

In addition to the assessment by the two raters the number of spelling mistakes for the pre- and post-essays was also compared. The number of spelling errors is normalised to the number of mistakes per 100 words. Spelling is included in this analysis as all the rubrics allocate marks for spelling. Furthermore, the nursing lecturers indicated that the nursing students' spelling was not adequate (cf. §7.3).



**Figure 7.9 Comparison of pre- and post-essays regarding spelling errors**

The number of spelling errors is clearly higher in frequency in the pre-essay than the post-essay (cf. Figure 7.9). The pre-essay mean was five spelling errors per 100 words while with the post-essay the mean was four spelling errors per 100 words. In order to explore this phenomenon further a t-test was conducted to determine any statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-essays.

**Table 7.14 Comparison of pre- and post-essays regarding spelling errors: t-test**

Data	t-value	Degrees of freedom	p-value	Effect size
Pre-essay	1.769	23	.090	-0.58
Post-essay				

In terms of spelling errors, the comparison of the pre- and post-essays was not significant. With  $p > 0.05$  this result cannot be considered as statistically significant. Furthermore, when calculating Cohen's d value a value of -0.58 was calculated which is less than 0.8 and therefore this result is also not practically significant. However, it is important to note that spelling is not the focus of the AGLA 121 course and apart from making the participants aware of tools such as spelling checkers in word-processing software and instilling attentiveness to language in writing no other spelling-related interventions were done.

The readability (cf. §3.8) of the pre- and post-essays was also analysed in terms of the *Flesch Reading Ease formula* (cf. Flesch, 1948) and the *Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level* (Kincaid *et al.*, 1975). Though The Flesch Reading Ease formula and Flesch-Kincaid Grade level are usually used with English texts, they have also been used in other studies to determine the readability level of Afrikaans texts (cf. Vos *et al.*, 2014). An online readability calculator<sup>3</sup> was used to determine the two values. Through these instruments the difficulty of texts could be determined in terms of word and sentence lengths.

The Flesch Reading Ease formula gives a value between 0 and 100 indicating the following value on a readability scale (cf. Scott, 2013):

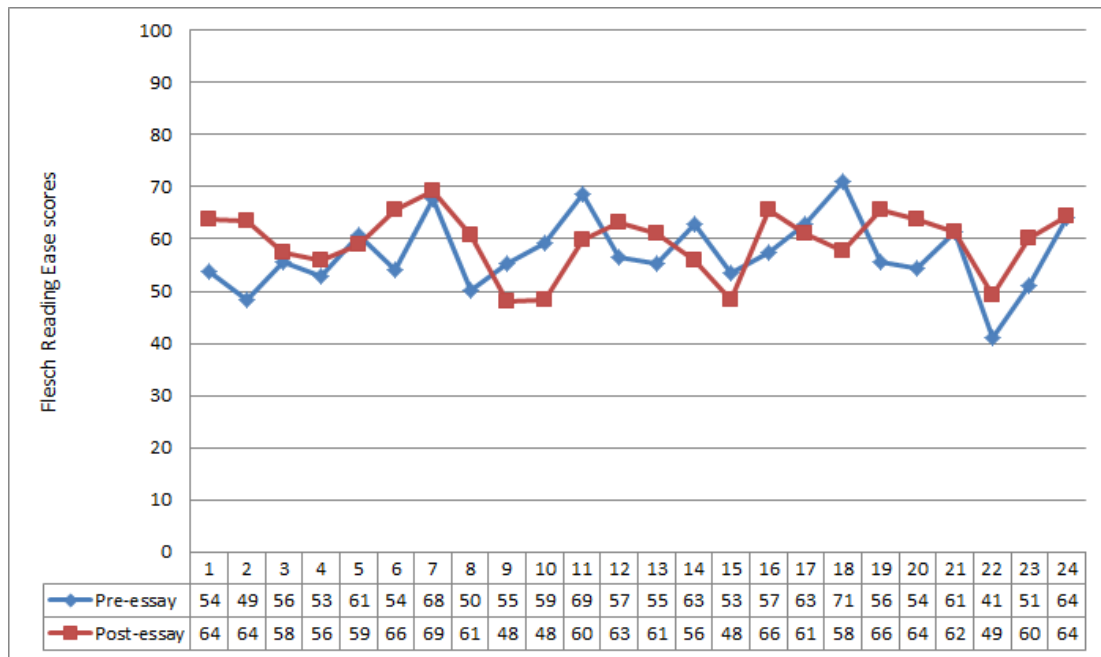
**Table 7.15 Flesch Reading Ease values**

Flesch Reading Ease value	Description
90-100	Very easy
80-89	Easy
70-79	Fairly easy

<sup>3</sup> The website Readability Formulas (<http://www.readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php>), maintained by Brian Scott, was used for this analysis.

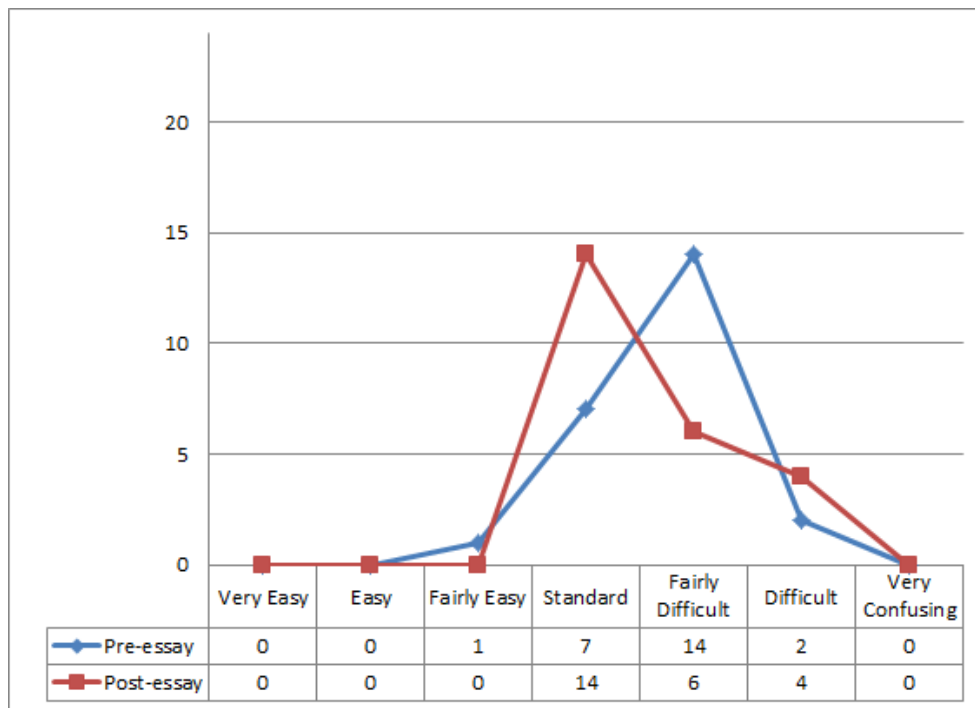
60-69	Standard
50-59	Fairly difficult
30-49	Difficult
0-29	Very confusing

The pre- and post-essay Flesch Reading Ease values gathered from the pre- and post-essays in this study are as follows:



**Figure 7.10 Comparison of pre- and post-essays in terms of Flesch Reading Ease scores**

When these values are placed in the Reading Ease categories a clear shift from “Fairly difficult” to “Standard” is visible in the group. In addition the average score moves from 57 to 60. This result could be due to the fact that after the intervention students started to write in a clearer manner.



**Figure 7.11 Pre- and post-essays Flesch Reading Ease categories**

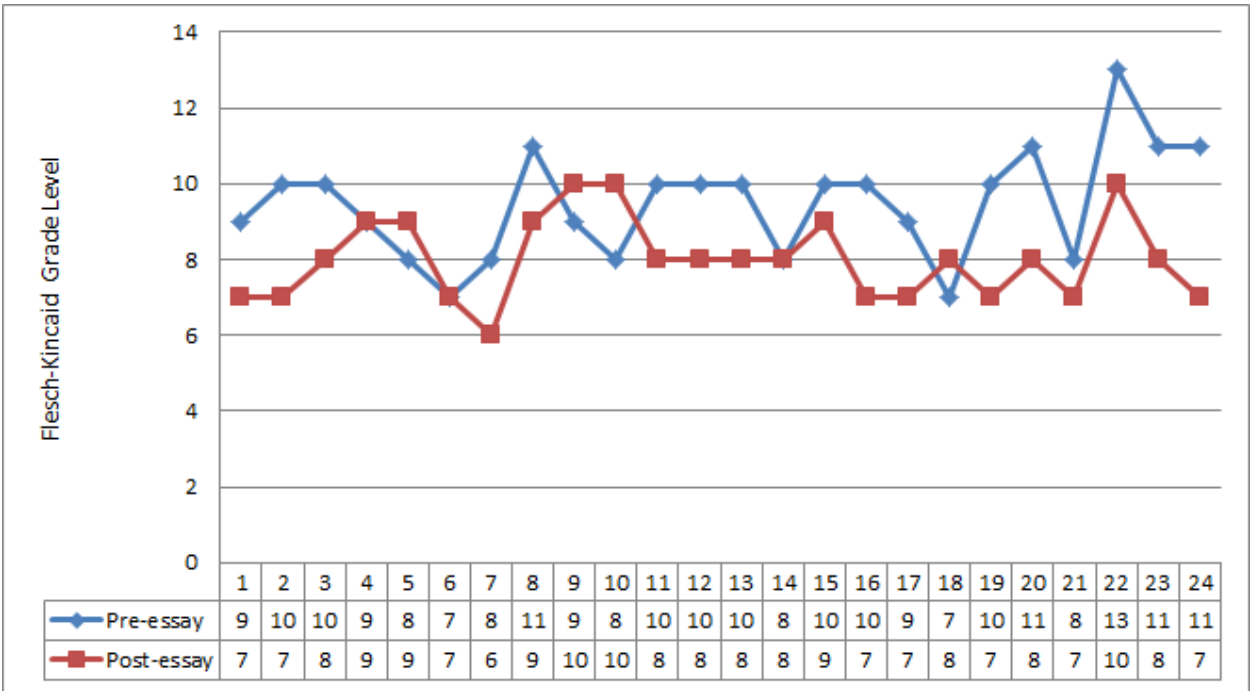
However, the values were also compared by means of a *t*-test and here no statistically significant change was evident.

**Table 7.16 Comparison of pre- and post-essays in terms of Flesch Reading Ease scores: *t*-test**

Data	t-value	Degrees of freedom	p-value	Effect size
Pre-essay Post-essay	-1.427	23	.167	0.34

With  $p > 0.05$  this result cannot be considered as statistically significant. Furthermore, when calculating the effect size, expressed by Cohen's *d* value, a value of 0.34 was calculated which is less than 0.8 and therefore this result is also not practically significant.

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level presents a grade from 1 to 12 which corresponds to a relevant school grade level<sup>4</sup> and any number above 12 are still regarded as grade 12 level. The distribution of grade levels for the pre- and post-essay are as follows:



**Figure 7.12 Comparison of pre- and post-essays in terms of the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level**

The pre-essay average for the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level was Grade 9 while the post-essay average was Grade 8. This decrease can be attributed to shorter sentence lengths and fewer syllables per word. This change can possibly be ascribed to strategies such as nominalisation being taught in class. The values were also compared by means of a *t*-test.

**Table 7.17 Comparison of pre- and post-essays in terms of the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: *t*-test**

Data	t-value	Degrees of freedom	p-value	Effect size
Pre-essay Post-essay	4.425	23	<0.001	-1.01

<sup>4</sup> The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level grade level was developed for the context of the USA, but in terms of the age of students this comparison can be used within the South African context; however, since this test is not the focus of this investigation the localisation of this test is not further explored.

In this instance  $p < 0.05$  and this result can be considered as statistically significant. Furthermore, when calculating the effect size, expressed as Cohen's  $d$  value, a value of 1.01 (the minus only indicates the direction of the effect) is higher than 0.8 and this result is therefore also practically significant.

The comparison of the pre- and post-essays shows statistically significant differences in terms of the set assessment criteria as assessed by the two raters as well as the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Levels. However, despite slight improvements, no statistically significant differences were determined in terms of spelling errors and the Flesch Reading Ease values. In the next section a corpus analysis of the pre- and post-essays is reported.

### 7.6.5 Text analysis

The pre- and post-essays were also compared with regard to the use of personal pronouns (cf. §3.8) and discourse markers (cf. §3.8). In this regard the Afrikaans personal pronouns and a list of discourse markers as identified by Carstens (1997:275-298) were used. For the sake of comparison, these values were normalised to a number per 100 words.

Figure 7.13 shows the number of personal pronouns per 100 words for both the pre- and post-essays:

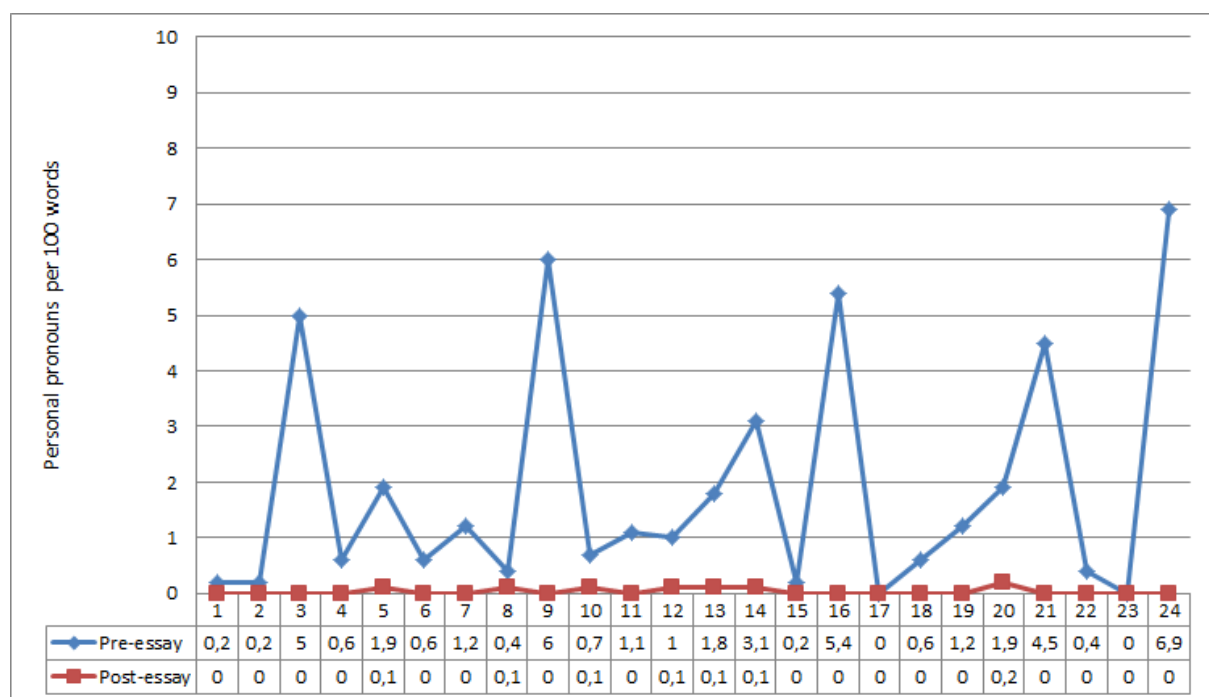


Figure 7.13 Comparison of pre- and post-essays in terms of personal pronouns

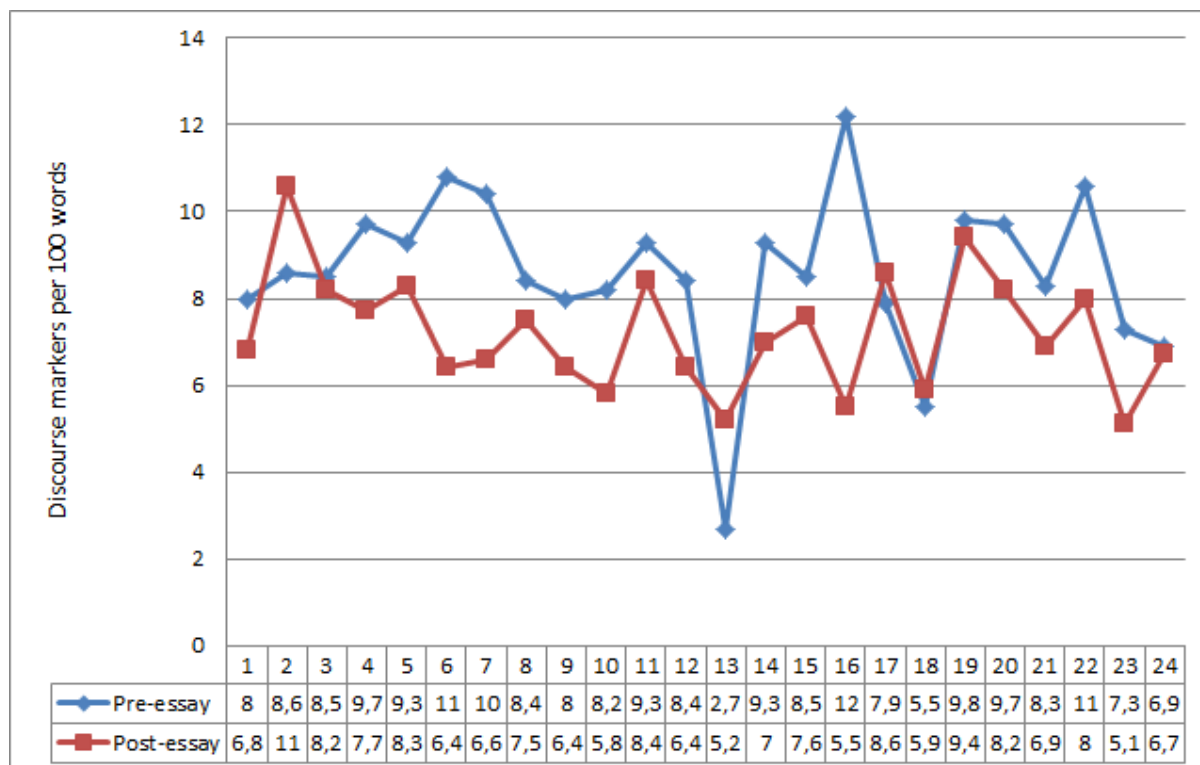
As the use of personal pronouns was one of assessment criteria and one of the outcomes of the course, a clear decline in use is visible from Table 7.18. The use fell from an average of 1.87 to only 0.03 per 100 words.

**Table 7.18 Comparison of pre- and post-essays in terms of personal pronouns: t-test**

Data	t-value	Degrees of freedom	p-value	Effect size
Pre-essay Post-essay	4.281	23	<0.001	-0.88

In terms of personal pronoun usage  $p < 0.05$  and therefore this result can be considered as statistically significant. When calculating the effect size, expressed by Cohen's d value, a value of 0.88 (the minus only indicates the direction of the effect) is higher than 0.8 and this result is therefore also practically significant.

However, little improvement was noticeable with regard to the usage of discourse markers. Figure 7.14 shows the number of correctly used discourse markers per 100 words for both the pre- and post-essays:



**Figure 7.14 Comparison of pre- and post-essays in terms of discourse markers**

Here, unfortunately, the average usage fell from 8.60 to 7.22 per 100 words. However, the *t*-test indicated that this is not a practically significant difference as is indicated in Table 7.19 below.

**Table 7.19 Comparison of pre- and post-essays in terms of discourse markers: t-test**

Data	t-value	Degrees of freedom	p-value	Effect size
Pre-essay Post-essay	3.484	23	.002	-0.74

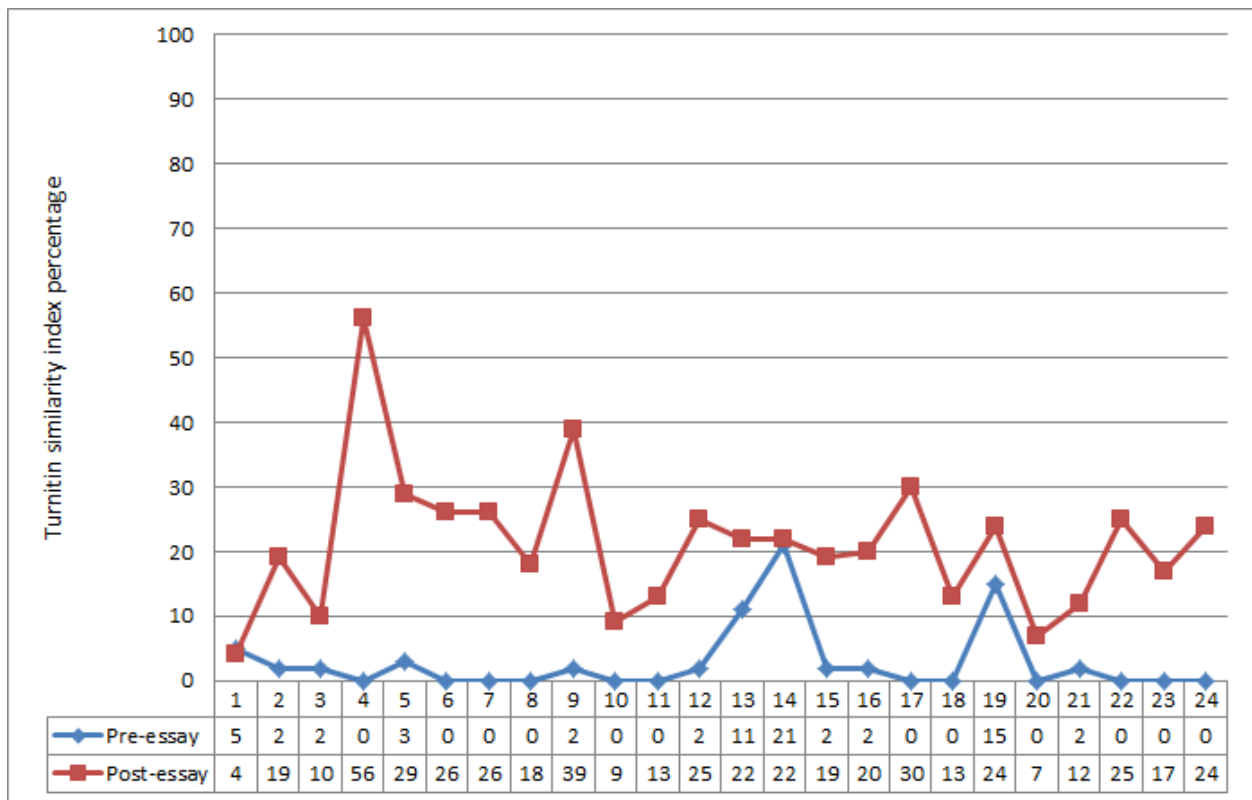
In terms of discourse markers  $p < 0.05$ , which is statistically significant. However, when calculating Cohen's *d* value a value of 0.74 (the minus only indicates the direction of the effect) was calculated which is less than 0.8 and therefore this result is also not practically significant. This result could indicate that the students did not have adequate or enough exposure and practice with discourse markers.

#### 7.6.6 Usage of sources: Turnitin originality check

Finally, the Turnitin originality check<sup>5</sup> was used in order to determine similarity between the individual essays and existing texts in the Turnitin database. This tool was used to gauge plagiarism (cf. §3.8) and for this study this tool proved to be useful in determining the extent of the use of other sources. In this regard, the following graph (Figure 7.15) shows the percentage of each essay corresponding to other texts already included in the Turnitin database (this covers, for example, printed and electronic sources as well as students' work submitted to Turnitin).

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<sup>5</sup> As available from: <http://turnitin.com/> and used in the NWU's learning management system.



**Figure 7.15 Comparison of pre- and post-essays in terms of the Turnitin similarity index**

Here the average percentage of the similarity index increased from 3% in pre-essays to 21% in post-essays. It is evident that participants have drastically increased using the amount of content from sources. This finding does not imply plagiarism, but rather the fact that the number of sources and quotations have increased in the participants' essays.

### 7.6.7 Document analysis of essays

In this section, the focus is on the participants' (n=24) academic writing progress (if any). This was done by analysing some examples collected from the essays that were written before and after the AGLA 121 intervention. Through this analysis and discussion, the "what worked" and the "what did not work" pragmatic evaluation questions (cf. §6.2.1) were addressed. The analysis was done by looking at the individual criteria identified for the assessment rubric used in this study (cf. Appendix E). The examples are given verbatim (words with spelling and grammar mistakes in the original text are highlighted in bold) in order to provide the reader with an overview of the participants' academic writing abilities.

### 7.6.7.1 Introduction

In the introduction sections of the first essay, many of the participants immediately expressed personal opinions. Furthermore, several of the participants started the essay by highlighting their role as nurses / nursing students:

*“As nurses we have a responsibility towards our fellow men to act responsibly, ethically and professionally. If you go and drink in your uniform then you will lose the trust of the community.” / “As verpleegsters het ons ’n verantwoordelikheid teenoor ons medemense om verantwoordelik, eties en professioneel op te tree. As jy in jou **univorm** gaan drink gaan jy die gemeenskap se vertroue verloor.”*

*“As a nurse practitioner you have a responsibility towards your patient, their next of kin, the staff you work with and towards yourself.” / “Jy as verpleegkundige **het het** ’n **verantwoordlikheid** teenoor jou **pasient**, hul naasbestaandes, die personeel wat saam met jou werk en ook teenoor jouself.”*

Many participants used popular and colloquial quotes to begin their essays:

*“My grandmother always said anything with ‘too’ in front of it, except in the sense of ‘on foot’ or ‘by horse’ is not good for you.” / “My ouma het altyd **gese** alles wat ’n ‘te’ vooraan het, behalwe te voet en te perd is nie goed vir jou nie.”*

*“May nursing students use alcohol? It is probably one of the questions that have been asked many times.” / “Mag verpleegkundestudente alkohol gebruik? Dis seker een van die vrae wat al verskeie kere oor ’n paar mense se lippe gerol het.”*

In the second attempt, most participants were able to advance problem statements and formulate theses. Background material was presented to contextualise the topic. It seemed that the introductions became quite formulaic. However, the introductions seemed more organised and adhered to the requirements of AGLA 121 and correlated with the nursing literature (cf. Table 4.3).

### 7.6.7.2 Body

Regarding the body, initially almost all the participants wrote one long essay without any paragraphs. Many of the participants did not signpost their work and almost no linking devices were used. Random ideas were thrown together and most of the participants did not present organised, logical arguments. Many of the participants also did not define important terms.

Many of the participants tended to make generalisations. One such an example is:

*“Everyone knows that is really bad for you to smoke.” / “Almal weet dit is ongelooflik sleg vir jou om te rook.”*

In the first essay, organizational skills seemed lacking. In the second essay, some of the participants used more linking devices to connect paragraphs and ideas:

*“From the discussion above ...” / “Uit die bostaande bespreking ...”*

*“To resume, as discussed under the previous heading ...” / “Om te **ervat**, soos bespreek uit die vorige punt ...”*

Many of the participants gave a one-sided argument in the first essay. In the second essay, many of the participants posed counter arguments:

*“Furthermore, the advantages and disadvantages of smoking will be viewed from different sources.” / “Vervolgens gaan daar gekyk word na die voordele sowel as die nadele van rook uit verskeie bronne.”*

*“According to me there is a positive and negative side to each question.” / “Volgens my is daar ’n positiewe en negatiewe kant aan elke vraag.”*

*“The counterargument would be to say that nursing students should not be viewed differently to other students.” / “Die teenargument sal wees deur te **se** dat verpleegstudente nie anders beskou moet word as ander studente nie.”*

*“The argument can be viewed in many ways.” / “Die argument kan in baie opsigte gesien word.”*

### **7.6.7.3 Conclusion**

Before the intervention, many of the conclusions written by the participants comprised only personal opinions about the topic. The conclusions were also written in inappropriate registers not suited to the academic context:

*“How can I as a nurse conduct my daily tasks if my body has been polluted with yesterday’s ‘nice’ beer?” / “Hoe kan ek as ’n verpleegster my daaglikse take **verig** as my liggaam besoedel is van gister se ‘lekker’ bier?”*

*“I realise that it is just an excuse, that it is having the wrong kind of friends, that when I say no they get angry, that it is not worth it, it has made me do stupid things. Therefore, I have made a decision that would benefit me and my future children one day.”* / “Ek het besef dat dit net ‘n verskoning is, dat dit nie regte vriende is nie, dat **wanner** ek **se** nie en hulle kwaad word, dit nie die moeite werd was nie, dit het my simpel goed laat doen. Daarom het ek ‘n besluit gemaak, wat my bevoordeel, en eendag my toekomstige kinders ook.”

After the intervention, most of the participants’ conclusions were more appropriate summaries of what had been covered and many of the participants came to clear, logical conclusions.

#### 7.6.7.4 Voice

Especially in the first essay, the participants incorrectly used the first-person voice extensively by giving subjective, personal opinions:

*“I think as a nursing student one may use alcohol.”* / “Ek dink as ‘n verpleegstudent mag mens drank gebruik.”

*“If you are a student it looks even better for me.”* / “As jy ‘n student is lyk dit vir my al hoe beter.”

*“I think that if you’ve used alcohol, then it would be really rude and unprofessional if you work with patients.”* / “Ek dink dat as jy alkohol gebruik en dan met **pasiente** moet werk is dit uiters ongeskik en onprofessioneel.”

Though the participants were instructed not to use the first person in academic writing, some still opted to do so. However, it was not incorrectly used as it was used not as an opinion, but as a preview:

*“In this essay I am going to discuss the use of alcohol amongst nursing students.”* / “In hierdie opstel gaan ek die gebruik van alkohol onder verpleegstudente bespreek.”

Although it was correctly used, marks had to be deducted as the participants were instructed not to use first-person voice in their essays. It thus seems that the issue to be addressed is not necessarily the incorrect use of first person voice, but rather teaching students to follow the requirements as made by individual lecturers for individual writing assignments.

### 7.6.7.5 Register

In the first essay, many of the participants used a register that was generally inappropriate for an academic context. Some of the examples include:

*“To have a hangover at work is very unprofessional.” / “Om ’n babelas te hê by die werk is baie onprofesioneel.”*

*“At least nursing students get weekends off. Moderation remains the key.” / “Verpleegstudente kry ook **darm** naweke af. Matigheid bly steeds die belangrikste wagwoord.”*

*“The reality is that smoking can contribute to the big C, known as cancer by everyone.” / “Die werklikheid is dat rook tot die groot K kan bydra, wat almal natuurlik ken as kanker.”*

*“Chances are great that you will have to do dirty work while treating patients; this can just be the tipping point in your state of mind and could make you vomit by the patient’s bed. What an embarrassment wouldn’t it be for you as a nurse!” / “Die kans is groot dat jy vuil werk moet doen tydens **pasiente versorging**, wat dalk net die laaste strooi kan wees op jou gemoedstoestand en jou kan laat braak by die **pasient** se bed. Wat ’n **verleenteid** sal dit nie vir jou as verpleegster wees nie!”*

*“Statistics has shown that one ‘shot’ takes exactly one hour to be digested by your body. After one beer, you have to wait one hour to drive, unless you want to take the chance to be pulled off the side of the road and sleep in jail for night.” / “**Statestieke** het bewys dat een ‘shot’ presies een uur vat om deur jou liggaam verwerk te word. Na een **buur** moet jy een uur wag om te bestuur, tensy jy die kans wil vat om afgetrek te word om ’n aand in die **toekkie** te slaap.”*

After the intervention it appeared that one of the participants attempted to use a more formal register, but still needed some practice:

*“Smoke if you want, but do it somewhere else.” / “Rook as u wil maar doen dit iewers anders.”*

### 7.6.7.6 Language use

Many of the participants seemed to have a lack of awareness of the need to revise their essays before submission as a lot of spelling and punctuation errors occurred during the first essay attempt. An overuse of exclamation marks was also found in the first essays:

*“There would be many reasons why you would want to answer NO immediately!” / “Daar sou baie redes wees waarom mens dadelik NEE wil antwoord!”*

*“It just does not make sense!” / “Dit maak net nie sin nie!”*

*“My conscience would bother me! I will not use a drop of alcohol, otherwise I have lost my calling (fruit of the Spirit).” / “My gewete kla my aan! Ek sal nie ’n druppel alkohol gebruik nie, anders het ek my roeping (die vrug van die Gees) verloor.”*

After the intervention, the readability of the participants’ texts improved where they used clearer and complete sentences (cf. §3.8; §6.5.5; §7.6.4).

#### **7.6.7.7 Referencing**

Many participants struggled with accurate referencing. In the essays that were written before the intervention, most of the participants did not make use of any referencing. Even after the intervention, many participants still did not know how to use direct quotations and to paraphrase correctly. Furthermore, the participants did not seem to have a wide range of evidentials. Almost all the participants used “according to” (“volgens”) repeatedly with almost no variation. They were instructed to do so but seemed to lack the necessary vocabulary. More examples and practice seem necessary to address the problems in this area.

#### **7.6.7.8 Source list**

Before the intervention, most participants did not include a bibliography. The few who did had no structure and only included popular Internet entries. One participant only included the word Google in the source list. Another participant produced the following source list:

Sources:        [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/wyn](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/wyn)

[www.mieliestronk.com/alkoholisme.html](http://www.mieliestronk.com/alkoholisme.html)

After the intervention, the source list was in many cases still not perfect. However, the Harvard style was more identifiable. The participants also used other types of sources such as newspaper articles, books and journal articles.

### **7.6.7.9 Technical aspects**

In the first essay, many participants displayed a lack of attention to detail. They did not adhere to the technical aspects required of them. The technical aspects comprised including a cover page and a table of contents, using the correct format (font and font size), entering page numbers and headings that correlated with the table of contents, and justifying the text.

From the analysis of the individual students' before and after essays, it became clear that the majority of the participants' academic writing had improved. Furthermore, it also became evident that not all the participants struggled with the same issues. Individual support on individual issues needs to be addressed. However, it is impossible to address all the individual academic writing needs of (nursing) students in class in one semester. A possible solution is that technology could be implemented as a potential tool to personalise the learning experience (cf. §8.4.2) to assist the students with their individual writing needs. Further research is needed to test this hypothesis.

The fact that many of the participants almost perfected (but not completely) many of the writing requirements in their second essay indicated that further and more practice may be necessary. Students should be exposed to more examples of the essays that they are expected to produce.

### **7.6.8 Conclusion: TAG and essays**

From the statistical analysis of a variety of variables related to academic literacy this section shows clear improvement after the intervention investigated in this study. Both the TAG results (cf. §7.6.1) and reading scores (cf. §7.6.2) showed statistically and practically significant improvements. The fairly low computer literacy scores (cf. §7.6.3), however, might imply a need for further support for certain participants.

The analysis of the essay results and related variables also shows an improvement from the pre-essay to the post-essay (cf. §7.6.4). An assessment rubric (cf. Appendix E) was employed in the assessment of the essays. The Cronbach's Alpha values for both the pre- and post-essays indicated that the rubric proved to be reliable as it has good internal consistency. The comparison of the different criteria in the assessment rubric showed statistically and practically significant improvements from the pre- to the post-essays. The reading ease of the essays was also explored with a statistically significant difference in Flesch-Kincaid Grade Levels but not with Flesch Reading Ease values (cf. §7.6.5). The number of spelling errors per 100 words per essay was also considered, but no statistically significant difference was determined (cf. §7.6.5).

The pre- and post-essays were also compared with regard to the use of personal pronouns and discourse markers (cf. §7.6.5). There was a statistically significant difference between the two sets of essays with a clear decline in the use of personal pronouns. However, the use of discourse markers between the pre- and post-essays did not show any statistically significant difference. Finally, the Turnitin originality check (cf. §7.6.6) also showed an increase in the use of sources from the pre-essay to the post-essay.

Therefore, from the analysis the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) can be rejected as statistically significant improvements were observed in terms of academic writing performance ( $H_1$ ) of first-year nursing students (cf. §1.5.3). From the document analysis (cf. §7.6.7) it also became clear that the nursing students' writing abilities seemed to improve. However, not all the participants showed equal improvement in all the criteria assessed. Consequently, further support seems necessary and needs to be implemented and evaluated in future studies.

## 7.7 Phase 6: Main study: focus group interviews

In this phase, the qualitative focus group data are analysed. The qualitative focus group data analysis was done through utilizing computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). The choice of software for this study is *Atlas.ti*. The software was used to support and assist the researcher to manage and analyse data sets through coding and annotating (Smit, 2002:65; Hwang, 2008:524).

As mentioned in Chapter 6, another rater also analysed the qualitative data. For the sake of inter-rater reliability Cohen's Kappa was calculated to determine consistency among raters (Cohen, 1960:37). The result as seen in Table 7.20 was as follows: Kappa = 0.625 ( $p < 0.001$ ). According to Landis and Koch (1977:165) this implies a substantial agreement between the raters as the value was between 0.61 - 0.80.

**Table 7.20 Symmetrical measures**

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error <sup>a</sup>	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Measure of agreement	Kappa	.625	.081	10.880	.000
N of valid cases		40			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

A discussion of the identified themes follow below.

From the transcriptions of the focus group interviews and the help of the *Atlas.ti* programme, three themes with related codes were identified (cf. §6.5.6):

*Theme 1: Cause / reasons for the academic literacy course*

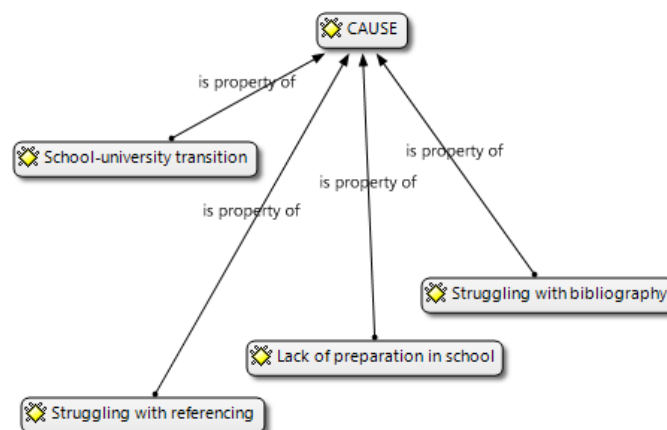
*Theme 2: Attitude of students towards the course*

*Theme 3: The effect of the course*

The identified themes will now be discussed in further detail. The number at the end of the quotes of the participants is the *Atlas.ti* reference number.

### 7.7.1 Theme 1: Cause/reasons for the academic literacy course

In this section, the main causes or reasons for the need for the course, as identified by the participants, are described.



**Figure 7.16 Network for cause / reasons for the academic literacy course theme**

#### 7.7.1.1 Lack of preparation in school and the school-university transition

As mentioned in the literature review (cf. §2.2; §3.3.1), many students entering university are not sufficiently prepared to cope with literacy issues at tertiary level.

Just as with the participants from the pilot study (cf. §7.4), it became clear that most of the participants felt that their high school language education did not adequately prepare them for university studies as the type and level of learning and writing expected of them were

completely different. In high school they were mostly expected to write “stories” to get higher marks for examination assessments purposes and formal writing was barely covered. A few participants felt that some of the writing skills needed at university should have been dealt with already at school level.

The following verbatim quotes are examples of the participants’ frustrations with the transition from high school to university writing:

*“For me it is bad that the subject is not offered in school. The fact that we only now at a tertiary institution have to learn to actually write...” / “Vir my is dit baie swak dat die vak nie in skool aangebied was nie. Die feit dat ons dit nou eers na tersiêre instelling moet leer hoe om eintlik te skryf.” (118)*

*“I struggle to interpret the texts from matric to this, it is quite difficult for me to get it exactly right.” / “Ek sukkel so bietjie om die skryfstukke te interpreteer van matriek hiernatoe, dit is nogal vir my moeilik om dit presies reg te kry.” (268)*

*“At school they showed us how to write well and I always thought I did it right, and when we did our first thing here I actually did badly, because I thought I did it well and it was all wrong.” / “Op skool het hulle ons gewys hoe om goed te skryf en ek het altyd gedink ek doen dit reg, en toe ons ons eerste ding hier doen toe doen ek eintlik sleg, want ek dink ek doen dit reg en dis heel verkeerd.” (342)*

#### **7.7.1.2 Struggling with the bibliography and referencing**

At the NWU, an adapted Harvard-style of referencing is used for most of the faculties. For this study that deals with the writing skills of nursing students, it is relevant to note that Gimenez (2007:161) mentions that the Harvard system of referencing is the most commonly used system in nursing.

Almost all of the participants indicated that they needed the AGLA 121 course to help them with composing a bibliography and with how to reference as they received no instruction at school level. One of the participants made the following comment:

*“Or say you are doing research in the industry in which you are, you will have to know how to quote and to compile a bibliography, because at school you learn to write a story, you learn none of these things, so it is all like a new subject for us and that is good.” /*

“Of sê nou maar jy doen navorsing in die bedryf wat jy is, dan gaan jy moet weet hoe om die aanhalings te maak en die bronnelys op te stel, want op skool leer jy hoe om ’n storie te skryf, jy leer niks van hierdie goed nie, so dit is alles vir ons soos ’n nuwe vak en dit is goed.” (341)

This topic regarding learning how to reference and how to compile a bibliography will be further explored later in the chapter (cf. §7.7.3.1.3.9) which deals with the effect of the AGLA 121 course. The following section deals with the attitude of the participants towards the AGLA 121 course.

## 7.7.2 Theme 2: Attitude of students towards the course

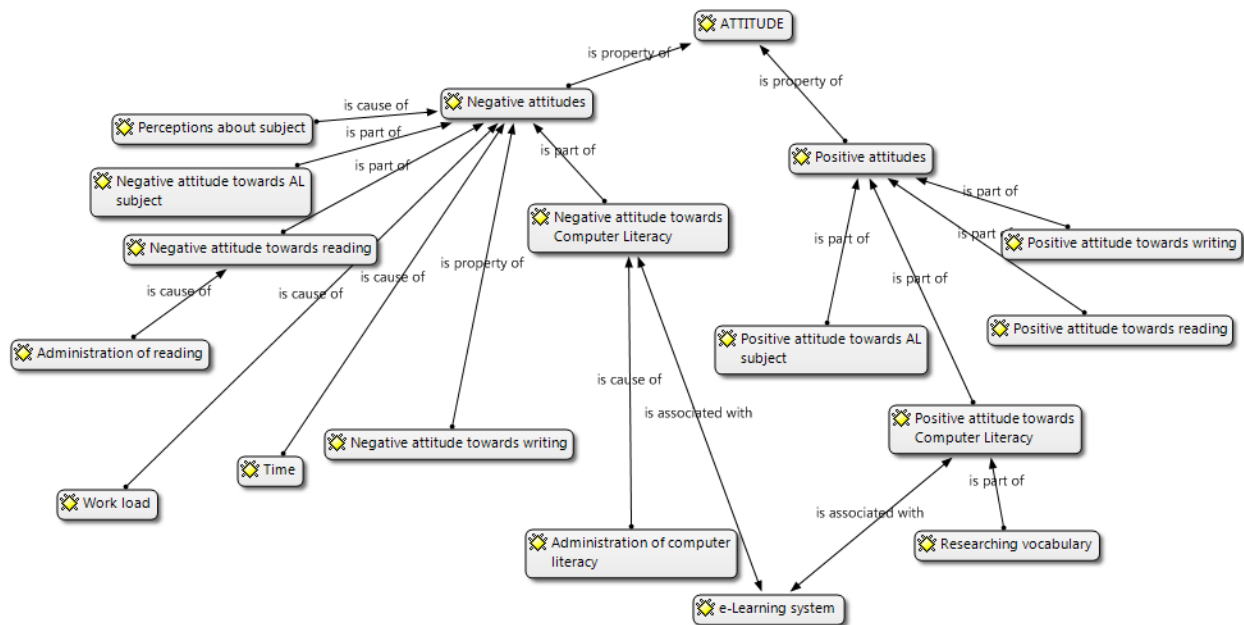


Figure 7.17 Network for attitude of students towards the course theme

### 7.7.2.1 Negative attitudes

In this section, the negative attitudes as identified by the participants are explored.

#### 7.7.2.1.1 Negative attitude towards RINL

As mentioned in Chapter 5 (cf. §5.4), together with the academic literacy course, all first-year students are required to complete the computer literacy component (RINL) of the course.

When asked what they liked the least about the course, most of the participants in all the focus groups exclaimed that RINL (together with LEES) was their least favourite part of the course. Most participants felt quite aggressively that RINL was not a priority, was a waste of their time and is “useless”. Some also commented that they did not understand why they had to take the computer literacy course. A few participants reflected that they did not need the course, but that some of their fellow students who did not have computer literacy subjects at high school and did not own computers could benefit from the course. Furthermore, one participant reported that her computer skills had not improved from the course. Another participant confirmed this statement and said that some of the content was useful such as the section on how to do research, but not all of it. The following is a comment regarding a participant’s opinion about the course which was supported by most of the participants in all the focus groups:

*“But I think most of us grew up with computers and we know how it works and we can do it, and then it is useless for us.” / “Maar ek dink die meeste van ons het grootgeword met rekenaars en ons weet hoe dit werk en ons kan dit doen, en dan is dit vir ons nutteloos.” (390)*

It is interesting to the researcher that the students state that they do not need the computer course because when the participants’ assignment essays were assessed for the quantitative part of the study (cf. §7.6.4), it became evident that some of the participants did not possess or did not apply the computer skills that they claimed to have. Basic aspects such as using a spellchecker, getting the line spacing correct, inserting page numbers, justifying the text (all features covered in the RINL computer course) were done mostly incorrectly by many of the participants. There seems to be a discrepancy between what the participants think they can do and what they are actually able to do, which needs to be addressed in programme re-evaluation. The connection between the various components of the course needs to be clearer so that students can transfer the skills from one component to the next and ultimately transfer and apply all the skills that they had learnt in the AGLA 121 course to their other courses.

Finally, a participant mentioned that she was studying nursing and did not see the use of having computer skills:

*“I don’t know what I would ever want to do with a computer. I am studying nursing, so the fact that I will work with a computer is not great, so for me it is a waste of time.” / “Ek weet nie wat ek ooit met ’n rekenaar gaan wil maak nie. Ek swot verpleging, so die feit dat ek met ’n rekenaar gaan werk is nie groot nie, so dit is vir my tydmors.” (7)*

This statement is in contrast to what is actually expected of nursing students both academically and as practising nurses (cf. §4.7).

#### 7.7.2.1.2 Administration of RINL

The participants also thought that the administration surrounding the computer literacy component was unclear and they had difficulty figuring it out. The participants felt that as first-year students they were unfamiliar with the electronic environment of the NWU and needed more instruction on how to access and use the RINL component on the e-learning environment eFundi. The participants were also upset about the semester tests of RINL as these tests are completed online and some of the participants felt that it was unfair as some of the students helped each other. Some of the participants suggested that these problems could be rectified if the students received more information and instruction on the e-learning environment during first-year orientation. The RINL semester tests could also be facilitated like the RINL examination where students write a controlled examination.

#### 7.7.2.1.3 Negative attitude towards LEES

As seen in Chapter 3 (cf. §3.3.2), reading is an essential part of the writing process (Creme & Lea, 2008:51) and not having the proper skills needed for university reading, could have a negative effect on the students' writing abilities. Most complaints about the AGLA 121 course were about the reading component (LEES) of the course. Almost all of the participants stated that they thought the reading component was a waste of time. They also concurred that it was a lot of work and made them very tired and that they could not concentrate after the first story. Some participants also felt that they were not given enough time to complete the reading component. One participant was also very frustrated with the fact that all three components must be completed to pass the course and if one component is failed the entire course with all three components must be redone. The participant voiced his grievances as follows:

*“You will sit in AGLA and in LEES until you are finished with university one day. Then you won't be able to get your degree because you didn't pass AGLA.” / “Jy gaan in AGLA en in LEES sit totdat jy eendag klaar is met universiteit. Dan gaan jy nie jou graad kan kry nie want jy't nie AGLA deurgekom nie.” (231)*

At the time of the interview, the reading component was in English and many of the participants felt that the lessons were really difficult as they were not mother-tongue English speakers. The

visual layout of the programme was also problematic as one participant also remarked that she would rather study for another subject's test than read a piece with *"ants and silly pictures"* on. She did mention that it was *"cute"* but did not really like it as it did not look professional.

Most of the participants reflected that the reading component did not help them at all and they could not see an improvement. One of the participants also mentioned that the *"stories"* had nothing to do with her studies. One participant mentioned the following:

*"They also waste your time that you could have used to read for your studies rather than to read those things that your are not even interested in. So I think it is a waste of time" / "Hulle mors ook jou tyd wat jy eerder kon gebruik het om vir jou studies te lees as om daai goed te lees, wat jy nie eers belangstel in nie. So ek dink dit is 'n mors van tyd."*  
(183:184)

A possible answer to this problem could be to incorporate authentic and subject-specific texts in the reading course. Most of the participants could not see the use of a reading course and exclaimed:

*"Because of course one can read!" / "Want mens kan mos lees!"* (183)

A possible solution could be to provide students with the results and statistics of their reading abilities so that they could realise that they need the course. Students could also be referred to published studies that show that the reading component does improve their reading skills.

#### 7.7.2.1.4 Administration of LEES

The participants were upset because they were only allowed to read once a week and on Fridays the reading laboratory closed earlier. The participants made the suggestion that the reading component must be available to them on the e-learning environment, eFundi, so that they could do the course in their own time. One participant also expressed the opinion that the noise level in the reading laboratory was very distracting and that they could not concentrate. Some of the participants were also upset that some of the students were able to *"hack"* into the reading programme that gave them an advantage to redo some of the questions. Another issue that was debated quite fervidly was that some of the participants felt that they were not properly informed about the first reading test during the Orientation week that could have exempted them from the reading course. They exclaimed that they were very tired and had they known about

the exemption, they would have concentrated more. One participant expressed himself as follows:

*“Can just say about the LEES I feel...I don't know, one didn't really use it...or I don't see any difference between before and after – the reading. And the guys, I think, who need it, then they learn how to jippo the computer – you go up to a certain point, start over and then you can re-do everything and it takes your second mark. So what is the point of that?”* “Kan maar net sê van die LEES ek voel... ek weet nie, mens het dit nie regtig gebruik... of ek sien geen verskil in voor die tyd en na die tyd – die lees nie. En die outjies, dink ek, wat dit nodig het, dan hulle leer hoe om die rekenaar te boikot – jy gaan tot op 'n sekere punt, begin oor dan kan jy al die goed oordoen en hy vat jou tweede punt. So wat is die nut daarvan?” (381)

#### 7.7.2.1.5 eFundi

Some of the participants complained that they did not have Internet available to them where they lived and had to come to campus just to do some of the work required on eFundi. Also, for many of the participants, figuring out the e-learning system and environment, eFundi, was quite difficult and confusing and they did not receive adequate instruction on how to use and function in this environment. One of the participants complained as follows:

*What I don't like – eFundi is very disorganised, really” / “Waarvan ek nie hou nie - eFundi is baie deurmekaar, regtig.”* (197:198)

#### 7.7.2.1.6 Negative attitude towards AL as a subject

Most of the students were very negative at the beginning of the course, yet realised the importance of the course at the end. However, many were quite upset about the fact that all three components, the LEES, RINL and AGLA 121 had to be passed order to pass the subject and all three had to be repeated if one component was failed.

#### 7.7.2.1.7 Negative attitude towards writing

Even though the participants felt that all the writing assignments helped them a lot, they felt that it was a lot of work and effort.

*“The pieces of writing we have to write every week really helps a lot, but it is a lot of work and a lot of effort” / “Die skryfstukke wat ons moet skryf elke week help baie, maar dit is baie werk en baie moeite.” (278)*

The participants also did not all like (cf. §3.3.6.1) the topics that they had to write about in classes as not all the topics were nursing subject-specific.

One of the participants made the following comment:

*You don’t want to waste your time to write something that won’t help you at all.” / “Jy wil nie jou tyd mors om iets te skryf wat jou niks gaan help nie.” (376)*

#### 7.7.2.1.8 Time and workload

The participants almost unanimously agreed that how time was spent was very important for university students and felt that some aspects of the AGLA 121 course were a waste of their time. The nursing students expressed that they had a lot of practical lessons and really found it difficult to fit in additional reading classes and to complete the RINL on eFundi. Two participants reported the following:

*“We are so busy because we work practical hours as well, much more than an ordinary student, so there is no time for this.” / “Ons is so besig want ons werk praktiese ure ook, baie meer as die gewone student, so daar is nie tyd daarvoor nie.” (335)*

*“One is so caught up in studies for tests that have to be written or preparation for the next day’s class. There is no time to say let’s go do RINL at home or let’s do the comprehension test.” / “n Mens is so vasgevang in jou prakties en vasgevang in jou studies vir toetse wat geskryf moet word of voorbereiding vir die volgende dag se klas. Daar is nie tyd om te sê, kom ons gaan doen RINL by die huis of kom ons doen die begripstoetsie nie.” (294)*

#### 7.7.2.1.9 Perceptions about the subject

Many of the participants stated that they were influenced by other students who complained a lot about the course, telling the participants that it is a waste of their time and not very enjoyable.

*“I feel that our attitude is influenced a lot by the other students who tell us how AGLA is – that it is a waste of time and that they don’t like it.” / “Ek voel dat ons houding baie beïnvloed is deur die ander studente wat vir ons vertel hoe is AGLA - dat dit tydmors is en dat dit nie vir hulle lekker is nie.” (172)*

However, the participants indicated that even though they were very negative about the course at the beginning, they later realised that the course helped them a lot with their assignments. This will be discussed further in the next section.

*“Yes, in the beginning one was very negative, but one does notice that you do need it to some extent because it helps a lot with the assignments.” / “Ja, aan die begin was mens baie negatief, maar mens kom tog agter jy het dit in ’n mate tog nodig want dit help baie met opdragte.” (113)*

Perceptions and attitudes are not changed easily (cf. §3.3.6; Pickens, 2005:43-76); however, if some of the issues mentioned by the participants could be resolved, students might be convinced that the AGLA 121 course is indeed necessary and worthwhile. In the next section, the positive attitudes of the participants towards the AGLA 121 course are reported.

### **7.7.2.2 Positive attitudes**

Even though the participants were in some cases extremely negative about certain aspects of the course, during and after the course they did realise the value of the course. Some of the positive aspects addressed by the participants in the focus group interviews are now discussed.

#### **7.7.2.2.1 Positive attitude towards RINL**

Some of the participants commented that the computer literacy course improved their computer skills a lot. One participant also reported that she could see that her roommate who did not have any computer subjects at school level really benefited from the course:

*“Yes, I don’t like the RINL much either, I had computers at school, so I know these things, but my roommate for instance, did not have computers and I can see that it actually helps her.” / “Ja, ek hou ook nie baie van die RINL nie, ek het rekenars op skool gehad, so ek weet hierdie goed, maar my kamermaat byvoorbeeld, het nie rekenaar gehad nie en ek kan sien dat dit haar actually help.” (339)*

The participants also reported that the computer literacy course helped them to search for sources for their nursing assignments.

#### 7.7.2.2.2 Researching vocabulary

The participants agreed that the academic literacy lecture programme did help them to enlarge their vocabulary and also provided them with skills to research words and concepts that they did not understand.

#### 7.7.2.2.3 Positive attitude towards LEES

Even though most of the complaints about the course were about the reading component, a few of the participants revealed that they liked the reading and that it had helped them. One participant stated that the course had helped her how to read correctly. Another student shared this point of view and stated that if one had to study for another subject in a short amount of time, one had to be able to read fast and with comprehension, and that the course had helped her to acquire that skill:

*“LEES is certainly necessary, because if you like have to study for another subject and its a lot of work that you have to deal with in a short time, you have to be able to read fast with comprehension.” / “LEES is vir seker nodig, want as jy soos gaan leer vir ’n ander vak en dis baie werk wat jy in ’n kort tydperk moet behandel, dan moet jy vinnig kan lees met begrip.” (146)*

#### 7.7.2.2.4 Positive attitude towards AL as a subject

The participants stated that they really needed the academic literacy lecture programme as it helped them with their assignments for their other nursing subjects because they did not always receive clear instructions from their other subject lecturers and did not always know how to attempt the assignments. According to the participants the academic literacy lecture programme provided them with clear guidelines, especially on how to put together their written assignments and how to conduct research. Following are some of the positive comments about the AGLA 121 course:

*“I feel that in AGLA we receive more information than what we necessarily get in other subjects we are more informed of what we physically have to do.” / “Ek voel dat in AGLA kry ons meer inligting as wat ons noodwendig by ander vakke kry ons is meer ingelig van wat is fisies wat ons moet doen.” (116)*

“But we must change it positively, because we are actually doing it for ourselves and not for the other students who don’t like it.” / “Maar ons moet dit positief verander, want dit is eintlik maar vir onself wat ons dit doen en nie vir die ander studente wat nie daarvan hou nie.” (175)

“But I like this subject, because I didn’t know how to do these things, I didn’t even know it existed, so I like taking this subject.” / “Maar ek hou van hierdie vak, want ek het nie geweet hoe om hierdie goed te doen nie, ek het nie eers geweet dit bestaan nie, so dis vir my lekker om die vak te neem.” (334)

In the following section, the participants’ opinions on the perceived effect of the AGLA 121 course are described.

### 7.7.3 Theme 3: The effects of the course

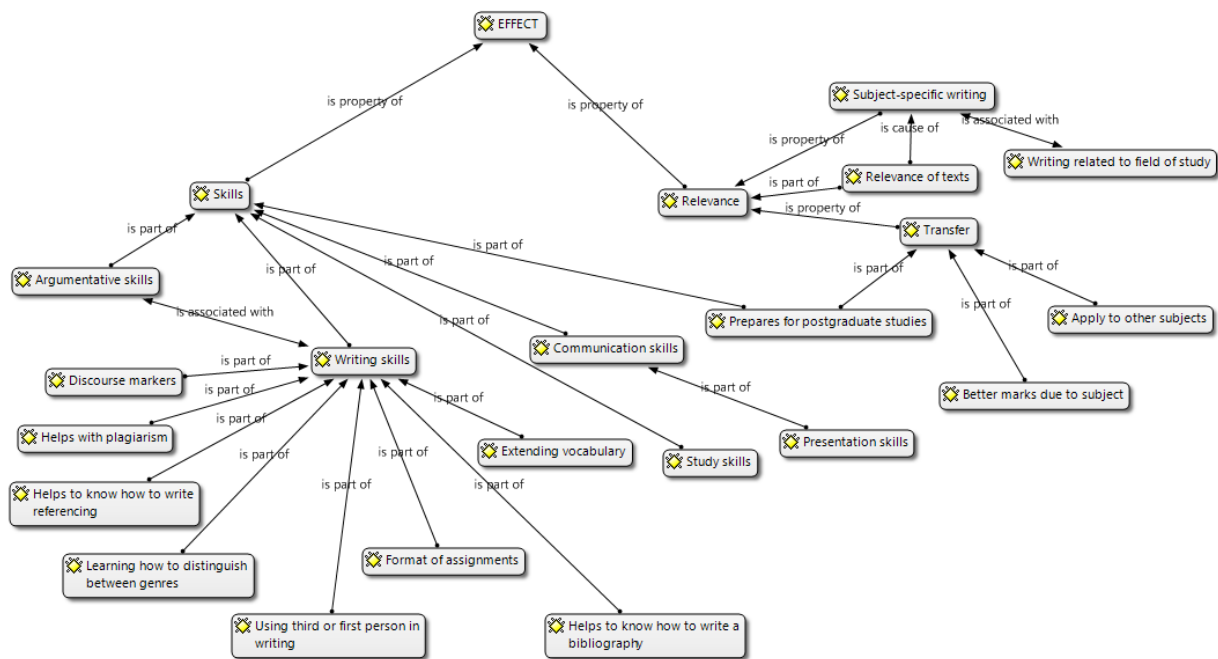


Figure 7.18 Network for the effects of the course theme

### 7.7.3.1 Skills

#### 7.7.3.1.1 Communication and presentation skills

Effective communication is an essential element of nursing (cf. §7.10; Bowles *et al.*, 2001:348). As potential nurses, the participants remarked that as they had to work with the public a lot they needed interpersonal skills. They reflected that the seminar skills taught to them during the course really assisted them, especially during their practical classes and seminars that they had to present.

#### 7.7.3.1.2 Study skills

A few of the participants reported that the course helped them with study skills and methods as well as taught them how to make effective mind maps and summaries:

*“AGLA helps me a lot with how to study.” / “AGLA help my baie oor hoe om te leer.”*  
(102)

#### 7.7.3.1.3 Writings skills

Almost all of the participants voiced the perspective that the course had dramatically improved their writing skills. The participants stated that they would not have known how to write assignments at university level had it not been for the course. Some of the participants even ascribed their good marks for their assignments to the help they received from the AGLA 121 course.

*“I think it will help you to like do your tasks and assignments more comprehensively, because there are many more things that you have to include now that you never knew should be in there. Its just more complete and more formal.” / “Ek dink dit gaan jou help om soos jou take en opdragte meer volledig te doen, want daar is soveel meer goeters wat jy nou moet insit wat jy nooit geweet het daar in moet kom nie. Dis net meer volledig en formeel.”* (88)

*“If we didn’t have AGLA in the beginning of the year, and we all of a sudden had to do an assignment, we wouldn’t have known how to do it, and then we would not have been able to get good marks.” / “As ons nie AGLA sou gehad het in die begin van die jaar nie,*

en ons moet eweskielik 'n opdrag doen sou ons nie geweet het hoe om dit te doen nie, en dan sou ons nie goeie punte kon kry nie.” (96)

In the following segment all the skills relating to writing and how these skills helped the participants with their AGLA 121 essays and assignments as well as their nursing essays and written assignments are discussed.

#### 7.7.3.1.3.1 Argumentative skills

The majority of undergraduate students must be able to develop and produce argumentative texts (cf. §3.10.1.1) at some time in their academic career. One of the participants stated that in one of their nursing subjects they had to argue whether euthanasia was right or wrong. They also had to do an assignment on whether abortion should be legalised or not and stated that the argumentative skills taught during the course were very valuable and helped them a lot with the assignments.

#### 7.7.3.1.3.2 Learning how to distinguish between genres

When entering university, undergraduates are faced with written genres that they have never come across during high school language education. As seen in Chapter 4 (§4.5), nursing students are expected to produce a myriad of genres and need to be exposed to the rules, regulations and conventions of these genres. Even though the AGLA 121 course only covers the argumentative essay, students are made aware of the fact that there are many genres that could be expected of them during their studies. A few of the participants mentioned that the course alerted them to the fact that there are various genres and that they had to write accordingly. Unfortunately, not all of these genres could be taught and practised in AGLA 121.

#### 7.7.3.1.3.3 Format of assignments

A lot of the participants indicated that in many of their subjects they were just given the assignments without clear instructions on what was expected of them and what they should look like. According to the participants, the course provided them with a structure/template and guidelines on how to start and complete an assignment. Furthermore, the participants stated that in high school they only wrote stories and that the course really helped them to write formal assignments with proper introductions and conclusions.

*“Our faculty often makes you write reports, and then you don’t always know how to write it, and AGLA gives you guidelines on what you have to do and how to do it.” / “Ons fakulteit laat jou baie keer verslae skryf, en dan weet jy nie altyd hoe om dit te skryf nie, en AGLA gee vir jou riglyne oor wat jy moet doen en hoe jy dit moet doen.” (331)*

*“When I am in a work situation one day and they ask me, write a report on what happened and you have to go and write, you should know what the guidelines are that you should follow.” / “As ek eendag in ’n werksituasie staan en hulle sê vir my, skryf ’n verslag oor dit wat gebeur het en jy moet gaan skryf dat moet jy weet wat is die riglyne om te volg.” (341)*

#### 7.7.3.1.3.4 Extending vocabulary

Though difficult to physically determine, some of the participants mentioned that the course extended their vocabulary that they could use in future assignments.

#### 7.7.3.1.3.5 Discourse markers

To help with the cohesion and coherence (cf. §3.8) in the students’ writing, students are taught how to use linking devices such as discourse markers in the academic literacy lecture programme (cf. 3.5). The participants also indicated that learning how to use discourse markers also organised and guided their writing and resulted in better marks in their assignments.

#### 7.7.3.1.3.6 Using third or first person in writing

In the academic literacy lecture programme, students were made aware of the “debate” about whether and when the first person voice might be used or not (cf. §3.8). Most of the literature in nursing journals indicates that the use of “I” is being permitted more and more, however, in most journals it is still frowned upon and many articles are not accepted in nursing journals when written in the first person (cf. Webb, 1992:747; Hamill, 1999:38). With regard to using first or third person voice in their writing, the participants stated that in their nursing subjects they were told to always be professional and to always refer to “the patient” or “the nurse” and to never use “you” or “I”. One of the participants made the following remark:

*“Remember, very professional is always ‘the patient’, or ‘the nurse’. We try to avoid it as far as possible to say ‘you’ in our writing.” / “Onthou, baie professioneel is altyd “die pasiënt”, of*

“die verpleegkundige”. Ons probeer so vêr as moontlik te vermy om te sê “jy” of “jou” in ons skryfwerk.” (367)

#### 7.7.3.1.3.7 Helps with plagiarism

Plagiarism (cf. §3.8) was a huge concern for the participants. Almost all of the students agreed that the part of the course of most value to them was that they learnt about plagiarism and how not to do it as it was quite a foreign concept to them as they were not taught how to acknowledge sources properly in high school. One of the participants stated the following:

*“And to not commit plagiarism; so that we can learn to acknowledge other people for the work that we do use.” / “En nie plagiaat te pleeg nie; laat ons mooi kan leer hoe om ander mense ook erkenning te gee vir die werkstukke wat ons wel gebruik.”* (355)

#### 7.7.3.1.3.8 Helps to know how to reference

Regarding referencing (cf. §7.7.1.2), many of the students revealed that they had had no idea how to reference when they started at university and that the course guided them to use the reference guide book of the university and that it really improved their marks. The following comment was made by a participant:

*“We use the references all the time. We have an assignment now and every little thing has to have a reference, and I wouldn’t have known how to do it if it wasn’t for AGLA.” / “Ons gebruik healtyd die bronverwysings. Ons het nou ’n opdrag en elke ding moet ’n bronverwysing hê, en ek sou nie geweet het hoe om dit te doen nie as dit nie vir AGLA was nie.”* (308)

However, the following is quite a worrying statement made by one of the participants:

*“And the more sources you refer to in your text, the fewer words you have to type.” / “En hoe meer bronne jy na verwys in jou teks hoe minder woorde hoef jy te tik.”* (92)

Students need to be informed more on the reasons for and correct ways of referencing and must not use sources just to make up their word count.

#### 7.7.3.1.3.9 Helps to know how to write a bibliography

The participants identified that learning how to compile a bibliography was one of the main reasons why an academic literacy course should be available to students (cf. §7.7.1.2). Not only did the participants not know how to reference, they also did not know how to compile a bibliography correctly. The participants mentioned that it was expected of them to include a correct bibliography with every assignment that they did for their nursing subjects. The participants also mentioned that getting the bibliography correct was crucial for getting good marks:

*They are going to deduct ten percent if we do not do the bibliography correctly, so, AGLA helps me there.* / “Hulle gaan tien persent af trek as ons nie die bronnelys reg doen nie, so, AGLA help my daar.” (308)

In the following section the relevance of the course is discussed.

#### 7.7.3.2 Relevance

##### 7.7.3.2.1 Subject-specific writing, relevance of texts and application to other subjects

The participants were elated because the topics they had to write about were subject-specific and could be used in their nursing subjects. They were glad that they had an interest in the topics and could write about topics that they could relate to as it was something with which they work with on a daily basis. They also felt that the writing on these topics was not a waste of time. Two participants voiced the following perspectives:

*It helps because it is something we are interested in and it is something that we work with daily.* / “Dit help want dis iets waarin ons belangstel en dis iets waarmee ons daaglik werk.” (375)

*“You do not want to waste your time writing about something that is not going to help you at all.”* / “Jy wil nie jou tyd mors om iets te skryf wat jou niks gaan help nie.” (376)

The participants remarked that the academic writing skills that they had learnt in AGLA could be applied in every nursing subject that they were doing. One of the participants also thought that

the skills they had learnt in the course would assist them when they were out in the practice working as nurses and would have to compile reports:

*“And AGLA doesn’t only help for one subject, it helps for every single assignment that you can do in every single subject.” / “En AGLA help nie net vir een vak nie, dit help vir elke liewe opdrag wat jy in elke liewe vak kan doen.” (67)*

#### 7.7.3.2.2 Prepares for postgraduate studies

The participants also had the foresight that they would need the skills learnt in the AGLA 121 course for post-graduate studies:

*“Especially when you get to your fourth year and you have to do long assignments with many source references.” / “Veral as jy nou in jou vierde jaar kom en jy moet lang take doen met baie bronverwysings.” (339)*

*“Especially with post-graduate study, when you do honours and masters.” / “Veral met nagraadse studie, as jy honneurs en meesters doen.” (84)*

*“And not only now, one day also when one say wants to continue your education like you do your PhD or something like that and you also write medical reports.” / “En nie net nou nie, eendag ook as ’n mens sê nou maar verder gaan leer soos jy doen jou PhD of iets soos dit en jy skryf ook mediese verslagte.” (310)*

#### 7.7.3.2.3 Better marks due to studying the subject

Finally, the most important aspect to all students: marks. According to the participants, a lot of marks would have been lost had they not done the course. The participants mentioned that they were expected to know what to do in the assignments even though they had never done it in high school or were given clear instructions. The participants also reported that their results improved from their first assignment due to the skills that they had learnt in the course. The following remarks were made:

*“If you do well in things like writing assignments, it raises your marks.” / “As jy goed doen in goed soos skryfstukke dan bring dit jou punte baie meer op.” (94)*

*“If we didn’t have AGLA in the beginning of the year, and we all of a sudden had to do an assignment, we wouldn’t have known how to do it, and then we would not have been*

*able to get good marks.” / “As ons nie AGLA sou gehad het in die begin van die jaar nie en ons moet ewe skielik ’n opdrag doen sou ons nie geweet het hoe om dit te doen nie, en dan sou ons nie goeie punte kon kry nie.”(96)*

*“You still get those assignments where you have to cite, and those students who do not have AGLA lose many marks, because they don’t know how to do it. So, to make it a compulsory subject, where you learn how to do it, helps a lot.” / “Jy kry nogsteeds die take waar jy moet verwys, en daardie studente wat nie AGLA het nie verloor verskriklik baie punte, want hulle weet nie hoe om dit te doen nie. So, om dit juis ’n verpligte vak te maak waar jy leer om dit te doen help aansienlik baie.” (100)*

*“In comparison with our first assignments and our assignments now – the marks and what they look like – it differs a lot; it is much better.” / “In vergelyking met ons heel eerste taak en ons take nou – die punte en hoe dit lyk – verskil regtig baie; dis baie beter.” (371)*

*“If it wasn’t for AGLA we would not have done as well in our assignments!” / “As dit nie vir AGLA was nie dan het ons nie so goed gedoen in ons take nie!” (378)*

From the responses from the participants it is clear that some students do see the relevance of the course and are grateful that they had done the course. However, there are some issues identified that can be rectified with course redesign that can benefit both nursing students (cf. §8.3) and all first-year students (cf. §8.4) in general.

## **7.8 Phase 7: Longitudinal value – Pilot study follow-up questionnaire**

To determine whether the AGLA 121 course had any long-term effect on nursing students’ academic writing, a questionnaire was sent out to the remaining participants (cf. §6.5.7) who formed part of the original pilot study (who were in their third year of studies).

Firstly, the participants were asked whether RINL and LEES were necessary and useful in their first-year. One participant replied that she was very grateful that she had had RINL as their nursing lecturers expected their assignments and presentations to be technically correct and without RINL she would not be able to make proper PowerPoint presentations for the seminars that they had to present. She also said that getting the table of contents, for example, technically correct also helped to get better marks. Regarding the LEES component, the participant commented that during her first year, the reading component made her aware that her reading speed was quite slow. Even though reading techniques are briefly covered in the

academic literacy lecture programme, the participant felt the few lectures and reading a few stories were not enough to improve her reading speed. The participant would have appreciated it if she could have had more reading classes that taught her how to actually improve her reading skills and speed as she has plenty of reading material to get through for her nursing courses and does not feel that she is keeping up with all the reading required of her. Another participant felt that the LEES and RINL components were just something that she had to finish as soon as possible. The other participant replied as follows:

*“NONE of the reading, and RINL only the library search methods, which anyone who is computer literate would be able to do themselves. There is a need for students who have no computer skills to do RINL, although the fact that it is against time and for marks makes the learning process more tense and they consequently do not absorb optimally.”*  
/ “NIKS van die lees nie, en RINL slegs die biblioteek soektog metodes wat enige een wat rekenaar vaardig is self sou kon doen. Daar is wel ’n behoefte vir studente wat geen rekenaarvaardigheid het nie om RINL te doen, alhoewel die feit dat dit teen tyd en vir punte is die leerproses moontlik vir hulle meer gespanne maak en hul dus nie optimaal inneem nie.”

Secondly, the participants were asked whether they were using any of the skills that they had learnt in the AGLA 121 course. Two of the participants commented that they still used their AGLA workbooks to look at the list of discourse markers (cf. §7.7.3.1.3.5) when they wrote. One participant stated that she remembered something about discourse markers, but did not use it as she had forgotten what it was and how it should be used. She attributed this to the fact that she had only encountered discourse markers for the first time during AGLA 121 and never again in her nursing subjects. One aspect that all the participants were thankful for was that the AGLA 121 course had taught them how to reference and how to compile a bibliography (cf. §7.7.3.1.3.8) using the reference guide of the NWU, as a lot of marks can be lost if these aspects are not correctly done in nursing assignments. One participant also mentioned that they were expected to write objectively and had to write in the third person (cf. §7.7.3.1.3.6) and were grateful that she was taught how to do this in AGLA 121.

When asked about what types of texts they were expected to write in the nursing modules, the participant reported that they wrote many patient reports and patient studies where they had to describe what they saw and then do research and describe the phenomenon they had seen. One participant stated that they were only required to minimally use an argument in their writing. Another participant revealed that they had a research subject in the second semester in their third year where they would be writing research essays and arguments. This fits in with what

Gimenez (cf. §4.5; 2007:24-25; 2008:153) states about the levels of writing expected of nurses that is from beginning with descriptive writing in their first year and working up to argumentative writing. One participant gave an example of where they were expected to write argumentatively and incorporate EBP (cf. §3.3.4.2.2; §3.9; §4.7):

*“We sometimes have to be able to argue. For instance, we have to compare the different research on for example care of the umbilical cord and then decide what research is best based evidence.”* / Ons moet partykeer kan argumenteer. Byvoorbeeld ons moet die verskillende navorsings oor bv. naelstringsorg teen mekaar opweeg en dan besluit watter navorsing is die best based evidence.

The types of sources that all the participants used for academic purposes included books, and Internet and journal articles. One participant also mentioned that she used personal interviews in her writing.

When asked if they used the writing skills they had been taught in AGLA 121 in their nursing modules, all the participants concurred. One participant did highlight that she used the Harvard method in all her assignments and this became problematic when she used it in PSYH 211 where she was supposed to use the APA-method and did not know how. One participant made quite a relevant remark:

*“I don’t think writing scientifically correct has anything to do with a specific discipline, but it can ease learning if the subject is relevant.”* / Ek dink nie om wetenskaplik korrek te skryf het iets met ’n spesifieke vak rigting te doen nie, maar kan seker die aanleer vergemaklik indien dit vak relefant is (sic).

All the participants stated that their nursing lecturers were quite strict regarding language issues in their assignments and that specific marks were allocated to language in their marking rubrics (cf. Appendix F).

Regarding structure of the argument, the participants were asked what was expected in their introductions and conclusions. One participant mentioned that knowing how to write an introduction and conclusion correctly was crucial to getting good marks for nursing assignments. Another participant stated that depending on the type of writing assignment, most lecturers expect them to write what is going to be researched or investigated and then what the outcome thereof was. One participant mentioned that she was quite confused about what the lecturers expected in introductions and conclusions:

*“The introduction and conclusion is a problem for me at the moment, because different lecturers want different things. Some only want a paragraph to support the aim of the study and others want half a page with definitions, history etc. The same goes for the conclusion. Some lecturers want a paragraph on whether the goal has been reached and others want a summary of the study.” / “Die inleiding en slot is nou op die oomblik vir my ’n probleem want verskillende dosente soek verskillende goed. Party soek net ’n paragraaf om die doel van die studie te staaf en die ander soek ’n halwe bladsy met definisies, geskiedenis ens. Dieselfde geld vir die slot. Party dosente soek ’n paragraaf oor of die doel bereik was en ander soek ’n opsomming van die studie.”*

The above reference to different lecturers having different expectations can be remedied by teaching students the principles of discourse variation (cf. §2.7.3).

## **7.9 Phase 8: Study guide document analysis**

Firstly, in this phase, two of the study guides that all first-year nursing students must use were inductively analysed. The focus was on all aspects pertaining to academic writing. The study guides that were analysed were: *Introduction to community nursing (VPGI 111)* (Watson, 2009:xi-xii) and *Fundamental nursing science (VPFB 121)* (Van der Walt, 2012:xi). To determine whether academic writing issues are addressed later in nursing students’ academic careers, a third-year nursing study guide was also perused: *Nursing research process (VPNN 323)* (Pretorius & Coetzee, 2013).

In both first-year study guides, students are also clearly warned against plagiarism (cf. §3.8; §4.5; §7.6.6). The students are advised against copying from each other and from other sources. They are advised to not reproduce existing material, but to put it into their own words and integrate their opinions with the texts to offer solutions to problems if necessary. Here they are referred to the reference guide that is also prescribed in AGLA 121. Furthermore, students are warned that they would not receive any marks for the assignment and that disciplinary steps might be taken against them if they plagiarised material (Van der Walt, 2012:xiv; Watson, 2009:xv).

Regarding how their writing would be evaluated, Van der Walt (2012:viii) explained to the students that both formative and summative assessments (cf. §3.6) would take place. Students were reminded that the written assignments had to be done in a scientific way according to the

Harvard-style as required by the NWU. Students were also advised to use not only their study guides and textbooks, but also relevant and recent sources such as academic articles.

Van der Walt (2012:viii) also mentions that an andragogical teaching method is employed for the module (cf. §3.4.3). This is in line with the teaching outcomes of AGLA 121. This implies that students must aim to be self-directed students and must take both personal and professional responsibility for their learning (cf. §5.3.1; §5.3.2).

In Van der Walt (2012:xi), clear descriptions of all the writing action verbs that first-year nursing students need to know for academic writing purposes are provided. In Table 7.21, examples of these descriptions are provided.

**Table 7.21 Action verb examples from a first-year nursing study guide**

Action verb	Description	Example
<b>Critically discuss</b>	The negative as well as positive aspects are pointed out, considered and discussed.	Critically discuss Chris Barnard's view of voluntary euthanasia.
<b>Describe</b>	The attributes of something are written down in a logical and well-structured way.	Describe how you will prevent a paralytic, bedridden elderly person from getting bedsores.
<b>Explain</b>	State the case clearly and simply where applicable according to the steps.	Explain how you will monitor the intake and excretion of a patient with a disrupted water and electrolyte balance.

In AGLA 121, the following genres correlate with the action verbs that are found in the nursing students' study guides: narrative, description, explanation, discussion, classification, comparison and contrast (Van der Walt *et al.*, 2011:66). Nursing students are thus exposed to these types of verbs in AGLA 121. However, students might not see the connection between nursing and AGLA 121. AGLA 121 lecturers could refer to the nursing study guide and nursing lecturers could refer to the AGLA workbook. AGLA 121 lecturers can also analyse the frequency of certain action verbs used by first-year nursing (and other) students and assist students in applying these verbs correctly in their specific subjects. Table 7.22 is a representation of the frequency of the action verbs expected of first-year nursing students.

**Table 7.22 Frequency of action verbs used in a first-year nursing study guide**

Action verb	Frequency used in study guide
Apply	2
Develop	3
Compare	4
Define	4
Name	4
Differentiate	5
Evaluate	8
Implement	8
Distinguish	9
Identify	17
Assess	18
Describe	18
Formulate	22
Explain	86

In the study guide, *Nursing research process* (VPNN 323) (Pretorius & Coetzee, 2013), that nursing students receive in their third year at the NWU, it is clearly stated that the utilisation of technology and computers is essential for completing the writing assignments in their courses (cf. §4.7). Students are also prompted to use electronic databases as it is a prerequisite for the course. Furthermore, Pretorius and Coetzee (2013:v) mention that during the students' first year they would have already received basic guidance for writing academic papers and that it is therefore expected from them to hand in well-prepared, typed material. In the third year study guide used by nursing students at the NWU, it is stated that "[r]eading and reference technique is an important requirement for this course to present your report in a logical argument. It is also very important that you read extensively" (Pretorius & Coetzee, 2013:v). Therefore, it is important that first-year nursing students realise the relevance and importance of reading both in their AGLA 121 classes and in the LEES component (cf. §4.6).

### **7.10 Phase 9: Literature review and AGLA 121-workbook analysis**

In Chapter 5 (§5.3.3), a detailed description of the content of the AGLA 121 course is provided. In Table 7.23, the outcomes of the course are compared to the study skills required of nursing students as is evident from the literature. This was done in order to determine whether the course assisted nursing students with general study skills, but more importantly whether the course aided nursing students in their academic writing.

**Table 7.23 A comparison of AGLA 121 content and outcomes and nursing education study and writing skills requirements**

AGLA 121 WORKBOOK CONTENT	NURSING EDUCATION STUDY AND WRITING SKILLS REQUIREMENTS
<p><b>Chapter 1: Introduction to learning strategies and study skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study skills</li> <li>• Learning styles</li> <li>• Examination preparation hints</li> <li>• Meta-cognition</li> <li>• Time-management</li> <li>• Note-taking</li> </ul>	<p>As some nursing students find the transition to tertiary education quite difficult, many nursing students value study skills assistance at the start of their first-year as these skills help them to adapt to new ways of learning and writing (Bochner, 1989:187).</p> <p>Mastering study skills is vital for nursing students to become autonomous, independent students and effective nurse practitioners (Fischer <i>et al.</i>, 2001:67; Ely &amp; Scott, 2007:vii). For effective learning to take place for nursing students, the students need to be aware of their own learning styles (Rassool &amp; Rawaf, 2007:35).</p> <p>Through meta-cognition, nursing students can improve their academic work as well as their nursing practice by exploring and examining their own thinking (Colucciello, 1997:237; Fischer <i>et al.</i>, 2001:67).</p> <p>Nursing students also need assistance with time management skills, note-taking in lectures (Taylor, 1992:23), as well as with the examination practices at tertiary level (Taylor, 1992:70).</p>
<p><b>Chapter 2: Strategic reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading techniques</li> <li>• Practical tips for academic reading</li> <li>• Comprehension exercises</li> </ul>	<p>As with all students, nursing students' reading skills are inseparably interwoven with the ability to learn, study and also write effectively (Fischer <i>et al.</i>, 2001:70). Gallagher <i>et al.</i> (2001:134) also mention that reading comprehension is crucial for nursing students to be successful in nursing programmes.</p>
<p><b>Chapter 3: Academic language use</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Characteristics of academic language</li> <li>• Clarity and accuracy in academic writing</li> <li>• Objectivity</li> <li>• Academic vocabulary</li> <li>• Passive voice and the use of first/third person voice</li> </ul>	<p>Kolin and Kolin (1980:12) state that nurses tend to underpunctuate and when writing reports and recording notes, nurses are encouraged not to use complete sentences. For academic writing for nurses, it is important to punctuate correctly (Gimenez, 2007:18-21). It is vital that nursing students know the difference regarding punctuation when writing academically or professionally.</p> <p>Correct spelling is important in nursing as a single spelling error can have major consequences as Kolin and Kolin (1980:21) state that "a seemingly small matter of a misspelled word can call into question the larger issues or professional performance and skills". Nursing lecturers complain about their students' unacceptable spelling in their academic writing (Kolin &amp; Kolin, 1980:21).</p> <p>Regarding conciseness in academic and professional writing, Kolin and Kolin (1980:30) remark that nursing students and practicing</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Correct punctuation, spelling and abbreviations</li> <li>• Conciseness in academic writing</li> <li>• Text cohesion</li> <li>• Words and phrases to avoid in academic language</li> </ul>	<p>nurses' writing should be "lean and crisp".</p> <p>Writing for academic purposes, nursing students should be aware of the informal vocabulary that they use. Kolin and Kolin (1980:27) comment that nursing students and practicing nurses use clichés. However, clichés are not acceptable in academic or professional nursing writing.</p> <p>Furthermore, Price and Harrington (2010:42) remark that nursing students should omit colloquialisms in their academic writing.</p> <p>Professional nurses use an abundance of abbreviations and acronyms (Kolin &amp; Kolin, 1980:6). Professional nurses use three different types of abbreviations: shared abbreviations, standard health care abbreviations, and idiosyncratic abbreviations (Kolin &amp; Kolin, 1980:38). It is therefore important that generic literacy courses and the nursing department work closely together to help the nursing students with all the uses, rules and regulations regarding the use of abbreviations and acronyms in academic en professional writing.</p> <p>Just as with other disciplines, within the nursing discipline the debate regarding the use of first-person vs. third person voice and passive voice in assignments and reports is on-going (Gardner &amp; Rolfe, 2013:32). According to Gimenez (2012:414) impersonality is seen as an attribute. Furthermore, to not appear "unacademic", the nursing discipline prefers students to project an impersonal voice and to avoid using first-person singular and passive voice in writing their academic writing assignments (Gardner &amp; Rolfe, 2013:34; Gimenez, 2012:414-415). However, using the first person is increasingly the norm where reflective writing is required from nursing students (Price &amp; Harrington, 2010:40) and is even acceptable in certain nursing journals (Gardner &amp; Rolfe, 2013:34). Nursing students therefore need to be carefully guided with regards to which voice is acceptable in various contexts.</p> <p>To promote text cohesion, nursing students are encouraged to use related concepts and words, cohesive devices and substitution in their academic writing (Gimenez, 2007:131).</p>
<p><b>Chapter 4: Critical thinking and argumentation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical thinking</li> <li>• Constructing arguments</li> </ul>	<p>According to Paul (1993:91) critical thinking "is thinking about your thinking while you are thinking in order to make your thinking better". For academic work and nursing practice, it is important to foster and develop nursing students' critical thinking skills (Colucciolo, 1997:236; Borglin, 2012:612). Critical thinking enables nursing students to assess arguments to see whether the arguments are well thought out, logical and supported with appropriate proof as well as weighing up opposing arguments and finally being able to draw conclusions whether the argument is truly valid (Gimenez, 2007:49-50).</p> <p>To help nursing students develop their critical thinking skills, formal academic writing assignments can be used to present their arguments in a clear and structured way (Sorrell <i>et al.</i>, 1997:13-14; Gimenez, 2007:50; Newton &amp; Moore, 2010:221).</p>

	<p>In the third year nursing study guide for the nursing students at the NWU, Pretorius and Coetzee (2013:8) state that academic reading and writing require critical thinking in order to analyse, evaluate and eventually formulate arguments.</p>
<p><b>Chapter 5: Planning and structuring an academic text</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Genres</li> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Body</li> <li>• Conclusion</li> <li>• Source quality</li> <li>• Referencing</li> <li>• Plagiarism</li> <li>• Compiling a bibliography</li> </ul>	<p>There are many types of essay writing genres that nursing students must be able to produce such as descriptive, argumentative and reflective essays (Gimenez, 2007:24).</p> <p>According to Gardner and Rolfe (2013:34) many nursing journals have a rigid structure and strict guidelines and headings such as <i>aims, background, method</i> and <i>relevance</i>. Therefore, even though the structure expected from the students will vary from lecturer to lecturer and from assignment to assignment, it is important that undergraduate nursing students learn and respect the importance of structure in academic writing.</p> <p>Just as other disciplines, most pieces of academic nursing writing have a beginning, middle and end (introduction, body and conclusion) (Price &amp; Harrington, 2010:40). Nursing students must know the general purposes and structures of introductions, main bodies with headings and subheadings, and conclusions are (Price &amp; Harrington, 2010:40-42; Diehl, 2007:203).</p> <p>Another very important skill that nursing students must learn regarding their academic writing, is signposting (Gimenez, 2007:27; Price &amp; Harrington, 2010:41).</p> <p>In academic writing assignments, nursing students are also expected to produce disciplined paragraphs where one paragraph attends to a single subject, has a topic sentence and evidence for what claims has been made (Gimenez, 2007:14-15; Price &amp; Harrington, 2010:42).</p> <p>Nursing students are also required to use various sources and must know how to manage the vast amount of available literature and how to determine relevant source quality (Taylor, 1992:34; Brennan, 1995:351; Mason-Whitehead &amp; Mason, 2008:59).</p> <p>Students must also learn how to reference (Gardner &amp; Rolfe, 2013:32) and use literature to support and frame their academic writing and must be cautioned against over quoting (Diehl, 2007:203). Nursing students must also be warned against plagiarism and be taught how to paraphrase (Gimenez, 2007:142).</p>
<p><b>Chapter 6: Empirical research and the research paper</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empirical research</li> <li>• Quantitative and qualitative research</li> <li>• Examples of research</li> </ul>	<p>Nursing students, nursing lecturers and practicing nurses who choose to write for academic journals need to know how to write empirical research reports as many nursing journals mostly contain empirical research reports (Gardner &amp; Rolfe, 2013:33).</p> <p>In the nursing programme at the NWU, nursing students are exposed to and expected to produce research essays and reports utilising empirical research (Pretorius &amp; Coetzee, 2013:20).</p>

reports	
<p><b>Chapter 7: Seminar skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication models</li> <li>• Preparing for seminars</li> <li>• Presentation of seminars</li> </ul>	<p>Nursing students and practicing nurses need to be able to communicate effectively with various people in various discourses. Effective communication is an essential element of nursing (Bowls, Mackintosh &amp; Torn, 2001:348), both academically where nursing students are expected to present seminars (Taylor, 1992:55) and in the nursing practice where communication plays an important role in patient recovery (Chant <i>et al.</i>, 2002:13).</p>

From Table 7.23, it is evident that the content covered in the AGLA 121 course, corresponds to what is expected from the basic study skills of nursing students in the literature. Following is a summary of the general study skills (that are all connected to writing), expected of nursing students that is covered in AGLA 121: learning styles and skills; time management; examination techniques; the importance of reading, lectures and effective note taking; the use of technology and why it is important that nursing students are information literate; being aware of the various types of writing genres expected from them and the expected styles; the importance of developing well-structured arguments; acquiring skills needed to manage and evaluate research literature; learning to reference and using referencing systems; and communication and presentation skills.

From the nursing literature, regarding study skills and specifically writing skills, it is clear that one element that is clearly missing from the AGLA 121 course, is the importance of reflection in nursing (cf. Gimenez, 2007; Mason-Whitehead & Mason, 2008:175; Hurford, 2009; Maslin-Prothero, 2010). Pianko (1979:275) and Scardamalia *et al.* (1984:173) state that reflection is seen as a valuable aid to the writing process (cf. §3.3.4.2.3). Mason-Whitehead and Mason (2008:175) support this view and mention that for nursing students, reflection can be used as a learning aid for “academic knowledge and writing as well as for practice”. Thus, as the AGLA 121 course already follows a process approach to writing, not only nursing students, but all first-year students can benefit from reflective writing as a critical component of the writing process. The role of descriptive writing should also be practiced and highlighted in AGLA 121 (cf. §4.5).

## 7.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, the results from the empirical research phases were provided and discussed. The data were gathered from various sources in order to provide an in-depth description of the

academic needs and requirements of first-year nursing students worldwide, in South Africa and at the NWU Potchefstroom Campus.

Firstly, the responses from the interview with the first-year student nursing facilitator were analysed and discussed (cf. §7.2) It became clear that the Subject Group Nursing valued their students' writing abilities. What stood out from the interview was that the Subject Group Nursing expected their students to write more descriptively than argumentatively. This could have important implications for AGLA 121 course redesign. Regarding the nursing facilitator interview, the participants' responses confirmed the commitment of the Subject Group Nursing to their students' academic writing abilities and needs. The findings from the pilot study focus group interviews (cf. §7.4) correlated closely with the findings from the focus group interviews (cf. §7.7) as well as the responses from the participants from the pilot study follow-up questionnaire (cf. §7.8). It is clear that the same issues (such as the participants' concerns about workload and time-management, LEES, RINL and eFundi) appear in all three stages and therefore need to be addressed in course redesign. There are, however, many positive aspects of the course that can be continued as is. Many of the participants expressed their gratitude towards the course and the positive contribution that it made to their practice of academic writing. The main findings from the AGLA 121 questionnaire confirmed that high school education does not adequately prepare first-year students for university literacy and writing requirements. Thereafter, the TAG and essay results (c. §7.6) indicated that the participants' academic writing did improve significantly. After document analyses of nursing study guides (cf. §7.9) and a comparison between the AGLA 121 workbook and evidence from the nursing literature (cf. §7.10), it was confirmed that the mainly generic approach of the AGLA 121 did cover most of the writing needs and requirements of nursing students at the NWU. However, there were certain aspects such as the role of descriptive and reflective writing and subject-specific writing topics that need to be incorporated into the AGLA 121 curriculum.

## CHAPTER 8: REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*“What? So what? Now what?” (Rolfe et al., 2001)*

### 8.1 Introduction

Alderson (1992:299) believes that all evaluations should be reflexive in nature. Furthermore, evaluations should serve pragmatic needs, assist programme designers to take appropriate actions based on the evaluation, and most importantly the results should be useful for recommendation purposes.

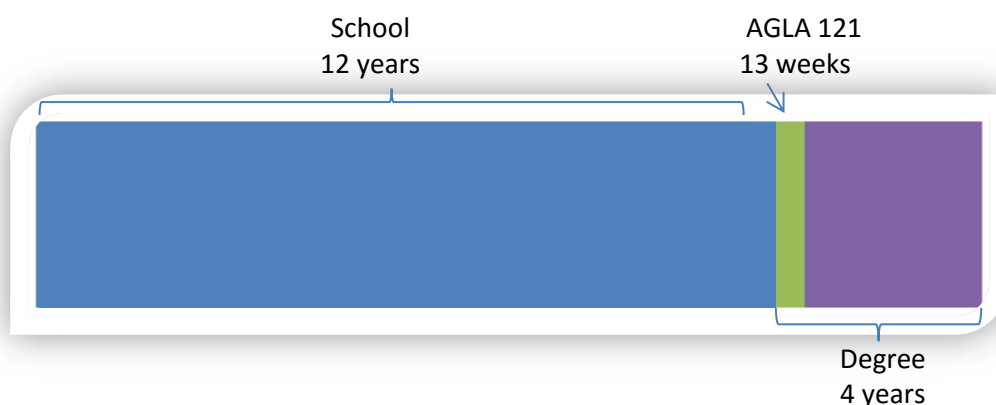
This chapter reflects on the evaluation processes and experiences of the study. The function of this chapter is three-fold. Firstly, a personal reflection on the entire study is provided (§8.2). Subsequently, suggestions are made for course redesign for nursing students, who are the main stakeholders of this study (§8.3). Thereafter, ideal world and real world suggestions are made regarding the overall AGLA 121 course (§8.4). These suggestions pertain to course content and methodology.

### 8.2 Some personal reflections

The first question to be answered in this section of the thesis is why I attempted this research and considered it justifiable and necessary to conduct? As a former high school language teacher (both overseas and in South Africa) and currently an academic literacy lecturer at the NWU Potchefstroom Campus' Centre for Academic and Professional Language Practice (CAPLP), I am aware of what first-year students are capable of writing when they enter university and the almost impossible skills and knowledge that many lecturers expect them to have when they start tertiary education.

At the beginning of the study, the following questions came to mind: What is literacy? What is academic literacy? Is the content and teaching of academic literacy adequate enough to help the nursing students become “academically literate” and support them with their academic writing? What exactly is academic writing? Is the writing programme of AGLA 121 effective? Do we expect too much of first years and then nothing after that? Do faculties of universities care that they deliver students who are not fully academically literate and cannot produce proper written assignments? These questions informed the research questions (cf. §1.4), paradigms, and methodologies followed in this study (cf. Chapter 6).

The first two questions are really difficult to answer as there are as many definitions as there are different subjects, disciplines, faculties, contexts, lecturers and writing assessment tasks. In Chapter 2 (§2.3; §2.4.1) it was described how difficult it is to define the concepts of literacy and academic literacy. It is thus proposed that the definition for student literacy and academic literacy should be made student-specific in a way that that describes their needs at a certain point in their academic careers. Students will become members of their academic discourse communities at different times as they acquire academic literacy skills at their own pace. However, time is an important issue to address especially as AGLA 121 is only prescribed for thirteen weeks in total. Figure 8.1 illustrates the short amount of time that students are exposed to academic literacy compared to their entire academic careers. If twelve years of schooling could not address all of their literacy needs, then thirteen weeks might not make much of a difference. According to Evans and Morrison (2010:395), the process of disciplinary academic acculturation does not happen easily and quickly for most students and usually takes longer than a semester to acquire. Therefore, it is imperative that the length of the AGLA 121 course is extended as it is evident that thirteen weeks are not enough, especially if follow-up courses throughout their academic career are not provided.



**Figure 8.1 Academic literacy acquisition timeline**

Looking at Figure 8.1 it is evident that the AGLA 121 course occupies a very small part of a nursing student's academic career but not acquiring the skills presented in the course can have high-stakes implications later on.

The question pertaining to what academic writing actually is was also difficult to answer. The scope of what the two words **academic writing** actually entailed is quite overwhelming to investigate. Therefore, I could just imagine how overcome many first-year students must be when they are confronted with a variety of university writing tasks with different expectations from different lecturers. Figure 8.2 visualises words and phrases (as identified in Chapter 3)



university. The possible answers to these research questions are summarised in Chapter 9 (§9.2). In the following section, I provide possible recommendations that could be implemented after the evaluation.

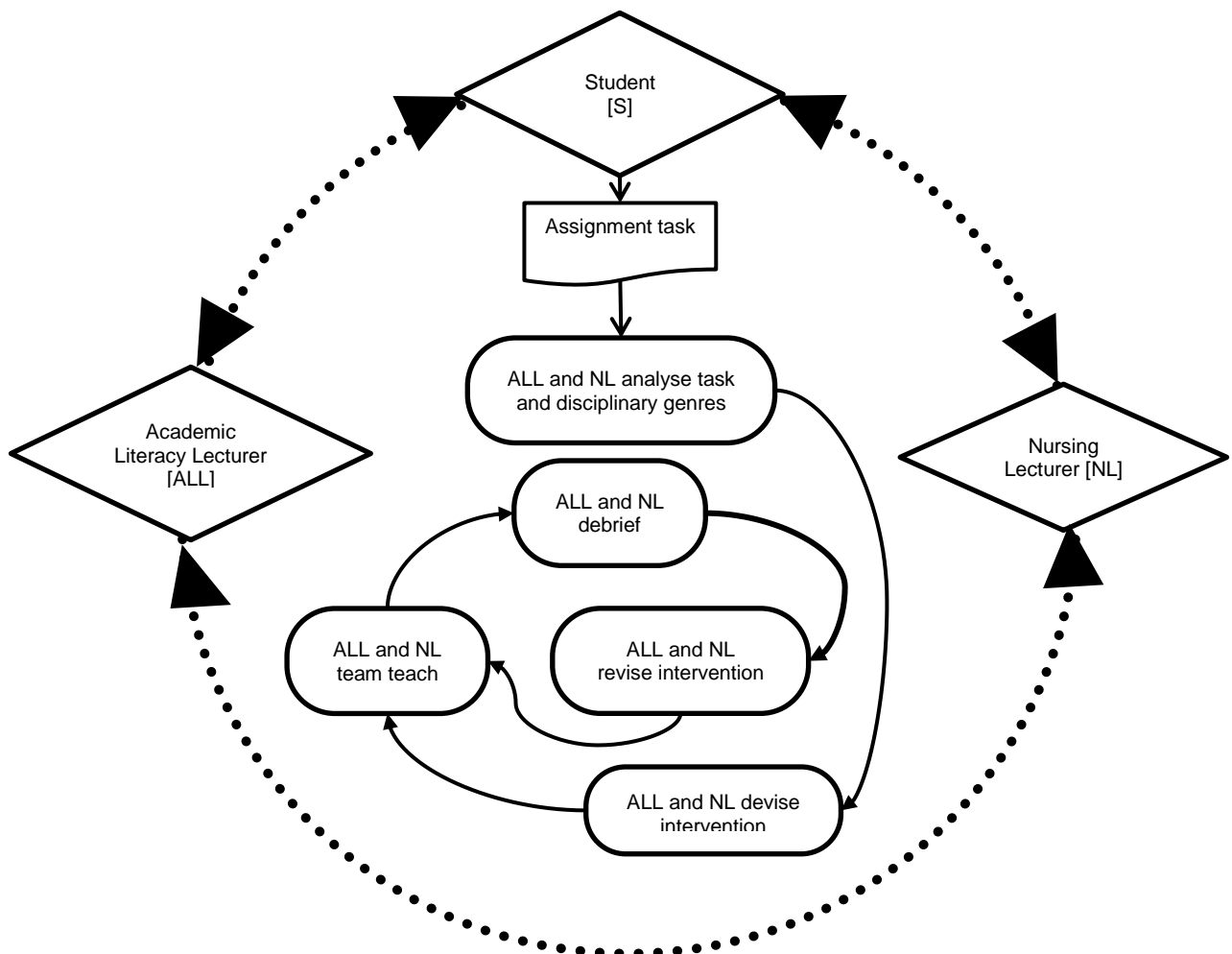
### **8.3 Recommendations of how AGLA 121 can further assist nursing students' academic writing**

What was clearly missing from the AGLA 121 course with regard to nursing students' needs, was more practice and exposure to descriptive and reflective essays (cf. §7.2; §7.10). As the curriculum is already quite full, students can be provided with sample texts of these genres on eFundi that they can compare to the argumentative essays in their own time and whenever they need it. The chart from Table 4.3 can also be used to provide nursing students with additional examples regarding the genres expected of them.

The main recommendation proposed in this study is that closer collaboration with the Subject Group Nursing should be established. Firstly, for example, AGLA 121 lecturers could work in partnership with the nursing lecturers to find out exactly what nursing content is covered during the first-year. This could assist the AGLA 121 lecturers with topics and texts of interest to nursing students (cf. §3.3.6.1; §7.7.3.2). For example, the very first assignment could be a descriptive essay about the importance of "washing hands" as it is the very first learning material that the nursing students encounter and what the nursing lecturers expect them to write about (cf. §7.2). The nursing lecturers could also provide the academic literacy lecturers with subject-specific vocabulary and terminology that can be incorporated into classes and materials. Academic literacy lecturers can also encourage nursing students to incorporate EBP (cf. §3.3.4; §4.7; §7.8) into their argumentative essays (cf. §3.10.1.1).

In an ideal world, with longer academic literacy courses, an adapted version of McWilliams and Allan's best-practice model (2014:9) is proposed as a possible solution if full subject-specific academic literacy teaching is not possible. This model is based on the premise that the writing intervention is developed around an **assignment task** designed by both the literacy lecturer and the nursing lecturer. The literacy lecturer and the nursing lecturer conduct a survey together of the disciplinary practices and genres. They decide together on the task, topic, outcomes and criteria. Afterwards they determine whether all their students' needs will be met through the designed intervention. The literacy and nursing lecturers then decide the nature of the interventions. For example, contact sessions could be in set weekly classes or monthly workshops throughout the semester / year(s). Team teaching and assessment then take place with whatever the literacy lecturer and nursing lecturers decide on. After every task, the literacy

lecturer, nursing lecturer and the students debrief and evaluate the effectiveness and suitability of the task. The literacy lecturer and nursing lecturer then revise the assessment task/intervention. This model is extremely flexible and can continuously be tailored to suit the needs of all the stakeholders. Most importantly, it places the students at the centre of the intervention. For the model to be effectively implemented institution-wide support is required. A possible constraint is that the initial planning could be difficult and time consuming. Figure 8.3 is a representation of this model.



**Figure 8.3 Adapted McWilliams and Allan's best-practice model**

However, more examples of different models and research are necessary to find a solution that will suit all stakeholders.

Regarding the content and materials of AGLA 121, it is proposed that generic examples and exercises can be used in contact lessons; especially if not all subject groups can be made into subject-specific classes. Subject-specific exercises can be placed online for students to do at

their own pace and time, which could help with the research participants' complaints about time management (cf. §4.2; §7.7.2.1.8).

To make even the testing of nursing students' academic literacy skills more subject-specific, a test similar to ICELDA's (2014) test for nursing students, the Test of Academic Literacy (TAL) of the Free State School of Nursing for prospective students of nursing can be adjusted for the NWU's nursing students. Once again, in an ideal world, financially and time-permitting, specialised academic literacy tests could be designed for all schools and faculties.

Unfortunately not all of the nursing students' specific needs can be met. For example, their workloads cannot be made less. However, students' attitudes towards academic literacy and academic writing can be influenced if the students see the relevance, value and effect of the writing programme of AGLA 121 by making it more discipline specific.

#### **8.4 Recommendations: The way forward for AGLA 121?**

In the following section, recommendations are made that can be used for AGLA 121's redesign.

##### **8.4.1 LEES and RINL**

Even though the issues identified from the interviews are not always directly related to writing (such as LEES, RINL and the TAG) it is relevant to address these issues as a negative attitude towards these concerns can eventually have an effect on student writing motivation as well as how the students approach and eventually produce writing (cf. §3.3.6).

In Chapter 4 (cf. §4.5), it became evident that in the digital and information age, it is vital that nursing students should be computer literate. Closer collaboration between the academic literacy unit and the Subject Group Nursing is needed where both parties stress the importance of nursing students being computer literate. The RINL component could be adapted for nursing students with content and exercises that they will need for their course work and nursing practice.

The administrators of LEES need to extend the hours for students to complete the course and need to create a more positive environment. Students also need more information beforehand about the implications of the reading pre-testing and what the consequences are. LEES could design more subject-relevant texts that interest nursing students in order to enhance their motivation and attitude towards reading and academic literacy and eventually even their writing.

Regrettably, such a solution would entail plenty of time and money that is not necessarily available.

#### 8.4.2 Technological aspects

As some first-year students have never had to deal with an electronic and digital environment used for academic purposes, it is important that the university provides enough **information** and **training opportunities**. It is essential that students know how to navigate eFundi as almost all the lecturers use eFundi for class preparations and assessment purposes. Therefore, all students must know how to use eFundi, not only for RINL and AGLA 121, but for all their subjects, as failing in knowing how to use eFundi could eventually have a negative influence on their entire academic career.

Fudin (2012) provides the following suggestions for helping students with the challenges but also opportunities that technology can offer:

- Immediate electronic feedback (such as multiple-choice tests) can help to motivate students and increase their confidence.
- Students can engage online with, for example, blogging or podcasting with fellow students and even students around the world. Collaborative learning could take place.
- Technology can help students with **problem solving** and **critical thinking**. For example, students should be given instruction on how to search for reliable sources online.

Through using technology effectively, the AGLA 121 course designers could thus not only strive to assist students with their general academic literacy and academic writing, but the nature thereof can help the course designers make the course more **subject-specific** by supplementing the generic contact classes with subject-specific examples and exercises on eFundi.

Moreover, technology could be implemented for **differentiation** purposes. Differentiation can be defined as instruction being tailored to address students' individual needs (O'Brien & Guiney, 2001:4). Technology can thus be used to make the course more **student-specific**. For example, the TAG / TALL can also potentially have pedagogical and diagnostic value. It seems wasteful not to use the test results and data available as proficiency tests and placement tests can be utilized for diagnostic and eventually pedagogic purposes (Zhao, 2013:43). It is therefore proposed that students receive their results by means of an individual electronic diagnostic report. This is an opportunity for feedback (cf. §3.7) on the test to see on the test itself where they went wrong through interactive computer-based instruction (CBI) as proposed by Clariana *et al.* (1991:5). Students could, for example, see what the correct answers were and extra

information could perhaps be provided as to how to answer multiple-choice questions. Students could also be given the opportunity of getting additional practice with a database of questions in areas where their reports indicated a weakness. If these weaknesses are addressed early in the semester, it might even improve their writing in certain aspects - for example, if students struggle with vocabulary they can do extra exercises on eFundi that could help them with their written assignments. Students' essays could also be marked electronically on eFundi by using software such as MarkWrite. Students can be referred to extra exercises on eFundi for help with aspects of writing that they struggle with.

Other technological tools can be used to help students with their academic writing, for example, *wikis* and *Google Docs* where students can help each other with their writing assignments online. Technology can thus support cooperative learning (cf. §3.4.3) that may eventually result in **self-directed learning** (cf. §3.4.3) and eventually in students successfully producing individual written texts.

### **8.4.3 Testing**

It is important that students should not only write tests such as the TAG/TALL that measures their literacy levels, but also tests like the Daly-Miller (cf. §3.3.6.2) in order to screen their attitude especially towards academic writing. After the apprehensive students are identified, the literacy lecturers should ideally help them to cope with and manage their stress and anxiety relating to writing. This can be accomplished, for example, by providing students not only with negative feedback, but with positive feedback too.

Previously in the chapter (cf. §8.3) it was suggested that a nursing-specific test should be designed and given to first-year nursing students. This idea can be expanded and tests for all subject groups could be designed. However, the reality is that there are many subject groups and it would not really be economically and practically feasible. Discipline-specific tests could be a more feasible solution and could be used for examination purposes.

### **8.4.4 Teaching and content**

Through the following techniques by Thonney (2011), application to subject-specificity can be reached in generic classrooms:

- Students are required to read authentic academic texts as examples, in order to be exposed to a variety of academic writing conventions.

- Just as it is important for students to have knowledge about the general conventions of academic writing; they also need to know how academic writing varies. Students can be shown examples of different genres within their discipline as well as how citation conventions differ (Harvard, APA). Lecturers cannot teach students all the different conventions, but students can be taught to expect variety and to then appropriately respond to it.
- Students should practice both generic and subject-specific principles. For example, students can analyse how different authors use hedges or the first/third person and for what reasons. With such exercises students are made aware of the commonality and variation that exists in academic writing.
- Students should be made aware of the dynamic nature of academic writing. For example, a century ago, the well-known and well-used IMRaD (Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion) format was extremely rare. Students should understand that writing conventions are not set “rules” but constantly develop to meet required needs.

What could be included for both nursing students and other students are **sample essays** (cf. §4.4; Catt & Gregory, 2006:26; Conradie, 2009:42; DasBender, 2011:45; Granville & Dison, 2009:57; Skillen, 2006:143; Thonney, 2011) placed on eFundi. These essays could be provided by the various subjects/disciplines or the essays can be designed together with the academic literacy lecturers. These sample essays can then be available for students to use as the need arises over their academic careers. Students can also be exposed to examples of good and poorly written essays. The sample essays can also serve as a platform to discuss the criteria that will be used for assessment purposes.

At the time of the research, the AGLA 121 course was very prescriptive and indeed did teach the students writing conventions (cf. §3.8). However, as seen from the above suggestions, the principle of discourse variation as suggested in Chapter 2 (cf. §2.7.3) could be implemented in course redesign. It is not the job of academic literacy lecturers to “fix” students and highlight their writing deficiencies. The following quotes summarise what courses like AGLA 121 should aim to teach:

- “Literacy teaching is not about skills and competence; it is aimed at creating a kind of person, an active designer of meaning, with a sensibility open to differences, change and innovation” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009:175).
- “It seems important to think of academic literacy as something that has to be constantly negotiated and provides students with opportunities to develop flexible literacy repertoires that can morph and adapt to changing conditions” (Henderson & Hirst, 2006:3).
- “Students should be offered access to the range of knowledge, abilities, and forms of language, discourses that will enable them to lay claim to the social identities that afford them a participant status in the social communities of their choice, and to provide scaffolding (and a truly supportive environment) for the attainment of these” (Hawkins, 2004:23).
- “Central to the mastery of academic writing is the novice writer’s development of discourse competence, particularly in relation to academic prose. This involves writers developing the ability to integrate a wide range of different types of knowledge in order to create extended

written discourse that is both linguistically correct and socially appropriate” (Bruce, 2008:1-2).

It is evident that students should be exposed to a variety of writing genres in order for them to function effectively at university.

#### **8.4.5 Collaboration strategies**

In order for AGLA 121 to be truly successful and have a real effect on first-year students’ academic writing, collaboration should exist on all levels.

To make the transition from high school to university easier, a possible solution could be that there could/should be more co-operation between high schools, the Department of Education and literacy lecturers at universities. When learners are doing research projects, for example, high school teachers could start teaching the basics and stress the importance of referencing and not committing plagiarism. Teachers can also make learners aware of plagiarism-detection software such as Turnitin.com (Scanlon & Neumann, 2002:374).

In order to address the issue that there are too many subject groups on the NWU’s Potchefstroom Campus to have purely subject-specific academic literacy courses, core subjects for all the disciplines could be identified and collaborated with. Lecturers from these core subjects could supply the academic literacy lecturers with content from these subjects and materials and tasks can be designed from this content. Adapted versions of McWilliams and Allan’s best-practice model (cf. §8.3) suggested for the nursing students can be applied for all these core subjects. Working closely with the students’ subject groups can help with students’ attitude (cf. §3.3.6.1) towards AGLA 121 and their writing in general as they will be more exposed to materials that they see relevant for their studies.

#### **8.5 Concluding views and suggestions**

The main aim of this study was to determine whether the academic literacy course, AGLA 121 had an effect on and adequately supported first-year nursing students’ academic writing needs. From the empirical study, it became clear that the nursing students’ academic writing did improve and many of the participants realised the importance and value of AGLA 121. However, some shortcomings were identified and through some of the recommendations provided in this chapter, these limitations can be rectified in programme and course redesign and through continuous programme evaluations.

To illustrate a final view of what AGLA 121 could be, an adapted version based on the original Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (cf. Maslow, 1943, 1954) was used. This five-stage model consists of basic or deficiency needs such as physiological, safety, love and esteem as well as

growth needs that realise in self-actualisation (McLeod, 2014). These five stages were related to the students' journey with academic writing.

The premise underlying the use of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was to demonstrate that generic courses in combination with subject-specific literacy courses are necessary and justified. Simons *et al.* (1987) explain that according to Maslow, humans at first have weak dispositions and that if the environment around them is right, people will grow and actualise the potential they have. Relevant to this study is that if students' basic literacy needs are not met in the safe environment that AGLA 121 provides, they cannot be motivated to grow and acculturate in the academy and become productive members of the academic community. The students (specifically first-year students) need certain generic skills as "stepping stones" for scaling the academic hierarchy (Figure 8.4) in their subject /discipline. These skills can also help students to bridge the "information gap" (cf. §1.8).

AGLA 121 can and should therefore follow both a generic wide-angled and narrow-angled subject-specific approach (cf. §2.7.1) and work closely with the nursing lecturers in order to support students with their academic writing needs so that they can become self-directed and self-regulated writers.

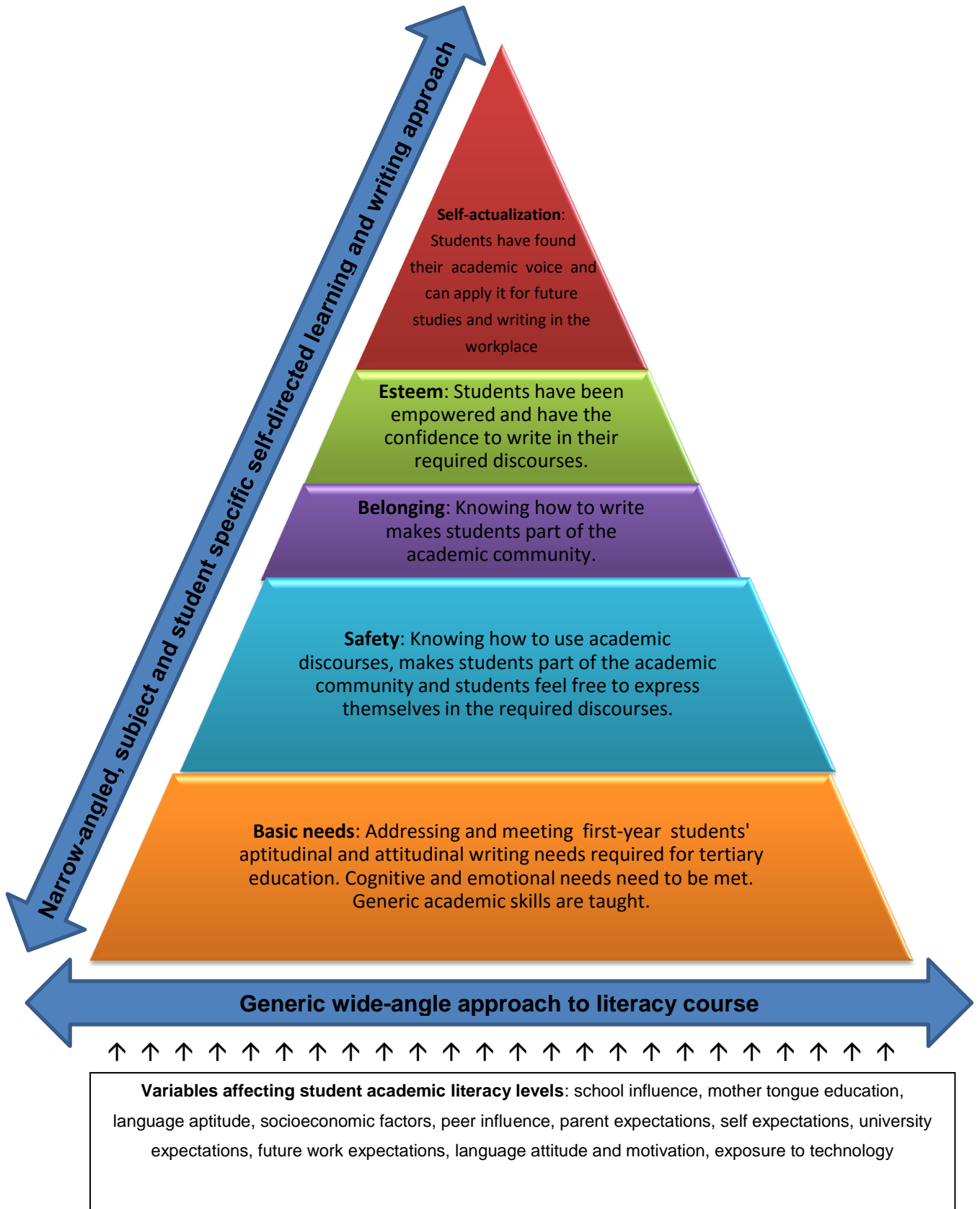


Figure 8.4 Stepping stones for scaling the academic hierarchy

## **8.6 Conclusion**

This chapter reflected on the evaluation processes and experiences of the study. Firstly, a personal reflection of the entire study was provided (§8.2). Thereafter, suggestions were made for course redesign for nursing students, who are the main stakeholders of this study (§8.3). Subsequently, ideal world and real world suggestions were made regarding the overall AGLA 121 course (§8.4). These suggestions pertained to course content and methodology.

In the following chapter, final concluding remarks about the entire study are provided.

## CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

*“Everything will be all right in the end ... if it is not all right then it is not yet the end.”*

*Madden (2011)*

### 9.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1 (§1.4), the following research questions were formulated to establish the nature of and the effect that the compulsory academic literacy course at the NWU’s Potchefstroom Campus has on first-year nursing students’ writing:

- What are the current views and definitions of literacy and academic literacy?
- What are the characteristics of academic writing?
- What are the current trends and views regarding the teaching and learning of academic writing at first-year level?
- What are the nature and characteristics of academic writing practices of nursing students?
- Is the academic literacy course (AGLA 121) effective in assisting and developing first-year nursing students’ writing needs?
- What proposals can be made regarding the content, teaching and learning methods, materials and assessment of student writing in the writing programme in the academic literacy course in general and specifically for nursing students?

An attempt to answer these questions was made through conducting a programme evaluation of the case study. Table 9.1 summarises the main questions that formed the basis of the evaluation.

**Table 9.1 Evaluation questions**

<b>WHAT?</b>	<p><b>AGLA 121 course:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main focus on the writing aspect</li> <li>• To determine the effect of the AGLA 121 course on first-year nursing students' academic writing</li> </ul>
<b>HOW?</b>	<p><b>Programme evaluation based on:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pragmatist, constructivist, interpretivist, and positivist paradigms</li> <li>• Case study design</li> <li>• Mixed-methods</li> </ul>
<b>WHERE?</b>	<b>NWU, Potchefstroom Campus</b>
<b>WHO?</b>	<p><b>The main stakeholders for this study:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nursing students</li> </ul> <p>If (nursing) students are adequately assisted with their academic literacy, learning and writing needs, then all involved stakeholders could eventually benefit.</p> <p><b>Future stakeholders:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NWU (management)</li> <li>• Nursing and AGLA 121 lecturers</li> <li>• All faculties and students</li> </ul>
<b>WHY?</b>	It is the responsibility of the course designers to assure all the stakeholders that the course is useful, relevant and effective in helping first-year students with their academic writing needs.
<b>WHEN?</b>	<p><b>2011 – Ongoing</b></p> <p>The research with the nursing students started in 2011. It is clear that ongoing evaluations are necessary to ensure that the writing needs of students are continuously adhered to.</p>

## 9.2 Findings

Possible answers to the research questions as they were accommodated in the various chapters are provided in this section.

### 9.2.1 What are the current views and definitions of literacy and academic literacy?

When students enter university, they bring with them twelve years of schooling and most of their attitudes, perceptions and skills of writing already have been formed. However, there is a vast difference between the type and level of writing that they were exposed to and expected to write respectively in high school and at university. In Chapter 1 (cf. §1.2), various reasons were provided why first-year students sometimes struggle with literacy issues and consequently struggle to bridge the gap from high school to university. Some of these variables that affect first-year students' academic literacy levels include aspects such as school influence (or lack

thereof), mother tongue education (or lack thereof), OBE education, socio-economic factors, exposure to technology, peer influence, language aptitude, language attitude and motivation, university expectations and workplace expectations. All these aspects could have an influence on students' academic writing. To address all or at least some of these variables, many universities worldwide support students with academic literacy courses and writing programmes that ultimately help them with their academic writing needs in order for them to eventually become part of their various academic discourse communities (cf. §2.5).

Before students are placed in their various support literacy courses, they are often tested to determine what type of intervention is required. In South Africa, universities use academic literacy tests that fit their specific needs (cf. §1.2). The NWU uses the TAG and TALL designed by ICELDA as the tests are highly valid and reliable (cf. §1.2; §5.2).

After the students have been tested at the NWU's Potchefstroom Campus, they are placed in their various courses. Universities base these courses on various models of literacy acquisition (cf. §2.6). The models discussed in this study were chosen as they aligned most effectively with academic literacy. Even though the models were discussed separately, they were not viewed in isolation. Rather, their best qualities provide the opportunity for use in course re-design. From Lea and Street's models (cf. §2.6.1) it became clear that a combination of their models seems to be the best solution to solve some of the issues related to academic literacy acquisition. Study skills should not be implemented in isolation, but as an important part of academic literacy. Study skills should serve as basis for initiation and socialisation into the academic discourse communities as suggested in the academic socialisation model. As became apparent in the research, literacy and writing are not uniform across all disciplines. Therefore, the academic literacies model is seen as an important model as students should learn how to apply the correct discourses in the correct contexts. Luke and Freebody's model (cf. §2.6.2) highlights the various roles that students have to "play" when they are busy with academic writing activities. Managing all these roles is not easy for many students and literacy and subject specialists should take it into consideration when they assess their students' written assignments. Cazden *et al.*'s model (cf. §2.6.3) stresses the importance of overt instruction and that courses such as AGLA 121 indeed are necessary and useful. Another important aspect of this model is that students are eventually able to apply what they have learnt on their own and become self-directed students (cf. §3.4.3). Cope and Kalantzis' model (cf. §2.6.4) emphasises that students must eventually be able to apply what they have learnt and transfer it to their other subjects.

Not all the stakeholders involved in students' academic literacy acquisition are always convinced of the nature and effectiveness of academic literacy courses. Some researchers,

course designers and lecturers are proponents of generic types of academic literacy and writing courses (cf. §2.7.1). In contrast, some researchers, course designers and lecturers believe that a subject-specific intervention is the only option (cf. §2.7.2). After viewing both approaches, it became evident that a blended approach (cf. §2.7.3) seems to be the best answer. Most importantly, it is proposed that the main focus of AGLA 121 should be to sensitize students to the principle of discourse variation (cf. §2.7.3).

## **9.2.2 What are the characteristics of academic writing?**

An attempt was made to define academic writing which resulted in the realisation of the enormous scope that academic writing entails. One of the main characteristics of academic writing is the perceived difficulty thereof. General student deficiencies are discussed in Chapter 3 (cf. §3.9). There are many reasons that influence students to struggle with academic writing. A poor schooling background (cf. §3.3.1) can cause students to struggle to bridge the gap between high school and university writing. Furthermore, poor reading skills (cf. §3.3.2) and poor technology and information literacy skills (cf. §3.3.3) also contribute to students' poor writing performance.

Academic writing is also a very cognitively demanding activity and many cognitive factors (§3.3.4) affect academic writing. The different cognitive models (cf. §3.3.4.1) described in Chapter 3 emphasised the wide range of cognitive processes necessary for academic writing. Students should be able to function effectively and possess the following cognitive skills: critical thinking, knowledge, memory, metacognition, planning, problem-solving, self-evaluation, self-regulation, reflecting and revising. Once again it is evident that "good" academic writing requires many steps and processes and may be quite difficult to manage for many first-year students.

Academic writing is not only a cognitive activity, but a social one as well (cf. §3.3.5). The university is a new social environment that the students need to function in. Affective factors (cf. §3.3.6) such as attitude and motivation (cf. §3.3.6.1) also influence the quality of students' academic writing. Many students experience writing in a negative way and might even suffer from writing apprehension (cf. §3.3.6.2).

In order to describe some of the characteristics of academic writing, the so-called "general conventions of academic writing" (cf. §3.8) were discussed. Some of these conventions include academic writing register, style and voice (cf. §3.8.1), metadiscourse (cf. §3.8.2), providing definitions (cf. §3.8.3), and the use of citations and referencing (cf. §3.8.4). It became clear that many of these generic conventions can be viewed by some in the academic discourse communities as being "archaic". For example, not all discourse communities still expect

students to write in the third person and in the passive voice. Fortunately for this study, the writing conventions required of nursing students were quite similar to the general academic conventions taught in the AGLA 121 course. However, in an overall course redesign these general conventions must be re-evaluated for the different subject groups so that their specific needs are addressed.

Writing an academic argument in the academic essay remains the most common type of written assessment (cf. §3.10) with the argumentative essay (cf. §3.10.1.1) as default genre. However, from the empirical research it became apparent that nursing students need to be exposed to various other genres first such as descriptive and reflective essays (cf. §7.2; §7.10).

### **9.2.3 What are the current trends and views regarding the teaching and learning of academic writing at first-year level?**

Many of the writing centres and writing courses (cf. §3.2.2) base their teaching of academic writing on certain learning theories (cf. §3.4). The learning theories that were relevant to the AGLA 121 course were discussed. Although CTR and behaviourism (cf. §3.4.1) are not always popular in modern literacy classes, there are certain aspects that are valuable for the AGLA 121 course. Some of these aspects include the focus on form and correctness that are assessed in both the AGLA assignments as well as nursing assignments (Appendices E and F). The cognitivism and social cognitivism (§3.4.2) theories emphasize the importance of student self-efficacy and self-regulation. With constructivism and social constructivism (§3.4.3), the significance of scaffolding students' learning through cooperative and collaborative techniques were foregrounded. Eventually students should become independent, self-directed students.

To accommodate the broad range of learning and writing styles of students, the teaching and eventual assessment of academic writing (cf. §3.6) should be based on a blended approach (cf. §3.5.4) to teaching academic writing (cf. §3.5). A combination of the certain relevant features of product approaches (cf. §3.5.1), process approaches (cf. §3.5.2), and genre approaches (cf. §3.5.3) can make the writing programme of academic literacy courses, such as the AGLA 121 course, even more effective.

### **9.2.4 What are the nature and characteristics of academic writing practices of nursing students?**

In Chapter 4, the wide range of genres that first-year nursing students are expected to manage with an intensive overall workload (cf. §4.2) became prominent. Some of the writing

assignments include descriptive essays, argumentative essays, care critique, reflective essays, arguments, action plans, care plans, portfolios, reports and research proposals. Nursing students constantly move between writing tasks that are relevant to either academic and/or professional purposes. Once again the importance of the principle of discourse variation (cf. §2.7.3; §9.2.1) should be made clear to students so that they are certain that they know when to use which discourse. For nursing students, academic writing is also a valuable tool for learning and can assist students with self-regulation (cf. §4.2).

### **9.2.5 Is the academic literacy course (AGLA 121) effective in assisting and developing first-year nursing students' writing?**

Statistically, most of the participants showed a significant improvement in their general academic literacy skills and academic writing (cf. §7.6). The nursing students were also mostly positive about the course in general and indicated that the course did improve their academic writing (cf. §7.4; §7.7; §7.8). However, even though most of the participants showed improvement, there are still certain aspects of the course that can be developed. From a longitudinal point of view, the participants were mostly positive about the course and stated that the course had long-term value and that many of the aspects covered in AGLA 121 could be used for their writing needs later on in their studies. Further research is still necessary as there are variables, such as the influence of different lecturers, which need to be taken into consideration.

### **9.2.6 What proposals can be made regarding the content, teaching and learning methods, materials and assessment of student writing in the writing programme in the academic literacy course in general?**

In Chapter 8, a reflection on the entire evaluation was provided. Recommendations to improve descriptive and reflective writing practices were noticeable as a main aspect that needs to be addressed in programme redesign as well as raising students' awareness about academic discourse variation. Other recommendations for both the nursing students and AGLA 121 were proposed. Resulting from this evaluation for this study, a blueprint (cf. Appendix H) was designed and it is suggested that this blueprint can be used as basis for evaluations of other subjects groups. The blueprint contains most of the methodologies used in the phases covered to gather information for this study, as well as other aspects that can be valuable to obtain evaluative information. It is important that evaluations of AGLA 121 continue. The blueprint checklist could serve as a starting point for future evaluations of the effect of AGLA 121 on the overall academic literacy skills as well as the academic writing of various subject groups. This

blueprint was designed after this study had been completed. From lessons learned in the empirical phase and from the literature, extra phases and methodologies could be incorporated, tested and be reported on in future investigations.

Firstly, as the **TAG / TALL** are the first encounters that students have with AGLA 121 / AGLE, these test results should serve as basis for evaluations. The LEES and RINL components of the course should also be evaluated as writing should not and cannot be viewed in isolation. The overall effect on the course could also be evaluated by considering the AGLA 121 / AGLE 121 participation and examination results.

The **content** of the entire course needs to be evaluated continuously to determine whether the needs of the various subject groups are being addressed. The course outcomes should correlate with what the subject groups need. The content in the workbook and study guide should support students in transferring the relevant skills to their various subjects. The content covered in LEES and RINL should also be evaluated to ensure that it corresponds with AGLA 121 and the subjects' literacy needs. The assessment plan of AGLA 121 should also constantly be revised to determine if the content covered and the assessment thereof contribute to the students' acquisition and development of academic literacy and academic writing.

The **teaching** of AGLA 121 should also continuously be evaluated. The quality of in-class teaching as well as distance education teaching should be appraised. Flipped classrooms are also a possibility to investigate. This could assist students with time management so that they can do parts of the course at their own pace and time. Furthermore, the teaching and incorporating of subject specific material could assist with attitudinal and motivational issues (cf. §3.3.6). Some sort of collaborative teaching could also assist in truly contributing to the needs of specific subject groups.

The **assessment** of teaching should also be evaluated after the completion of the course. The LEES and RINL examinations should be evaluated to determine whether they truly help students to become more academically literate and also if these components ultimately help students with their academic writing. The AGLA 121 examination paper should be examined to see if the paper contributes to students' academic literacy skills acquisition. Bloom's taxonomy, for example, could be employed. Furthermore, students could be asked to evaluate AGLA 121's assessment procedures and feedback on writing assessment tasks.

AGLA 121 should not be viewed in isolation. **Subject groups' needs and requirements** also need to be analysed. The content covered in various subject groups could assist AGLA 121 lecturers with material to focus on to make, for example, the writing assignment topics more relevant to the students' field of study. A subject analysis could be done by looking at: learning outcomes, workbooks / textbooks, study guides and assessment plans. Furthermore, tests and

examination papers could be analysed to determine what type of academic writing is required of the students. The assessment rubrics pertaining to writing could also be studied to compare it with the rubrics used in AGLA 121.

Continuous **needs analyses** of subject groups should be conducted. To determine the language and literacy needs, reviews of the writing cultures as found in the literature of the subject groups should be done. Both quantitative and qualitative methods should be used to determine the needs of the subjects groups. Some of these methods could include: individual and focus group interviews with both staff and students, and staff and student (from various year groups) questionnaires.

### 9.3 Recommendations for further research

The following recommendations for further research are proposed:

- A follow-up evaluation of the current study after implementation of the recommendations provided.
- If it is logistically possible, to have a subject-specific course and academic literacy test designed specifically for nurses and to then re-evaluate the effect thereof.
- Comparative studies with other subject groups and disciplines can be conducted and compared to the current study.
- A study could be conducted to determine whether transfer of skills had taken place – not only to other subjects but also to other languages.
- The influence of peers as stakeholders and the effects of collaborative writing can be investigated.
- As this was a study conducted only with Afrikaans students, it would be interesting to see whether similar results would be found with English students.
- If new courses and materials are designed they should be made available in all three the official languages used at the NWU (Afrikaans, English and Setswana) and the effects thereof tested.
- The effect and worth of the blueprint checklist when applied to other evaluations could be researched.
- For ultimate effectiveness, the main goal of the writing programme of AGLA 121 should be to become truly student-centred and student-specific. It is important to focus on individual student progress and success, especially in the era of massification. This could be achieved by incorporating more technological tools that can accommodate differentiation and could then be investigated.

#### **9.4 Limitations of the study**

The key limitation of this study was the small sample size available to the researcher. Also, the intervention with the nursing students could not be entirely subject-specific so a view on whether generic, subject-specific or a combination is the best approach to follow cannot completely be expressed. Even though the nature of case study research is to typically only investigate one case, it is unfortunate that only a small population of all the students who have to complete AGLA 121 could be investigated. Furthermore, the evaluation recommendations could not be implemented and tested, but could be researched and reported in future evaluations.

#### **9.5 Final comments**

The epigraphs used at the beginning of every chapter served to summarise the main idea of every chapter. Together they functioned to help form the main arguments of this study. Chapter 1's epigraph, "I sit at my window and the words fly past me like birds – with God's help I catch some", was taken from Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). It refers to all the potential hurdles that first-year students face with academic literacy and more specifically academic writing when they enter universities. It was proven that AGLA 121 does assist some (nursing) students with their basic academic writing needs. There are, however, some students who did not sufficiently benefit from the course and might still feel that "We are all apprentices in a craft where no-one ever becomes a master" (Hemingway, 1961). The ideal outcome and pedagogical value of AGLA 121 are that "[t]he essay then, is not a routine exercise, a chore for the student to write, a chore for the professor to read. It is, if properly approached by both parties, education in the truest sense" (Harris & McDougall, 1958). The main purpose of the study was to establish whether AGLA 121 had an effect on first-year nursing students' writing and the epigraph of Chapter 4 summarises the plight of the nursing students: "Pity the poor nursing student, who is required to write at times like a sociologist, at others like a philosopher, yet again like a scientist and finally as a reflective practitioner!" (Baynham, 2002). In Chapter 5 a description of the academic literacy practices and course content is provided. Hopefully, some of the students do not experience AGLA 121 as projected in the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1945) "We are students of words: we are shut up in schools, and colleges, and recitation-rooms, for ten or fifteen years, and come out at last with a bag of wind, a memory of words, and do not know a thing." The epigraphs from Chapter 6, "The paradigms war": finding the "radical middle" (Patton, 2014:87-88) and Chapter 7 "Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted" (Cameron, 1963), indicated the researcher's own plight in academic

writing in finding the correct methodologies to conduct the research. A mixed-methods approach did provide the researcher with a wide overview of the case. The most important aspect of an evaluation is the pragmatic value thereof. This was realised in Chapter 8's epigraph "What? So what? Now what?" (Rolfe *et al.*, 2001). The final epigraph of this final chapter addresses the continuous nature of evaluations "Everything will be all right in the end ... if it is not all right then it is not yet the end" (Madden, 2011). Evaluations should not be a once-off activity, but should continuously be conducted.

It is evident that all the stakeholders need to start working together to support students with their academic writing. In the age of massification in higher education, an attempt must be made by course designers to strive for student-specificity in order to truly have an effect on their academic writing needs and requirements. This could be achieved by incorporating more technological tools that can accommodate differentiation in both academic literacy teaching approaches and individual writing practices of students.

Ultimately, no matter what theories, approaches, techniques are followed to design writing programmes for academic literacy courses, the focus must be on the main stakeholders: the (nursing) students.

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## APPENDIX A: LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY  
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**Sentrum vir Akademiese en Professionele  
Taalpraktyk**  
E-pos: Louise.Olivier@nwu.ac.za

5 Maart 2012

Geagte Student

### NAVORSING: AKADEMIESE GELETTERDHEID

Ek is tans besig met navorsing oor die AGLA121-module. Vir die doeleindes van hierdie navorsing word hiermee toestemming vir u afhandeling van 'n vraelys en die gebruik van gekose skryfstukke vir navorsingsdoeleindes versoek. Deelname is ten volle vrywillig. Al u response sal anoniem hanteer word en vrae is slegs vir ontledingsdoeleindes. Die opgesomde resultate is per versoek, na afloop van die studie, beskikbaar.

Hiermee gee ek toestemming dat die inligting wat uit hierdie ondersoek spruit vir navorsingsdoeleindes gebruik mag word.

Naam en van:

---

Handtekening:

---

Vriendelike groete

Louise Olivier

## APPENDIX B: ONLINE LETTER AND QUESTIONNAIRE TO LECTURERS

Verpleegvraelys / Nursing questionnaire

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/13vzuOX3HKUxfjWHxzGZdwdliLuwB4poHZyrP8Y6WpWg/viewform>

Dear colleague

This questionnaire forms part of my PhD study. Participation is entirely voluntary but your contribution would be much appreciated. Would you kindly complete this consent form as well as the attached questionnaire and return it before 31 July 2011.

Louise Olivier

[louise.olivier@nwu.ac.za](mailto:louise.olivier@nwu.ac.za)

1. Vir watter jaargroep(e) gee u klas? / 1. Which year group(s) do you teach?

2. Watter modules bied u aan? / 2. Which modules do you teach?

3.1 Watter van die volgende soorte skryfwerk word by die NWU van voorgraadse verpleegstudente verwag en in watter jaar? / 3.1 Which of the following types of writing are expected of nursing graduate students at the NWU and in which year?

(Eerste jaar / First year)

- Deskriptiewe referaat / Descriptive essay
- Reflektiewe referaat / Reflective essay
- Argumentatiewe referaat / Argumentative essay

- Aksieplanne / Action plans
- Versorgingsplanne / Care plans
- Portefeuljes / Portfolios
- Persoonlike dagboeke / Personal Diaries
- Verslae / Reports
- Navorsingsvoorstelle / Research proposals
- Voorgraadse skripsies / Undergraduate mini-dissertations
- Ander / Other

3.2 Watter van die volgende soorte skryfwerk word by die NWU van voorgraadse verpleegstudente verwag en in watter jaar? / 3.2 Which of the following types of writing are expected from nursing graduate students and in which year?

(Tweede jaar / Second year)

- Deskriptiewe referaat / Descriptive essay
- Reflektiewe referaat / Reflective essay
- Argumentatiewe referaat / Argumentative essay
- Aksieplanne / Action plans
- Versorgingsplanne / Care plans
- Portefeuljes / Portfolios
- Persoonlike dagboeke / Personal Diaries

- Verslae / Reports
- Navorsingsvoorstelle / Research proposals
- Voorgraadse skripsies / Undergraduate mini-dissertations
- Ander / Other

3.3 Watter van die volgende soorte skryfwerk word by die NWU van voorgraadse verpleegstudente verwag en in watter jaar? / 3.3 Which of the following types of writing are expected from nursing graduate students and in which year?

(Derde jaar / Third year)

- Deskriptiewe referaat / Descriptive essay
- Reflektiewe referaat / Reflective essay
- Argumentatiewe referaat / Argumentative essay
- Aksieplanne / Action plans
- Versorgingsplanne / Care plans
- Portefeuljies / Portfolios
- Persoonlike dagboeke / Personal Diaries
- Verslae / Reports
- Navorsingsvoorstelle / Research proposals
- Voorgraadse skripsies / Undergraduate mini-dissertations
- Ander / Other

3.4 Watter van die volgende soorte skryfwerk word by die NWU van voorgraadse verpleegstudente verwag en in watter jaar? / 3.4 Which of the following types of writing are expected from nursing graduate students and in which year?

(Vierde jaar / Fourth year)

- Deskriptiewe referaat / Descriptive essay
- Reflektiewe referaat / Reflective essay
- Argumentatiewe referaat / Argumentative essay
- Aksieplanne / Action plans
- Versorgingsplanne / Care plans
- Portefeuljes / Portfolios
- Persoonlike dagboeke / Personal Diaries
- Verslae / Reports
- Navorsingsvoorstelle / Research proposals
- Voorgraadse skripsies / Undergraduate mini-dissertations
- Ander / Other

4. Indien 'ander' in vraag 3 gekies is, beskryf asseblief. / 4. If you chose 'other' in question 3, please provide details.

5. Wat is u algemene indruk van u studente se skryfwerk? / 5. What is your general impression of students' writing?

6. Waarmee sukkel studente die meeste met hulle skryfwerk? / 6. What do students struggle with most in terms of their writing?

7. Gebruik u 'n merkskema wanneer u studente se skryfwerk nasien? / 7. Do you use a marking rubric when assessing student writing?

8. Kry studente die merkskemas voor die tyd? Hoekom? / 8. Do students receive marking rubrics beforehand? Why?

9. Watter algemene kriteria verskyn gewoonlik in u merkskemas? / 9. What general criteria are usually found in your marking rubrics?

10. Is taalgebruik en spelling belangrik om te assesseer in u skryfstukke? Hoekom? / 10. Are language use and spelling important in the assessment of written work? Why?

11. Wat weet u van die verpligte taalkursus, AGLA, wat alle eerstejaarstudente moet neem? / 11. Are you aware of the compulsory language course, AGLA, that needs to be completed by all first-year students?

12. Wat dink u is die doel van AGLA? / 12. What do you think is the purpose of AGLE?

13. Dink u dat verpleegstudente AGLA nodig het? Hoekom? / 13. Do you think that nursing students need AGLE? Why?

14. Sou u 'n meer vakspesifieke verpleeg-AGLA wou hê waar daar slegs op die skryfvaardighede wat verpleegstudente nodig het, gefokus word? / 14. Would you prefer a more subject-specific nursing AGLE where the focus is only on the writing skills necessary for nursing students?

15. Sou u belangstel in werkswinkels wat ondersteuning vir verpleegstudente se skryfvaardighede bied? / 15. Would you be interested in workshops that would provide support for nursing students' writing skills?

## APPENDIX C: LETTER FROM LANGUAGE PRACTITIONER

### Declaration

This is to declare that I, Annette L Combrink, accredited language editor and translator of the South African Translators' Institute, have language-edited the thesis by

**Louise Olivier (12165581)**

with the title

**The effect of an academic literacy course on first-year student writing: A case study**

Prof. Annette L Combrink

Accredited translator and language editor

South African Translators' Institute

Membership No. 1000356

Date: 22 November 2015

## APPENDIX D: ORIGINAL AGLA 121 MARKING SCALE (TRANSLATED)

Marking scheme					
<b>Spelling</b>					<b>5</b>
0 No spellchecker used	1-2 Weak	3 Average	4 Good	5 Excellent	
<b>Academic language usage</b> (academic register, choice of words, formulation, punctuation)					<b>5</b>
1 Unacceptable	2 Weak	3 Average	4 Good	5 Excellent	
<b>Structure</b> (use of transitional words and phrases, sentence structure, paragraph structure)					<b>5</b>
1 No structure	2 Weak	3 Average	4 Good	5 Excellent	
<b>Total out of 15</b>					
<b>Comments</b>					

## APPENDIX E: ASSESSMENT RUBRIC – AGLA 121

Item and criteria	Score range: Very poor	Score range: Poor to limited	Score range: Average to good	Score range: Very good to excellent	Total
<b>LOGICAL ORGANIZATION</b>					
<i>Introduction</i>	0 No problem statement / thesis provided. No overview provided.	1-2 The problem statement / thesis is weak. Insufficient overview provided.	3 The problem statement / thesis is moderately well stated. The overview is moderately well organized.	4-5 The problem statement /thesis is clear. The overview of the text (structure and main points) is clear.	5
<i>Body</i>	0-2 There are no paragraphs. No logical argument can be followed. Important terms are not clearly defined.	3-4 Paragraphs are weakly structured. Paragraphs have more than one idea per paragraph and inadequate use of linking devices. Important terms are poorly defined.	5-7 Paragraphs are reasonably structured with one main idea per paragraph and fair use of linking devices. Paragraphing is functional and topic sentences are used. The argument is logical, but sequencing is problematic at times. Generally appropriate definitions for important terms are provided.	8-10 Paragraphs are well-structured with one main idea per paragraph and linking devices. A strong logical argument is present. Clear definitions for important terms are given.	10
<i>Conclusion</i>	0 No summary of what has been done. No logical conclusion.	1-2 Hardly any organization to evaluate. A weak conclusion.	3 A fair summary of what has been done. A moderate conclusion.	4-5 A clear summary of what has been done and of the argument. There is a clear, logical conclusion.	5
<b>VOICE</b>	0 Inappropriate use of third or first person voice.	1-2 Incorrect use of voice.	3 Reasonable use of voice.	4-5 Appropriate use of third or first person voice.	5
<b>REGISTER</b>	0 Totally inappropriate register used.	1-2 The language is unsuitable for an academic context.	3 The register is generally appropriate for an academic context (almost no colloquialisms, slang or clichés, more or less correct use of jargon,	4-5 Appropriate register for the academic context (no colloquialisms, slang or clichés, correct use of jargon,	5

			subjective/objective language, abbreviations and acronyms).	subjective/objective language, abbreviations and acronyms).	
<b>LANGUAGE USE</b>	<p><b>0</b></p> <p>Almost no understanding of sentence construction rules.</p> <p>Completely incorrect use of tenses and prepositions.</p> <p>Plenty of spelling and punctuation errors.</p> <p>Limited vocabulary.</p>	<p><b>1-2</b></p> <p>Major problems in simple / complex constructions occur.</p> <p>Plenty of tense and preposition, spelling and punctuation errors occur.</p> <p>Substandard vocabulary is used.</p>	<p><b>3</b></p> <p>The student uses effective but simple sentence constructions.</p> <p>Some errors in tenses and prepositions occur.</p> <p>There are few errors of spelling and punctuation.</p> <p>Vocabulary use is satisfactory.</p>	<p><b>4-5</b></p> <p>Clear, complete sentences are used.</p> <p>There are almost no errors of tense, prepositions, spelling, and punctuation.</p> <p>Sufficient extent of vocabulary.</p>	<b>5</b>
<b>REFERENCING</b> Correct referencing in text (Harvard)	<p><b>0</b></p> <p>There is no referencing or the student almost completely plagiarised secondary sources.</p> <p>Data used are not recent.</p>	<p><b>1-2</b></p> <p>Some secondary sources were used but were not correctly referenced.</p> <p>Some plagiarism detected.</p> <p>Data used are not recent.</p>	<p><b>3</b></p> <p>Some / most sources have been correctly referenced.</p> <p>Some plagiarism detected.</p> <p>Sufficient and fairly recent data used.</p>	<p><b>4-5</b></p> <p>All the sources have been correctly referenced.</p> <p>No plagiarism detected.</p> <p>Adequate and recent data used.</p>	<b>5</b>
<b>SOURCE LIST</b> Correct entries according to Harvard style	<p><b>0</b></p> <p>There is no bibliography.</p>	<p><b>1-2</b></p> <p>The bibliography is incomplete.</p> <p>Limited variety in sources used.</p>	<p><b>3</b></p> <p>Some of the entries are correct.</p> <p>Some variety in sources used.</p>	<p><b>4-5</b></p> <p>A clear and complete bibliography.</p> <p>Enough variety in sources used.</p>	<b>5</b>

<b>TECHNICAL ASPECTS (5)</b>				
Cover page	Table of contents	Format (font and font size)	Page numbers and headings	Text justified

## APPENDIX F: ASSESSMENT RUBRIC – NURSING

*(Translated from the Afrikaans original)*

Criteria		% of the mark	Mark allocated
<b>Aim</b>	Has the question been answered? Were the guidelines in terms of sources/pages followed?	30	
<b>Contents</b>	Is there enough detail? Correct recent information? Information interpreted?	30	
<b>Technical editing</b>	Introduction Logical exposition according to headings Summary/conclusion Neatness Language use	20	
<b>Bibliographical editing</b>	Quotations in the text are complete and correct Source list complete and correct	20	
<b>Bonus marks</b>	Extraordinary effort put in		
<b>TOTAL:</b>			

## APPENDIX G: STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

### 1. Persoonlike besonderhede/Personal details

Naam/Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Van/Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Studentenommer/Student number: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Wat is jou huistaal? (merk in die blokkie) /  
What is your home language? (indicate the  
relevant block)

- Afrikaans  
 Engels / English  
 Tswana  
 Sesotho  
 Ander: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Wat is jou studierigting? / What is your field of  
study? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Wat was jou punte vir jou huistaal in gr. 12? /  
What were your marks for home language in  
gr.12?

> 90	
81-90	
71-80	
61-70	
51-60	
41-50	
< 40	

5. Watter punt het jy vir die TAG gekry? / Which  
mark did you obtain for the TAG?

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

6. Hoe het jy die TAG ervaar? / How did you  
experience the TAG?

Baie maklik / Very easy	
Maklik / Easy	
Moeilik / Difficult	
Baie moeilik / Very difficult	

7. Het jy geweet wat om in die toets te verwag? /  
Did you know what to expect in the test?

Ja / Yes	Nee / No
----------	----------

8. Dink jy dat jou hoërskooltaalonderrig jou  
voorberei het vir die toets? / Do you think your  
high school language teaching prepared you for  
this test?

Ja / Yes	Nee / No
----------	----------

9. Wat is jou houding teenoor die vak  
AGLA 121? / What is your attitude towards the  
subject AGLA121?

Neutraal / Neutral	Positief / Positive	Negatief / Negative
-----------------------	------------------------	------------------------

10. Hoekom? (Vraag 9) / Why? (Question 9)

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11. Dink jy jy is 'n goeie skrywer? / Do you think  
that you are a good writer?

Ja / Yes	Nee / No
----------	----------

12. Hoekom? (Vraag 11) / Why? (Question 11)

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13. Dink jy dat jou skryfwerk op hoërskool jou  
voorberei het om op universiteit te kan skryf? /  
Do you think that your writing in high school  
prepared you to be able to write at university?

Ja / Yes	Nee / No
----------	----------

## APPENDIX H: BLUEPRINT CHECKLIST

<b>AGLA 121 COURSE ANALYSIS</b>			
<b>WHAT</b>	HOW	✓	✗
<b>TESTING</b>	TAG / TALL		
	LEES		
	RINL		
	AGLA 121 – participation		
	AGLA 121 – examination		
<b>CONTENT</b>	Outcomes		
	Workbook		
	Study guide		
	Assessment plan		
	LEES		
	RINL		
<b>TEACHING</b>	In class / online		
	Generic / subject specific Collaborative teaching		
<b>ASSESSMENT</b>	LEES		
	RINL		
	AGLA 121 participation rubrics		
	Examination papers Bloom's taxonomy		
	Feedback questionnaire / interviews		
<b>SUBJECT ANALYSIS</b>			
<b>WHAT</b>	How	✓	✗
<b>CONTENT</b>	Outcomes		
	Workbook / textbook		
	Study guides		
	Assessment plans		
<b>ASSESSMENT</b>	Assessment rubrics		
	Examination papers		
<b>FACULTY / SUBJECT NEEDS ANALYSIS</b>			
<b>What</b>	How	✓	✗
<b>Literacy and language needs</b>	Literature review		

Individual staff interviews Focus group interviews
Staff questionnaire
Student interviews Focus group interviews
Student questionnaire First years and students from other years

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