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INVESTIGATING FIRST-YEAR STUDENT TEACHERS' ENGLISH (L2) ACADEMIC WRITING PROFICIENCY AND ITS IMPACT ON IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: A CASE OF A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on first-year student teachers' academic writing proficiency in relation to their identity construction. Specifically, it investigates first-year student teachers' English second-language (L2) academic writing proficiency and its effect on identity construction as they transition from high school to initial teacher education (ITE) at a selected university in the Western Cape province of South Africa.

The study is informed by Academic Literacies Theory, Identity Theory, and Identity Construction Theory (Cerulo, 1997; Joseph, 2004; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Bailey, 2007), which shed light on the relationship between language learning and identity construction. The study also makes use of the Social Constructivism Theory in investigating how student teachers engage with academic writing in English (L2) and the challenges they experience.

I used qualitative research methods and a single case study design to achieve my research objectives. Research techniques included questionnaires, interviews and document analysis in the form of an examination of student teachers' journals. The participants were first-year student teachers at one selected university, fictitiously referred to as the University of Wingate (UW) to protect its identity.

The study findings show that first-year student teachers experience various language-related challenges which negatively affect their mastery of English (L2), the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) at UW. Their low proficiency in English (L2) has a negative effect on their academic writing. As a result, students employ various coping strategies that involve the use of their home languages, translanguaging and collaborative learning to deal with language-related challenges. In addition, the study discovered that the student teachers' personalities, values and beliefs played a significant role in the manner in which they constructed their identities through English (L2) academic writing.

The study concludes that students' languages, personalities and beliefs play an important role in enhancing their access to English (L2) and strengthening their academic writing proficiency. The student teachers' first languages served as important cognitive and linguistic resources which were significant in building a community of practice among student teachers and fostering their identity construction. The study acknowledges the cognitive and linguistic advantages of the use of the students' first languages in learning; hence it recommends a multilingual approach to academic writing in initial teacher education.

Key words: Academic writing, Academic literacy, English, Identity construction, Initial teacher education, Second language.

DECLARATION

I, Damilola Joseph, declare that '**Investigating first-year student teachers' English (L2) academic writing proficiency and its impact on identity construction: A case of a South African university'** is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and that the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the sovereign God, Jehovah, the giver of every good gift and the perfect presence, who instilled in me the wisdom, understanding and strength to complete this work in the face of many challenges.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
ESL	English Second Language
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LOLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
UW	University of Wingate
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the context and background of the study. It provides an overview of South Africa's higher education curriculum and academic literacy curriculum, and a discussion of students' low academic writing achievements in higher education. In addition, the chapter discusses the rationale for the study, the statement of the problem, the research questions in relation to the aims and objectives of the study, and the significance of the study. A chapter outline concludes this chapter.

The context and background to the study introduce the key issues that influence students' academic writing in higher education.

1.2 Background to the study

This study makes use of two essential, central and interrelated background contexts; namely, the impact of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) on students' academic success, and the role of identity in first-year undergraduate students' writing.

Academic writing skills are paramount for any student's educational accomplishment. This is because academic writing is a means to exhibit academic knowledge and insight gained during the period of study. There cannot be any proof of curriculum accomplishment without students' completion of assessments through writing. A demonstration of academic writing skill is the most common form of assessment of students' understanding of course content, determining their academic progression. This implies that poor academic writing skills can seriously affect students' academic performance and progression. Of concern are the many students who, although reasonably proficient in spoken English, have difficulty comprehending and writing academic content owing to multiple factors, including a fundamental language barrier and low levels of cognitive development.

Writing is the end product of reading and language use. Bharuthram (2012) believes that there are two literacy processes, reading and writing, both of which feed into students' academic success. Bharuthram (2012) and Ngwenya (2010) state that first-year students who experience difficulties in reading and writing academic content are at risk of academic failure if there is no provision of support mechanisms for writing.

Bharuthram (2012; 2017) and Ngwenya (2010) maintain that a large number of students are admitted for higher education studies who lack proficiency in academic reading and writing at the level expected of them. Moreover, both literacy researchers point out that the majority of first-year students in South Africa do not possess sufficient reading and general language skills because they are second-language speakers of English (Bharuthram, 2017, 2012; Ngwenya, 2010). The fact that English is the second or even third language of many students indicates that English language proficiency and skills in academic language use are likely to be a challenge to their academic writing and hence academic achievements. Many have basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS), which display their communicative competence in the language, but lack cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Bharuthram, 2012). First-year students who struggle with general reading and language use may easily become frustrated and demotivated to cope with the more complex and challenging tasks of academic writing.

In keeping with the above claim, it is important to mention that according to Cummins' propositions (1979: 2) CALP refers to 'the dimension of language proficiency which is strongly related to overall cognitive and academic skills.' BICS, on the other hand, is described as the oral productive skills of either a first language (L1) or a second language (L2) in the natural environment (Cummins, 1979). Cummins (1979) maintains that oral productive skills such as accent and fluency must reflect in both a user's L1 and L2. Therefore, I am inclined to believe that the cognitive and academic performance of students at university is not limited to how well they adapt their intelligence to reading, listening, speaking and writing for instructional purposes; I assume that an individual's CALP level is dependent on the level of their BICS. However, some first-year undergraduate students do not possess strong BICS in the English language (L2), which makes communication, teaching and learning overwhelming, while students with English as their L1 already display competency of English through BICS (Cummins, 1979).

Many scholars have explored and documented various interventions and support strategies that attempt to reduce the risk of failure among first-year undergraduate students (Ngwenya, 2010; Bharuthram, 2012; Van Dyk, Van de Poel & Van der Slik, 2013; Lea & Street, 2014; Wildsmith-Cromarty & Steinke, 2014). Specifically, Ngwenya's study (2010) focused on the disciplinary aspect of academic content and the language demands on first-year students. The aim of the study was to correlate first-year law students' profiles as either mother-tongue English users or second-language English users with the language demands of their content subjects at a historically black university in South Africa. Using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, Ngwenya (2010) contextualised the literacy challenges of first-year students by investigating how students' 'legal English' was acquired, the context of their content-based instruction (CBI) and their overall academic literacy. The study concluded that rather than dwelling on the strengths or weaknesses of students' English as revealed by remedial courses, the adoption of genre-based instruction was recommended, because it creates awareness among students of the discipline-specific discourse and facilitates learning.

Similarly, Van Dyk, Van de Poel & Van der Slik (2013) investigated the reading abilities and academic acculturation of first-year students in a higher education institution. Van Dyk et. al. (2013) noted that a significant number of students exhibit a lack of preparedness for the expectations of higher education, specifically the use of English language for academic purposes, which hinders their academic progress (2013). Yet evidence shows that apart from the students' social and personal backgrounds, the correlation between each student's reading ability and their reading performance significantly contributed to how much they could academically acculturate (Van Dyk et. al., 2013). Also, Van Dyk et. al.'s (2013) study affirms the importance of the support that faculties provide to the students in order to boost their confidence in new academic discourse.

With regard to the aspects of literacy that prove most challenging to students in all disciplines, Ngwenya (2010) proposed a number of intervention strategies. Firstly, the teaching of language to first-year students should move gradually from the simple and easy to understand to the advanced and complex. The second type of intervention relates to reading. He suggests that instruction in rudimentary aspects of reading, such as vocabulary and the use of punctuation, be given before students progress, in order to help them synthesise information and read critically. Instruction may be reduced as students develop their reading in higher education. The third suggestion concerns

writing. Ngwenya (2010) believes that it would be helpful for lecturers to guide students by explaining the structure and conventions of academic writing before allowing them to write independently. This suggestion concurs with Lea and Street's (2014) claim that a support system must be put in place for students to understand the textual and contextual practices of academic writing in higher education. This means that lecturers in institutions of higher learning should provide clarity with regard to academic vocabulary and its usage in writing to enable students to use these learned terms correctly in assignments. These three suggestions are useful in this study as they shed light on how students' academic literacy in higher education may be strengthened.

Ngwenya's (2010) fourth recommendation is to reduce the risk of failure among first-year students with low literacy levels through the inclusion of multimodal literacy and a focus on sociocultural issues, especially ideology in language use, an awareness of which has been shown to be an intrinsic part of academic literacy.

Dukhan, Cameron and Brenner (2016) discuss the effect of students' first and second languages on their first-year academic performance. They maintain that in light of students' difficulties with taking detailed notes, early writing interventions and training would improve the grades of English second-language students (Dukhan, et. al, 2016). I agree with Dukhan, et. al (2016) and with Ngwenya's (2010) fourth recommendation, even though the present study focuses on how students construct their identities through English (L2) academic writing. It is my view that identity can be used to facilitate the development of first-year students' writing, whether general or discipline specific.

Many studies have been conducted from educational, sociological and linguistic perspectives on the relationship between identity and the academic literacies of English second-language learners (ESL), but few specifically focus on the aspect of academic writing (Canagarajah, 2002; Russell, Lea, Parker, Street & Donahue, Tiane, 2009; Gutiérrez, Bien, Selland & Pierce, 2011; Wingate & Tribble, 2012; Zamel & Spack, 2012). Logically, as ESL students acquire proficiency in the language, they assume the identities of learners and language users in either academic or non-academic discourses. In most cases, both discourses are influenced by the 'multimodality and language-crossing … use of both home and academic vernaculars promoted within a context that values social relationships and playful imagination' (Gutiérrez, et al., 2011, p. 232). This implies

that these discourses cannot be separated from the students' first language (L1). Very often, students resort to their L1 to make meaning of the target language. More importantly, some 'social and located' interactions, also known as socially contextualised verbal exchanges of students, can also enhance their literacy practices (Gutiérrez, et al., 2011, p. 232). This indicates that students acquire second-language literacy skills not only through the traditional pedagogical approaches but also through socialisation amongst fellow students with the same identity, and through established relationships.

Wingate and Tribble (2012) reviewed academic literacy models of popular theorists, focusing on the notion of academic socialisation. According to Taylor, Clayton and Rowley (2004), as cited in Capobianco and Best (2020), academic socialisation refers to the parental beliefs and practices that contribute to children's development of school-related ideals and competencies. They further state that, as with any kind of socialisation, academic socialisation is rooted in the cultural values and norms of a given society. In this study, I use the term 'academic socialisation' to refer to the situational process in which students construct their identities while learning academic content. Wingate and Tribble (2012, p. 488) affirm that 'academic socialisation cannot be called an instructional approach, as the development of writing is left to the students' ability to learn from the community by observation'. Instead Wingate and Tribble (2012), as cited in Lea and Street (1998, p. 159), concur that academic socialisation involves teachers in various disciplines taking an active role in inducting students into 'the new culture of the academy'. Evidently, Wingate and Tribble's (2012) study highlights that academic socialisation promotes academic literary and the adequate use of a second language by students.

In my experience, there are academic learning situations in which academic socialisation is not encouraged by the university or the lecturers. I concur with Wingate and Tribble (2012) and Lea and Street (1998) regarding the deliberate induction of new academic writers by lecturers to enable them to acquire the required conventions of writing at a new educational level. However, in this study, I explore academic writing from the perspective of student-student induction, as most lecturers cannot successfully attend to the needs of all students in higher education settings. What lecturers can do is assist in designing a curriculum that facilitates English academic writing, especially for first-year students.

This study examines, among other things, how first-year student teachers socialise themselves to improve their academic writing skills in English (L2). The study argues that through socialisation, students exchange thoughts and ideas which enable them to develop and enhance their writing skills. Considering the significance of academic writing skills for higher education success, the study contributes to the body of knowledge on academic writing in showing how socialisation helps students discover new knowledge to enhance their writing skills, and how student teachers construct and negotiate identities through their academic writing in English (L2).

1.4 Rationale for the study

The initial motivation to conduct this research study arose from the findings of my Master's degree study, in which I assumed that bilingual students who were struggling with language-related difficulties would maximally use translanguaging as a learning strategy. The study showed that the simultaneous use of two languages was hindered owing to an unconducive academic environment. Students' high levels of motivation helped them improve their competency in academic English; many formed study groups with peers who shared a common home language, which helped them cope with the English medium of instruction at the university. Participants in that study spoke of the challenge of having to engage in academic writing despite their limited understanding of various academic task requirements. I also noted that first-year students found academic tasks that involved essay writing particularly demanding and challenging when English was their second language (Joseph, 2015).

I was fortunate in having the opportunity to tutor some of the participants in my Masters' degree study in various modules of their second academic year. I observed that three of the ten participants in that study had developed their academic writing skills beyond their first-year levels. In addition, I noticed that as second-year student teachers, they were open-minded and friendly toward tutors and their peers. This made me realise the significant role of language acquisition in the construction of identity, and in turn on confidence and level of engagement in learning.

Since participants in my earlier research were from the Faculty of Education, it became evident that there was a problem with first-year student teachers who were expected to teach through the medium of English in the Senior Phase (Grades 7 – 9), according to the requirements of South

African teachers' qualifications. In addition, my attention was drawn to the Further Education and Training (FET) band, which includes Grades 10 – 12 and tertiary level, in which the low literacy achievement of learners is attributed to inadequate and the ineffective teaching approaches and skills of teachers. The Senior Phase is a transition to the FET band, in which learners are expected to write meaningful pieces of work and be able to understand and respond to instructions in English (L2).

In view of the above, I developed an interest in understanding how first-year student teachers, with intentions of teaching in the future, engage with academic literacy in relation to their identity construction during their period of training for an educational qualification. Therefore, I embarked on this study, which examines student teachers' identity construction in relation to their proficiency in academic English (L2). I believe that students' home languages have an influence on the acquisition of English (L2) academic literacy. However, this observation demands an understanding and clear exposition of the experiences of prospective teachers, and what they consider to the key factors that influence both their learning of academic literacy and identity construction. As a result, I was motivated to conduct a study on student teachers' identity construction through academic literacy. Teachers' academic literacy is crucial, irrespective of the subject they teach at school, as is the formation of their identity as academic writers and competent teachers.

1.5 Statement of the problem

The underlying problem addressed by this study is the low level of English academic writing among first-year student teachers who are English second-language users. The expectation of universities is that after graduating with a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degree, novice teachers will have adequate academic literacy skills to facilitate teaching and learning across the curriculum. However, this is not always the case. In South Africa the language of instruction from Grade 4 to tertiary education is English, so it is important that both teachers and learners demonstrate adequate proficiency in this language.

English academic writing is generally viewed as a challenging and complex task for most first-year undergraduate students (Thompson, Morton & Storch, 2013; Hirvela & Du, 2013). This is

because in higher education, a good writer must be able to put to use what they have read and understood in the recognised idiom of English. They need to be able to express their own ideas and scholarly views in writing, coherently and cohesively, in the academic context of their field of study. This involves more than the ability to write well; academic writers need to be critical thinkers who express their own ideas and those of others in relation to texts, in the form of assignments, tests and examinations, which together form their academic assessments.

Sivasubramaniam (2004) attributes the difficulties students experience with English academic writing not just to the fact that English may be their second language, but also to their poor reading habits. This shows that English second-language students can better manage the challenge of academic writing if they are able to read and connect with academic content in a critical way through reading, and then put their ideas into writing.

With regard to the teaching of language, especially writing, I am inspired by Barnett's (1989) formulation of the problem often experienced by teachers (and as a result, by learners):

> Yet what do we really want to teach students: to get all the grammar and vocabulary right or to develop intellectually and refine their capabilities at the cognitive level? How we treat their written work defines in great measure what they will give us (Barnett, 1989, p. 35).

Moreover, student teachers, irrespective of their prospective teaching specialisation, require a language in which to teach and communicate in the classroom. Today in South Africa, there is a concern about the language of instruction at all educational levels (Mkhize & Balfour, 2017). There is a growing awareness that first-year students may be affected by problems directly related to the language of instruction, rather than to an inability to understand content, both as students in higher education and as novice teachers at the school level. Naturally, teachers who experience difficulties in understanding and expressing themselves in the language of instruction will tend to pass on these difficulties to their learners.

My assumption was that first-year student teachers experienced particular difficulties with academic literacy in English as they transitioned from high school to university education. An individual cannot give what he or she does not possess. Teachers who want to contribute to the education system of their country but are not competent in academic English will continue to

struggle to raise the standard of education in this country. There is therefore an urgent need for universities to provide academic and language support to first-year student teachers, so that they may successfully facilitate and support their own learners' literacy development in English as a second language.

South Africa has eleven official languages, namely Afrikaans, English, isiXhosa, isiZulu, isiNdebele, Sesotho, Sepedi, Setswana, Siswati, XiTsonga, and Tshivenda Many students use English as a second or third language, a fact which remains a significant barrier to academic progression and completion of an academic programme (Van Rooy & Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2015; Butler, 2013; Barkhuizen, 1998; Mesthrie, 2002; Webb, 2002; Casale & Posel, 2011). Research findings indicate that students whose academic language differs from their home language exhibit poorer academic performance in their first year of study than in subsequent years in the same programme (Van Rooy & Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2015). Also, Webb (2002) states that the use of a second language (English) for instructional purposes has a negative effect on students' academic development if they do not have a competent use of the academic language. Casale and Posel (2011: 2) conducted a study on the link between English language proficiency and earnings in South Africa. These scholars reiterate that despite the progressive stance of the language policy in education, 'the early adoption of English as the medium of instruction has been counterproductive, and has adversely affected the acquisition of English language and African home language skills, as well as the quality of educational attainment.' Since the policy has been shown to adversely affect both the acquisition of English language skills and the overall quality of education, young people are likely to encounter language difficulties in their first year of university, especially with regard to academic literacy, which is central to learning in higher education.

It is well documented that first-year students have to deal with the use of effective academic English (Munn, Coutts, Knopke, Grant & Bartlett, 2016; Goldingay, Hitch, Ryan, Farrugia, Hosken, Lamaro, & Macfarlane, 2014; Bowers, Fitts, Quirk, & Jung, 2010). Evans and Morrison (2011) conducted a longitudinal study that centred on the academic activities of 28 first-year undergraduates from varying backgrounds in Hong Kong with regard to societal factors, education and discipline. They found that the students were confronted with three distinct language-related difficulties; the use of technical vocabulary, the inability to comprehend lectures, and lack of

familiarity with appropriate academic conventions. This demonstrates that globally, English (L2) university students have difficulties in using academic English for learning.

Wilkinson (2013) found that European universities are increasingly using English-medium instruction, even in non-English speaking nations. Difficulties in the use of the English language adversely affect the academic achievement of second-language English students (Berman & Cheng, 2010).

These difficulties trigger a more pressing situation facing student teachers engaged in academic pursuits: Higher education is desired by many post-matriculant students, yet many, if not most, lack the basic academic literacy skills needed in higher education. These students are not aware of the intricate demands of the new learning environment, that is, the requirements of the new social, linguistic and academic setting. They have to navigate a new academic and linguistic space as they learn to teach and build their careers and life prospects.

Pertinent to this issue is the specific matter of student academic writing, an essential aspect of students' academic literacy. While it is important that student teachers develop their overall understanding of English as an academic language, they also need to pay attention to the use of English in their own writing. This is because the university is considered a self-learning centre in which students are expected to achieve academic success without a high level of personal engagement with lecturers. All forms of assessments involve writing and its structures. This implies that student themselves have to pay more attention to the use of academic English as they engage in tasks that involve academic writing.

At the same time, other literacy skills (listening, speaking and reading) play a significant role, since all areas of language are interconnected. Writing is simply the most challenging skill to acquire for students, and yet central to assessments across the curriculum.

Academic writing in higher education is more complex than in matric, requiring the use of entirely new conventions. Many new university students are unaware of this change. Coupled with the overall use of English for academic purposes, a new social context and the complexity and technicalities of various disciplines, academic writing is regarded as a difficult mission to fulfill (Birhan, 2017; Adas & Bakir, 2013).

In keeping with the above observation, Leibowitz, Adendorff, Van der Merwe, Van Deventer, Nakasa, Ngxabazi, Daniels and Loots (2005) state that on top of challenges with regard to the use of academic English, social class affects students' achievements in education. English academic writing is more challenging for students who were supposedly taught in English at high school, but for the purpose of effective teaching were taught through code-switching, as is the case in many South African government schools. As a result of years of code-switching in the learning environment, many students resort to using their home language to make meaning of learning content delivered through the medium of English. In other words, students negotiate meaning in learning tasks by (re)constructing their language identities.

Identity is a broad concept that is applied to various aspects of daily life, yet it needs to be problematised (Lin, 2013). There are many kinds of identity, as explained in Chapter Two of this study. As an international student at the university where I conducted this research, I observed the role of language and identity in the South African social context. I observed that individuals who share the same language identity tend to 'go the extra mile' in support of each other. In other words, people's linguistic identity connects them to a particular group and helps them to bond in that context (Edwards, 2019); for them, this facilitates learning. This led me to investigate other forms of identity, including linguistic identity, and its role in enhancing students' English academic literacy, specifically writing, in teacher education. In this study, the particular subject is the problem of academic writing; my interest is the forms of identity construction that unite English (L2) student teachers and the effect of academic writing proficiency on students' identity formation.

While a number of studies have been conducted on identity construction (Makalela, 2015; Wunseh, 2018; Norton & De Costa, 2018) and academic literacy in higher education (Bharuthram, 2012; Ngwenya, 2010), to the best of my knowledge, to date, no research on first-year student teachers' academic literacy in English (L2) writing in relation to identity construction has been conducted in South African higher education. I chose to focus on student teachers specifically because much attention has been given to the (low) literacy rates in basic education (i.e. school level) while student teachers' academic literacy has been less prioritised. Hence my study focuses on first-year student teachers' academic writing in English (L2). This entailed examining first-year student

teachers' learning experiences in academic writing and how they negotiated and constructed identities through English (L2) in their studies.

1.6 Research questions

The main research question is situated in the challenges and experiences of English (L2) undergraduates, specifically first-year student teachers, while engaging in academic writing in an academic literacy course at a higher education institution in South Africa. The research question centres on academic writing and its relationship with the identity construction of student teachers. The main research question is:

> How does first-year student teachers' academic writing proficiency in English (L2) affect their identity construction?

The thesis seeks to answer the following subsidiary research questions:

i. What are the first-year student teachers' experiences of academic writing in English (L2)?
ii. What factors influence student teachers' academic writing in English (L2) and their identity construction?
iii. How do first-year student teachers negotiate their identities in the Academic Literacy course taught through the medium of English (L2)?
iv. What are the implications of the student teachers' academic writing proficiency in English (L2) for initial teacher education knowledge?

1.7 Aim and objectives of the study

The overriding aim of this research study is to investigate how first-year student teachers' English (L2) academic writing proficiency affects their identity construction.

The research objectives are as follows:

i. to explore first-year student teachers' experiences of English (L2) academic writing;

ii. to identify and understand the factors that influence student teachers' academic writing in English (L2) and their identity construction;
iii. to investigate and analyse how first-year student teachers construct their identity through writing in the Academic Literacy course taught through the medium of English;
iv. to determine the implications of the student teachers' academic writing proficiency in English (L2) for their classroom practice as novice teachers in the Senior Phase.

1.8 Significance of the study

This study is significant because it explores the English (L2) academic writing and identity construction of first-year students who pursue their studies in teacher education in a South African university. It sheds light on student teachers' experiences of academic writing, since it is a central literacy skill that influences students' academic assessment and success. Through study, student teachers ought to be well equipped with academic writing skills which will enhance the writing literacy of young learners. This implies that when student teachers graduate and become beginner teachers, they should have acquired the skill to help learners develop their own academic literacy practice, regardless of the subject they teach.

Also, the expected findings could draw the attention of stakeholders in education, such as language policy makers and curriculum developers. It should alert them to the fact that the strong academic literacy skills acquired in initial teacher education (ITE) have an influence on learners' literacy development at school level. The recommendations of this study could guide curriculum developers in higher education to develop academic courses that equip prospective teachers with adequate academic literacy skills for the classroom. In this way, it is hoped that through this study the long-existing problem of low literacy levels among learners, particularly in South African schools, can be minimised. This study contributes to new knowledge on the academic literacy and identity construction of prospective teachers and the utilisation of existing knowledge and methodologies in this field.

1.9 Outline of chapters

This research study consists of seven chapters. In each chapter, there is an introduction, sub-sections of the main discussion, and a conclusion. A brief description of the content of each chapter is stated below.

Chapter 1: Context and background to the study

This chapter serves as an introduction. It discusses the context and background to the study, acting as a springboard for the rest of the study. It discusses the rationale for the study, the problem statement, the research questions, and the aims and objectives of the study. Finally, it discusses the significance of the study.

Chapter 2: Conceptual framework and literature review

Chapter Two focuses on a detailed literature review, providing relevant insights on academic writing and the identity construction of English second-language students in higher education. The discussion is organised into various subsections. These direct readers' attention to the crucial and appropriate theories that were adopted to inform this research study, in so far as they help to understand how first-year students deal with academic writing and identity construction in their second language.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study. In order to advance a theoretical understanding of the study, four theories are presented: Academic Literacies Theory, the Theory of Identity, the Theory of Identity Construction and Social Constructivism Theory. An understanding of the principal aspects of these theories helps to determine the extent to which first-year students develop and construct their identity through academic writing.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology adopted in my research, which is underpinned by a case study research design within a qualitative research approach. I also elaborate on the appropriateness of the research design and the sampling method used to select research participants. The advantages and disadvantages of each chosen data collection tool (interview,

questionnaires and document analysis) are discussed, along with an explanation of how each of these research tools have been used to address the research questions. Next, I describe in detail the procedures followed for data analysis. The last aspect of this chapter discusses ethical considerations and research limitations.

Chapter 5: Data presentation and analysis

This chapter presents the data gathered through questionnaires, students' journals and interviews to understand their experiences of academic writing and its effect on their identity formation. In order to analyse the data findings, I make use of thematic codes and sub-codes that relate to the research questions and objectives.

Chapter 6: Discussion of research findings

In this chapter, I discuss the research findings drawn from the data presented and analysed in Chapter Five of the study. To do this, I consider the thematic codes and sub-codes identified, using related literature to support the findings.

Chapter 7: Summary, conclusion and recommendations of the study

The last chapter gives an overview of my research findings in relation to the aims and objectives of the study. It also presents limitations of the study, and provides recommendations and suggestions for further research. Conclusions are drawn and the contribution of the study to the body of knowledge is discussed.

1.10 Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced the study, discussing the context and background of the topic and the rationale for the study, with a particular focus on the South African higher education context. In addition, I have defined and stated the research problem, research questions, aims and objectives of the study, and significance of the study. Finally, I have presented an outline of the contents of the chapters.

CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed review of the literature on academic writing and students' identity construction in English (L2) in higher education. The chapter begins by defining relevant operational key concepts such as identity, identity construction, academic writing, student teachers and the support systems for academic literacy in English (L2). The chapter further reviews scholarly works related to the research questions mentioned in the previous chapter.

As a point of departure, I provide a brief description of the higher education curriculum in order to understand the knowledge and attributes expected of university students in South Africa. This is followed by presentation of a conceptual framework which covers the key concepts underlying the study.

2.2 The higher education curriculum

The curriculum is part of teaching and learning and is a key factor in the completion of an academic programme. In the context of this research study, the term 'curriculum' is relevant because academic writing is part of any higher education curriculum. Therefore, in this study, I refer to curriculum as 'the totality of the undergraduate student experience of, and engagement with, their new programme of tertiary study' (Kift, Nelson & Clarke, 2010:7). This definition of curriculum is supported by the Council on Higher Education (CHE), which refers to it as planned learning experiences that encompass knowledge, competence and attributes that students must acquire to achieve the intended learning outcomes (CHE, 2013).

When South Africa transitioned from apartheid to democracy in 1994, curriculum reform took place in higher education as a means of providing equal access to education and advancing equity and inclusive education (Van der Berg, Taylor, Gustafsson, Spaull & Armstrong, 2011). In order to break the educational impediments in basic education and to facilitate a smooth transition from basic to higher education, the CHE advocates a solid and relevant curriculum at basic education level as a support system undergirding the undergraduate curriculum. In 2013, the CHE compiled a report on the flexibility of curricula, discussing various areas of higher education in South Africa.

Furthermore, the CHE mentions that success in academic pursuits affects career systems and life orientation, enabling graduates to make meaningful decisions that facilitate the accomplishment of a nation's critical imperatives. However, as a result of the diversity in learning environments and backgrounds, first-year university students often face challenges such as communication barriers and difficulties in adopting new learning styles. The language-learning challenges contribute to the high attrition rate and low graduation rates in many South African universities (CHE, 2013). This implies that the two factors (ie, the diversity in both learning environments and students' backgrounds) have an effect on the objectives and outcomes of the higher education curriculum for first-year university students as they undergo the transition from high school to university.

These challenges vary according to the needs and abilities of each student. Clark (2005) categorises the challenges first-year undergraduate face in transitioning as either positive or negative, and as inside or outside the institution's area of influence. Other scholars classify these challenges as transition, academic, relationship, social, or home and family related. Krause and Coates (2008) identified three important aspects of the transition phase: (i) the institutional orientation programme which informs first-year students of the availability of learning support systems and aids quality learning experiences, (ii) the provision of course advice platforms, course guides and career counselling and (iii) the identity development of students and their expectations of higher education.

Academic challenges may be considered one of the most pressing problems facing first-year students. If no support system is in place, some students will drop out of higher education. Clark (2005) concludes that faced with the challenges of the new academic environment into which they are transitioning, new undergraduate students often re-strategise and negotiate challenges with a conscious and intentional effort to pursue their goals. However, academic language and literacy remains a problem during the first academic year.

Over the past decade, many publications that explored the experiences and perceptions of the academic transition of first-year undergraduate students have found that most students face unexpectedly low grades, more demanding course work, the challenges of self-learning and the

ordeal of reading and writing assignments, which often climax in extreme examination pressure (Krause & Coates, 2008; Kift, Nelson & Clarke, 2010; Gale & Parker, 2014). Krause and Coates (2008:6) maintain that 'the transition to university is a complex and often difficult period of a young student's life'.

The academic engagement scale mentioned by Krause and Coates (2008) evaluates students' abilities to wisely use their time, study habits and strategies to cope with their new learning space. Krause and Coates (2008) state that the foundation to the success of first-year students is situated in the students themselves. Students' discovery of notable differences between high school study and university study serves as a guide to making academic choices or decisions.

Kift, Nelson and Clarke (2010) believe that in attempts to help first-year undergraduates cope with the academic transition, the integration of co-curricular and curricular learning experiences is essential. In addition, these authors state that various introduction strategies may act as a cornerstone for first-year student abilities, forming a basis which determines future success. Essential introduction strategies include the development of academic literacies and sociocultural competencies, the facilitation of peer relationships, the mediation of non-academic support and the provision of learning support. These aspects are critical to the successful learning and development of all students, and it is difficult to think about introducing a curriculum that does not embed these aspects in daily learning (Kift et al., 2010). Consequently, Kift, et al. (2010) suggest that a specific curriculum be put in place for first-years to support and facilitate their learning experiences.

From the foregoing discussion, it can be deduced that the academic transition, including the acquisition of academic literacies, is challenging to first-year students in higher education across the globe. Based on these facts, there is a need to understand how first-year students deal with the transition challenges, especially with regard to academic writing, which is the cornerstone of achievement in higher education.

My study focuses on student teachers because the teaching profession plays a key role in nation building in any country. The success of a good teacher is measured in terms of the effectiveness of the delivery of the curriculum, and learner achievements (Beere, 2014). In other words, the most important purpose of teaching is to strengthen pupil achievements. This raises the question of learners' achievements in the South African education system, given the language and literacy

challenges faced by the country. While there have been some improvements in the matriculation pass rate over a decade, there are still debates on the quality of and possible discrepancies in these results. In a report of the Agence France-Presse Foundation published in 2014, entitled 'Why the matric pass rate is not a reliable benchmark of education quality', it is pointed out that the matric pass rate is an additional erroneous tool for measurement of national performance owing to the high rate of learners who drop out before their final year. The numbers of those students who have dropped out are not taken into consideration in national reporting on matric pass rates.

In this connection, Spaull's (2015) primary education research affirms that many students are pushed through the system until Grade 10, and many of them do not make it to Grade 12. Despite awareness of this fact in the school system and the Department of Education's efforts to implement strategies to minimise the high dropout rate, there is still a substantial number of students who drop out at university level, partially as a result of low academic literacy. This indicates that there is low literacy achievement among students in higher education.

This study focuses on academic writing as an aspect of academic literacy that affects meaningful learning and assessment across the curriculum. In the following sections, I focus on academic literacy and its key elements.

2.3 Conceptualising academic literacy

In this section, I focus on the conceptualisation of literacy in general, and how academic literacy and writing are understood. I unpack the concept of literacy in relation to academic literacy. I also discuss the significance of academic literacy in education.

2.3.1 Literacy as a multifaceted concept

Debates about the meanings of literacy are common (Street, 1999), with meanings varying according to the particular theory to which the writer subscribes. A survey of literature shows that the concept 'literacy' has been evolving over time. Seligmann (2012) opines that most interpretations of literacy can be categorised as one of three broad perspectives; namely, linguistic, cognitive and sociocultural.

Taking the linguistic view, Ravid and Tolchinsky (2002) state that literacy aims to make available a basis for the exploration of language growth in the school or place of learning; thus, the acquisition of literacy is a process and merge psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic concepts of dissimilarity, language apprehension and literacy into an inclusive model. Their model emphasises those features of literacy skills that are conveyed in language as well as general features of linguistic knowledge. The above refers to expertise with written language as *discourse style*, which is an appreciation that the type of language used for writing is not the same as the one used for speaking, and to written language as *notational system*, which is the perception and growing command of the representational system used in the written modality. Further, Berman and Ravid (2009) describe the hallmark of linguistic literacy as the ability to skilfully use both spoken and written language, along with the individual's ability to move flexibly between each skill. Linguistic literacy is viewed as a constituent of language knowledge characterised by the availability of multiple linguistic resources, and the ability to consciously access one's own linguistic knowledge and to view language from various perspectives.

Cognitivists view literacy development as a succession of qualitatively varied skills, whereas socioculturalists view literacy as socially and culturally embedded (Berman & Ravid, 2009). Traditional educational discourses tend to reflect cognitivist perspectives, which risk creating and maintaining social inequities in our increasingly diverse society. It is argued that the integration of the theories is possible and desirable in educational practice and research, in order to equalise the learning opportunities of all students.

A sociocultural view of literacy proposes that the influences of familial and cultural communities on literacy development should be considered in order to provide equality in educational access and opportunity for all students (Purcell-Gates and Tierney, 2009), particularly for students with diverse backgrounds (Au, 2000). Although some contend that these cognitive and sociocultural perspectives are diametrically opposed, Purcell-Gates, Jacobsen and Degener (2004:8) reject the notion that 'the social and the cognitive are independent and incommensurable'; rather, they propose that the cognitive occurs in a sociocultural context and that both are necessary for educational success.

In keeping with the above, I am inclined to agree with Davidson (2010), who states that in reality cognitivist and socioculturalist views of literacy development are not diametrically opposed; each

has its merits, and each recognises the value of the other. Based on this awareness, world governments and agencies have progressively promoted policies and practices that advance students' literacy skills. These policies and practices are borne of a theoretical framework for literacy instruction and research that integrates the cognitive and the sociocultural perspectives.

As previously mentioned, the term 'literacy' is differently defined. The most fundamental understanding of the notion of literacy is the ability of the individual to sign their name, or to master basic reading and writing (Seligmann, 2012). However, there is a great deal more to the concept. According to UNESCO's (2017:2) operational definition, 'literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts'. It involves a continuum of learning that enables individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.

As a result of changing factors around literacy practices, such as globalisation and advances in technology, the concept of literacy has recently come to include visual, technological and cultural perspectives (Seligmann, 2012), and to distinguish between personal and academic literacy. Personal literacy, as the name implies, refers to the life history of an individual, which includes their ability to talk, read and write as well as interpret visual information. The re-envisioned definitions of literacy refer to the ability to understand and negotiate meaning through any form of text or modality, such as oral and written languages, images, equations, symbols, sounds, gestures, graphs and artefacts, in any set of socially, historically and culturally situated practices (Scholtz, 2019; Huang & Archer, 2017; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Olson, 2006). People develop their literacy from their early experiences with texts and visual images, which affect the way they engage in literacy practices later in life (Seligmann, 2012: 55).

In contrast, academic literacy is described as the acts of students' literate life, and more to the experiences of their lives in relation to academic achievement. The acquired knowledge and experiences of students link with their ability to make meaning in an academic environment (Seligmann, 2012).

However, these definitions may not hold true for all countries, as each country has a specific language policy and language goals to reach, besides freedom with regard to the implementation of their policies to attain their unique goals. South Africa sees literacy as a functional tool that is

available to its citizens, particularly in their mother-tongue language, while lack of fluency in many forms of literacy such as academic, disciplinary and numeracy in the English language remain a societal threat. Boughey and McKenna (2016) advocate for an independent model of literacy that allows students in tertiary institutions to decontextualise the discourse according to their context of language use.

2.3.2 Academic literacy: Epistemological and ideological perspectives

Having examined definitions and opinions on what literacy constitutes, I move on to definitions of academic literacy in order to highlight the nexus between academic literacy and student achievement in higher education.

Academic literacy is a broad concept in education, subject to different scholarly understandings and ideologies. The term is defined in relation to language development in the school curriculum, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic notions of language, language apprehension, and an inclusive model. Globally, the complexity of academic literacy practices in higher education has been drawing researchers' interest for at least a decade (Jacobs, 2007; Lillis & Scott, 2007; Wingate & Tribble, 2011; Geisler, 2013; Kiili, Mäkinen & Coiro, 2013; Scholtz, 2016). Perhaps the increasing research interest is due to the considerable effect of academic literacy on the overall academic success of students across different programmes. Also, it may be due to increased access to higher education in all societies, which forces attention to be paid to the matter of students grappling with academic literacy in English (l2). In higher education, the academic achievements of students can be attributed to the strength of their academic literacy.

Lillis and Scott (2007) are concerned with the uncertain and contested definitions of academic literacies which inform their research. According to OECD (2000) and Barton and Hamilton (2000), as cited in Kiili, Mäkinen and Coiro (2013: p. 223), literacy is 'linked to school-based reading, writing, and technical skills, whereas other scholars have focused on the application of these skills in relevant ways that vary by social and cultural context'. Nevertheless, whether the term academic literacy is used to refer to the acquisition of skills or their application in society, the explosion of internet access and rapidly emerging new technologies continually raise questions about the changing nature of literacy and meaning-making in a 21st century community. New policies (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007), rigorous standards (Common Core Standards Initiative,

2010), and innovative assessments (OECD, 2011) challenge secondary school educators to keep up with changing notions of literacy while considering how best to prepare students to analyse, reason and communicate effectively in all modalities so as to continue learning throughout their lives.

In the present research study, I have conceptualised a multidimensional framework for academic literacies to help students become aware of different aspects of academic writing for assessments and how student teachers can both develop and express their identities through their academic writing. More specifically, this broad framework for literacy and learning explicitly considers the overlapping role of argumentation, digital inquiry, collaboration and innovation as they are applied to continuously evolving disciplinary literacy practices. With this framework, I seek to move beyond deficit views of literacy skills, a term used by Wingate, Andon and Cogo (2011), to consider ways of helping first-year student teachers expand their literacy repertoires as they construct their identities through academic writing. I concur with Lillis and Scott (2007), who define academic literacy as a field of inquiry which has a specific epistemological and ideological stance, and that allows students to study academic communication and writing skills. In other words, academic literacy has to do with knowledge construction, which is influenced by sociocultural, economic and political beliefs. Hence there is a view that there ought to be an 'epistemological and ideological understanding' of the term academic literacy before it may be strategically applied by researchers (Lillis & Scott, 2007). This view draws attention to the implications of academic literacy for teaching and learning and to how academic literacy determines the individual's success in the social and economic contexts.

Wingate and Tribble (2011) focus on two domains of academic literacy: writing at higher-education level and English for academic purposes (EAP). The first entails the epistemology of humanities and social science subjects that are made more explicit to students, along with the pedagogy, which ought to demystify academic writing and develop the collaborative writing skills appropriate to a literate and critical society (Gere, 2019). The latter, EAP, commonly known as academic English, entails training students, usually in a higher education setting, to use language appropriately for study. Sometimes EAP courses may be intended to raise students' general English levels so that they can enter university. Wingate and Tribble (2011) are of the view that much attention has been given to the academic literacies of English non-native students in the

UK and elsewhere, while the application of Academic Literacies Theory and the positive pedagogic effects of supporting EAP on the overall institution instructional model are neglected. This neglect negatively affects the academic writing of mainstream students. Also, it highlights the importance of the skilful use of academic literacy tools and English to facilitate students' completion of their academic programme in higher education. However, for students to successfully pass academic modules, they have to take into account different strategies or approaches to their academic literacy.

Apart from being the ability to understand and contextualise the academic vocabulary required in post-secondary education, academic literacy also refers to being proficient in reading and writing about academic subjects. Its practices are based on discussion and analysis of formal, academic and subject-specific jargon used and assessed in classrooms. It requires students to analyse, summarise, compare, contrast and synthesise ideas and related information from a wide variety of sources.

Bharuthram (2006) states that an academic literacy approach should consider the number of literacy practices needed by students to engage in their studies. Academic literacy acknowledges the different positions and identities that students participate in as academic readers and writers. In contrast, some scholars relate academic literacy to the writing context of higher education students (Bharuthram, 2006; Lillis & Scott, 2007; Wingate & Tribble, 2011). This shows that academic literacy may be considered either as reading or writing literacy skills, or both, in higher education and research. It is key to learning, as learning is 'based on complex sets of discourses, identities, and values rather than skill and socialisation' (Street 2001: 20). This implies that learning is influenced by a set of values and beliefs which shape students' identities and give them a sense of belonging in their social groups as they engage with writing for academic purposes. What is taught in schools or the discourses that define the curriculum are shaped by how people see themselves and how they want others to see them (Street, 2001). This claim relates to Bazerman, Little and Bethel's (2005:5) view that 'people in daily life are constantly learning from the people around them and the tasks they face, but institutions of schooling set up activities that are to some degree separated from the activities of daily life'. Therefore, a writing course for first-year students must be geared towards their preparation for the demands of higher education (Bazerman, et.al., 2005). When this is the case, students effortlessly move through literacy events

to its practices, with less concentration on other concerns that hinder the development of literacy functions (Bazerman, et.al., 2005).

According to Street (2001), three complex factors shape academic literacy acquisition: students' values and beliefs, students' identities and their sense of belonging. I examined evidence of each of these in the academic writings of first-year student teachers who participated in this study. I also examined various academic discourses of first-year students who are 'novices entering a university community' (Mauranen, Hynninen & Ranta, 2010:184), and how they negotiated different identities and beliefs regarding learning in higher education. However, the students who took part in my research sample were English second-language learners, and not 'native speakers of academic English' (Mauranen, Hynninen & Ranta, 2010:184). Student participation is discussed at length in Chapter Four.

2.3.3 Academic literacy in South African higher education

Obtaining a higher education degree has become an increasingly crucial step for people in order to achieve their personal and professional growth and freedom. Radical economic changes experienced in the world in the last decade have made higher institution degrees the most crucial tool for attaining and maintaining either a middle- or upper-class lifestyle (White & Lowenthal, 2011). This explains why it is no longer surprising that enrolment in colleges and universities globally continues to increase at staggering rates. Demographic shifts in the global population and increased focus on the significance of higher education have resulted in changes in the makeup of the global higher education body. Students entering higher education institutions in recent years show increased diversity in religion, culture, race, language, levels of academic preparation and physical ability, among others (White & Lowenthal, 2011). However, even though the number of students entering higher education institutions has continued to rise, the success rate recorded among students remains low (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014; Jappie, 2020; Munyoro & Dube, 2020). Most students do not have higher academic literacy or language mastery, which makes it difficult for them to interact with learning materials. The low success rates show the importance of academic literacy and language mastery for higher education success (White & Lowenthal, 2011; Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014; Burger & Naudé, 2019; Munyoro & Dube, 2020).

Academic literacy and mastery of the language of learning and teaching is vital for academic success (Mukhroji, 2020). The growth of English language usage as a result of the dissemination

of academic information has transformed higher education institutions (White & Lowenthal, 2011). Now many more students need to master the English language so that they can understand their particular disciplines and successfully navigate their learning. In recent years, language and applied linguistics instructors across the globe have shown an interest in instilling knowledge in academic literacy by using genre-centred strategies to analyse written and spoken discourse (Clark, 1999; White & Lowenthal, 2011; Thaiss, Bräuer, Carlino & Ganobcsik-Williams, 2012; Johnson, Lin & Lin, 2016). Nations around the world have also made efforts to enhance academic literacy because of the demand for high-level professionals (Fouche, 2010; Jefferies, McNally, Roberts, Wallace, Stunden, D'Souza & Glew, 2018).

In South Africa, educational policies with regard to academic literacy in higher education have been developed. However, the language used in teaching and learning has continued to be a barrier to access and success in higher education, considering that African languages have not been academically accorded high status in education (Van Dyk, 2019). The majority of students entering higher education institutions in South Africa are neither proficient in African languages nor English, which makes it difficult to help them learn and develop academic literacy. Research shows that low levels of academic literacy in the language used for learning is the main reason why most higher education students in South Africa do not succeed, even though they have the potential (Van Dyk, 2019). Students with low academic literacy levels find it challenging to deal with complex academic materials.

Van Dyk (2005) and Letseka (2009) reveal that dropout rates of students at tertiary institutions have increased in recent years. According to data released by the National Plan for Higher Education or NPHE (2001) 25% of first-year tertiary students drop out of school before completing their education, which results in a financial loss of R1.3 billion yearly. Research shows that not only has the country recorded increased numbers of first-year dropouts, but also, a 40% dropout rate among disadvantaged students (Murray, 2014; Department of Education, 2015; Van Dyk, 2019). The situation remains a challenge for higher education, with contributing factors including poverty, language difficulties, and difficulties in adapting to the new environment, among others.

Another reason for low levels of higher education achievement is that most universities in South Africa use English as the main language of instruction. Research shows that English first-language

speaking students are more successful at the end of their first-year and subsequent years than those who use English as a second language (Hibbert, 2011; Neumann, Padden & McDonough, 2019). Most students currently prefer English as the language of learning and teaching, even though the use of English as a teaching and learning language is a disadvantage to their performance in higher education. These challenges have compelled universities in South Africa to implement strategies to support under-prepared students (Van Dyk, 2019). These new strategies pay attention to the many post-enrolment factors which influence academic success, including low levels of academic literacy.

The policy implemented by some higher learning institutions to deal with these challenges is the establishment of a Language Unit for Academic Literacy (UAL), which aims at enhancing students' academic literacy. Many universities in South Africa have established language departments to help deal with low literacy and language mastery issues. The University of Pretoria, for example, established a language department to help students who are at high risk of failing owing to low levels of academic literacy or mastery of the academic language (Van Dyk, 2019). The unit has the responsibility to assess first-year students' academic and language literacy using a valid and standardised measuring instrument (Van Dyk, 2019). The unit also provides language support to students who are not capable of completing their courses within the time allowed, by teaching them language support courses related to their courses. This includes courses such as communication skills, academic writing and academic reading (Defazio, Jones, Tennant & Hook, 2019).

I believe that the move by higher education institutions to teach courses such as communication skills, academic writing and academic reading through their language units or departments is a suitable strategy to enhance students' academic literacy and to attain the learning and development goals set by each higher institution.

Until now, I have emphasised the relationship between academic language/literacy and academic writing as an aspect of academic literacy; I have stressed that academic literacy is a higher education term used to describe the literacy requirements of post-secondary school education. Notably, academic literacy and academic writing are distinct from each other, in the sense that the former involves the development of these five skills: reading, writing, speaking, listening and

viewing, from an analytical and interpretative perspective throughout a student's higher education career. The latter – academic writing – is more narrowly focused on the student's writing knowledge, skills and ability. Both terms are interrelated as they are used in the contexts of academic instruction and language of instruction. Also, there is no guarantee that native speakers of an academic language will be proficient in their use of academic literacy skills (Daminova, Tarasova & Kirpichnikova, 2017). In fact, the component of academic writing is still the most challenging of the academic literacy skills for post-secondary level students. In general, first-year students engage in a developmental learning process of academic writing and language of instruction.

2.4. Academic writing in learning

In this study, the term academic writing is interchangeably used with 'student writing'. It is a vital part of the higher education curriculum, as indicated earlier. According to Curry and Lillis (2002) students engage in writing for three reasons: assessments, the learning process, and in order to enter a particular disciplinary community. In terms of assessment, students are expected by their assessor, regardless of the nature of the modules, to explain the content in written form, using good academic language (English), and to apply grammatical conventions to ensure that there is cohesion of sentences and arguments. Students also learn through their academic writing, because some assessments require students to make use of their reasoning ability and develop as critical thinkers in relation to academic texts and other academic contexts. As students' progress through academic programmes, the combination of the first two purposes (assessment and learning) serve as a bridge for identifying with the norms and conventions of a chosen field. In the context of this study, for example, student teachers have to conform to the conventions of the teaching profession.

Generally, academic writing is not taught as a course in the higher education curriculum. This may be due to the misconception that students will naturally develop as they progress in their academic journey. Despite the fact that academic writing is paramount to higher education pedagogies, it is not clearly linked to the curriculum and implicitly is regarded part of students' own practical knowledge; it is therefore not explicitly taught as a practice (Curry, et al, 2002). This research study explored the perceptions and experiences of first-year student teachers of academic writing in relation to their identity formation on the basis of this limitation.

While academic writing is not a visible aspect of the higher education curriculum, it is considered part of the academic evaluation and assessment of students. Irvin (2010) is of the view that academic writing is a constant practice of assessment that requires the writer to exhibit their knowledge and to indicate their aptitude with regard to certain fundamental skills such as deducing, discerning and presenting texts. Students have to engage in academic writing for assessments, which involves learning and then expressing knowledge of a particular discipline. This observation is in line with the three purposes of academic writing (assessment, learning and discipline) as stated by Curry and Lillis (2002). However, there are notable problems or challenges that first-year undergraduate students encounter in developing coping strategies.

As I advanced in higher education studies, I realised that speaking good English does not automatically result in being a skilled writer, particularly when writing for academic purposes. Academic writing is demanding for novice writers and impressive in an experienced one. Academic writing may be difficult even for experienced writers because of the specific language conventions used. Mauranen, Hynninen and Ranta (2010) postulate that no individual is born a first-language speaker of academic English. While some children are born as English language native speakers, they still need to learn and develop academic literacy in this language. This signifies that English academic language is to be learned by both English' first- and second-language students.

At the same time, in developing their written English academic language and achieving academically, students draw upon their inherent English language writing abilities. This is supported by researchers who make it clear that 'writing skilfully can involve sophisticated problem solving' (Deane, Odendahl, Quinlan, Fowles, Welsh & Bivens-Tatum, 2008:3). The term 'academic language' is used in this study to refer to words that are 'situated for formal speech and writing but that are not necessarily found in everyday use of language' (Seligman, 2012, p. 81). Deane et al. (2008, p. 3) distinguish between the skills outcomes of experienced and inexperienced writers. They state:

> Expert writers often develop elaborate goals, particularly content and rhetorical goals, which require sophisticated problem-solving. In contrast, novice writers typically take a simpler, natural approach to composing, adopting a knowledge-telling approach in which content is generated through association, with one idea prompting the next.

This implies that someone with good writing skills associated with experience in a specific field can produce texts of good quality that may be considered 'textbooks' and that contribute to innovations in a specific field. These writings necessitate good background knowledge to both produce and understand them. On the other hand, beginner and non-experienced writers can produce clear and easy-to-understand texts, which are based on previously read or learned materials.

In keeping with the above, it is worth reiterating that the writing process is difficult not only for beginners but also for experienced writers. The process is complex and confusing, as readers tend to reorganise an individual's writing and reviews on the basis of their perceptions of a particular subject (Seligmann, 2012). In addition, Seligmann (2012) attests that there are no academic tasks that enhance thinking as well as the practice of academic writing. In this research study, I have examined first-year student teachers' work as novice writers based on the assumption that their literacy levels needed to be improved or strengthened.

A number of factors are responsible for low achievements in the academic writing of English second-language students, but attention will be drawn to students' language proficiency in English. First, I explain the concept of academic writing, followed by a description of the problems and factors influencing academic writing and achievement rates.

As mentioned earlier, the practice of academic writing guides students in becoming critical thinkers. A layman might describe this ability as being able to 'think out of the box'. It involves questioning, appraising, explaining and justifying one's own point of view through logical argumentation. This ability is needed by every skilful academic writer because it helps them to understand a text or a task, create a mind map to prepare for writing, and then engage with the writing act by expanding on ideas noted at the outset. However, not all new writers or students have the ability to think critically.

Vyncke (2012) based her study on the concept and practice of critical thinking in academic writing. She investigated the perceptions and writing experiences of three postgraduate students through in-depth interviews. She identified various problems in academic writing among these students,

which included lack of confidence in formulating arguments (whether personal or scholarly), not having a good understanding of the discourse, unfamiliarity with genres, and non-comprehension of the assessment rubric. Although Vyncke's (2012) study focused on postgraduate students, it is relevant to my research study because it shows that even at postgraduate level, academic writing is a major challenge. Based on reported levels of academic progression in higher education, I believe that first-year undergraduate student teachers face similar problems in academic writing. Possibly, they experience these problems on a grand scale, considering that academic writing is still new to them, unlike with the postgraduate students in Vyncke's study. Therefore, it is important to support students' academic writing, especially in the first year of study, to enable them to cope with writing and learning across the curriculum.

2.5 Challenges with academic writing in English (L2)

Many scholarly works investigate gaps in the academic writing of first-year English second-language learners (Salamonson, et al., 2010; Evans & Morrison, 2011; Gonye, Mareva, Dudu & Sibanda, 2012). Amongst these works, much attention has been given to the specific challenges of English academic writing faced by students in higher education (Salamonson, et al., 2010; Evans & Morrison, 2011; Gonye, Mareva, Dudu & Sibanda, 2012). A fluency in spoken or conversational English does not imply that such a speaker is adequately equipped to engage in English academic writing. This is because written language is different from ordinary discourse, which uses casual language, uncertainties, reiterations and incomplete sentences (Seligman, 2012). This means that all forms of writing are likely to exhibit the writer's true level of writing skills.

English academic writers often struggle to use academic and disciplinary vocabulary in their writing. Sometimes, this situation is caused by unfamiliarity with the complexity of the English language and results in inappropriate use of academic terminology.

According to Salomone (2015), studying in a language that is not one's own requires supplementary verbal and oral abilities achieved over time in the learning programme of that language. It also necessitates a rich academic language and sometimes the ability to assess and critically reorganise details and views, in both written and oral language. This challenge was comprehensively examined by Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2013) in a book entitled *English-*

Medium Instruction at Universities: Global Challenges. One of the book's contributors, Wilkinson (2013), reveals problems with the use of English academic language in curriculum and course design. Despite the provision of language learning resources such as tutorials, language specialists, redesigning of tasks, and academic writing training, Wilkinson (2013) notes that English second-language students struggled more linguistically than their Dutch counterparts (French and German) in different programmes at the same higher education institution and level. Further, he argues that a student-centred approach helps students deal with their 'productive competencies' in writing and speaking more than an approach where academic content is crammed in a less proficient language (Wilkinson, 2013). The learning context described above does not produce a true reflection of students' understanding of the curriculum.

In 2004, Hellsten and Prescott reported on the impact of the English university curriculum on international students in different disciplines and study levels. Their aim was to investigate comments made by students during classroom interaction, and the effect that the use of English had on the quality of students' learning. The findings of this study showed that the majority of the students found it challenging to participate and share views during classroom discourse (Hellsten & Prescott, 2004) because they were conscious of their conversational flaws in English. As a result of fear of intimidation owing to incorrect pronunciation of English words, students remained quiet during class discussions. A finding from students' reflective journals in that study was that some students remained silent in class as a result of communication difficulties rather than as a result of difficulties with the lesson content. Students believed that there should be support for English second-language students because of their low levels of English. This could be the case for first-year undergraduate students at the university where the current research was conducted, particularly because most of the lecturers of English and their tutors were not native speakers of English. In fact, one of the findings of my previous research was that the first-year students were intimidated by the fluency of other South African students who spoke English well (Joseph, 2015).

It would not be fallacious to state that most first-year student teachers learn academic English because it is the only language of instruction and is used for assessment purposes at the university. Although the institution's language policy (2003) allows for the use of students' home languages in assessment tasks if agreed to by the student and the assessing faculty, this option has never been

realistically considered, and English remains the LOLT across the curriculum, except in the teaching of other languages such as Afrikaans and isiXhosa.

A survey analysis conducted on 81 petroleum engineering undergraduates at Hadhramout University of Sciences and Technology in Yemen focused on motivation and attitudes towards the use of English for learning purposes (Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009). For the data analysis, students' motivation was classified into three categories: instrumental, integrative and personal. The students' attitudes were grouped into four themes: (i) English in the Yemeni social context, (ii) English in the Yemeni educational context, (iii) the English language itself, and (iv) the culture of the English-speaking world. Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) discovered that almost all undergraduate students considered the use of English important for both academic purposes and socialisation. This helped them to be motivated to learn English, but very few undergraduates saw the need to learn English for cultural interaction.

Generally, students develop positive attitudes when learning English for its social and academic advantages. Owing to the global status of the English language, students often opt to use the English language for communication inside and outside of university. Inspired by the work of Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009), I investigated the experiences of first-year student teachers in the use of academic English for writing purposes. I explored the students' experiences with English academic writing, in light of the fact that they were second-language learners and had just transitioned from high school learning.

2.6 Academic writing and student support

Scholars have explored the challenges of academic writing in the English language and have drawn different conclusions on the role of students' academic support systems such as writing workshops and institutional writing centres, which employ trained consultants who give feedback to reduce the problem (Salamonson, Koch, Weaver, Everett & Jackson, 2010; Dowse & Van Rensburg, 2015; Leibowitz, 2016). Regardless of how enormous the challenge of academic writing in a second language may be, it is a relief to the burdened new and unskilled academic student-writers when they are provided with an effective strategy or support system (Salamonson et al., 2010); Dowse & Van Rensburg, 2015; Leibowitz, 2016). It was acknowledged by Salamonson et al.

(2010) that support spaces have a positive effect on the development of English academic writing of second-language learners at university.

Through a randomised intervention of 59 first-year nursing students for whom English was a second language, Salamonson et al. (2010) used an academic support workshop as a strategy to support their academic writing skills. The four-day embedded academic learning support workshop aimed at the provision of constructive feedback and suggestions in written form to improve students' work. Salamonson et al.'s (2010) results show that 28 attendees of the workshop benefited significantly compared to their counterparts who did not attend the workshop. Also, the study confirms that an academic support system such as consultation with experienced and knowledgeable writers and content experts helps to allay students' fears regarding English academic writing.

Salamonson et al. (2010) argue that peer support gives first-years sufficient confidence and awareness of what is in their self-interests to handle academic and personal goals. The authors argue that when students engage in workshops, they interact with their peers who share either the same or different sentiments and have different skills and abilities. Exchanging ideas and thoughts with each other plays a significant role in strengthening what first-years know, as they learn new writing skills from one another. In the case of my research study, support from tutors and lecturers' feedback and written suggestions helped first-year student teachers to cope with English academic writing at the university. I was particularly interested in peer-to-peer student support in seeking to understand how first-year students coped with the difficulties of academic writing.

Research has proven that support in academic writing is essential at tertiary level, but there is limited research to show how first-year students develop their identities through competency in English academic writing. At the same time, it has long been recognised that identity construction always occurs within a communicative language (Norton, 1997). In addition, Norton (1997) reveals that the notion of identity is applicable to forms of pedagogy. This means that identity is at least partially based on the way students are trained. For example, people who have been trained by the same teacher might have similar behaviours and could be referred to as people belonging to the same school. However, the significance of identity is only evident if students share common identities.

Norton (1997) illustrates the experience of Mai, a young Vietnamese woman who attended an English second-language course in Canada. He found that Mai did not find the classroom speaking exercises beneficial to the English course because other students who spoke about their native countries during sessions did not share her language, or her cultural, ethnic and social identity. Thus, Mai's experience showed that her language and identity as an investment in learning was not regarded, and hence she could not use it to support her English language development in the course. Norton (1997) is of the view that the connection between an individual and the language they use is not only theoretical and imaginary but also has significant value for constructive and dynamic language learning and teaching. Therefore, my research study aims to establish how identities are constructed by first-year student teachers who are English second-language speakers, and their shared experiences in relation to English academic writing.

2.7 Exploring teacher identities

In this section, I explore the literature on teacher identities in order to shed light on how novice teachers construct their identities. I also highlight the role of language in shaping teachers' identity construction.

2.7.1 Language and teacher identity construction

There is abundant research on the role of teachers in identity construction, both novice teachers and experienced teachers (Samuel & Stephens, 2000; Murray & Male, 2005; Brown & McNamara, 2011; McIntyre & Thomson, 2016; Hong, Cross Francis, & Schutz, 2018). However, few studies focus on teacher identity, especially in relation to student teachers in higher education, and the role of English second-language for academic purposes in shaping student teachers' identities (Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008; Park, 2012).

Urzúa and Vásquez (2008) discuss context-specific functions of future-oriented academic discourse, such as planning and prediction, based on teachers' ability to reflect and think, in relation their professional identity. Their study shows how 16 novices, English-as-second language (ESL) teachers on a US university ESL programme, were influenced by 'a goal-orientated and problem-solving type of reflection' and shows how they negotiated their professional identities. The findings of the study show that the teachers adopted planning and prediction distinctively as

strategies when engaging in discursive presentation, often using the first-person term 'I', which can be considered an instance of teacher identity construction (Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008). Thus it is concluded that future-oriented talk establishes the kind of thinking that permits beginner teachers to understand their first experiences in relation to their future – to envision the type of teacher they wish to be, and to use their developmental years in forming a programmed perception of self as teachers (Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008).

Nomlomo, Stofile and Sivasubramaniam (2018) state that professional identity encompasses both the personal and professional identities, which are subject to how the teacher prioritises their teaching roles, and a combination of professional experience and sociocultural background. This indicates that teacher identity may be understood through the lens of the individual characteristics of the teacher, the content of specific subjects and their instructional delivery, and the personal student teacher development (Nomlomo, Stofile & Sivasubramaniam, 2018).

Furthermore, Urzúa and Vásquez recognise that teacher identity is constructed through relationships and conversations. This implies that the construction of teachers' professional identity is a complex phenomenon that involves teachers' perceptions of themselves, as indicated in their professional development, choice of pedagogy, control of classroom domain, and the ownership of language(s) (Kayi-Aydar, 2019). A teacher's professional identity is 'constituted in any utterances which include first person reference to one's activities, knowledge, beliefs and attitudes related to teaching' (Urzúa & Vásquez, 2008, p. 1937).

Urzúa & Vásquez's (2008) investigation focused on spoken discourses and novice English language teachers. It inspired me to investigate whether the first-year student teachers who participated in this study reflected any form of professional identity, specifically in their academic writing. I base my enquiry on Urzúa & and Vásquez's definition of teacher professional identity and on Nomlomo, Stofile and Sivasubramaniam's (2018) perspective of teacher identity, both of which include the personal and professional aspects of becoming a teacher. I believe that student teachers' experiences with academic writing could enable them to develop this kind of identity.

Barkhuizen (2011) argues along similar lines as Urzúa and Vásquez(2008), positing that the idea of teachers' identity, in relation to their reflective teaching practice, can be linked to the narrative

inquiry rather than to spoken discourses. In his research, Barkhuizen (2011) realised that his narrative inquiry into the lives of migrant students who lived in New Zealand was retold in academic spaces. This phenomenon can be described as 'narrative muddling', and it shows that teachers and student teachers construct their professional identities through shared narratives between the teachers and learners, or between student teachers and peers (Barkhuizen, 2011).

With the understanding that written narratives elicit different forms of identities, in the analysis chapter of this study I look out for themes relating to student teacher development, ie, personal characteristics, language teaching and learning experiences. For teachers and student teachers to understand their professional identities, they should reflect on questions about their past and present experiences in relation to their future identities (Barkhuizen, 2016). Some of the answers to these questions could indicate how well teachers' professional identities relate to their personal characteristics, classroom practices and pedagogical approaches.

Another interesting study on teacher identity was conducted by Park (2012) in the United States. The study explored identity construction by non-native English teachers while studying for a TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages) degree. Park (2012) used a qualitative method and adopted three main research tools for data collection, namely, electronic autobiographical (e-auto) narratives (structured), electronic journal (e-journal) entries (semi-structured), and individual interviews (unstructured). The study revealed that 'teachers' identities were negotiated and constructed prior to and during their time spent in TESOL programs where multiple discourses and counter discourses shaped and reshaped the teachers' understanding of their work as English teachers' (Park, 2012:142). The findings also indicate that teachers' identities may be connected to their life history with its social, educational and linguistic aspects. While Park's (2012) study is limited to English teachers, it could be generalised to student teachers in higher education training because the language of instruction is central to all pedagogical situations.

Identity construction by non-native English teachers explored by Park (2012) has implications for children's language learning. Language plays a crucial role in learning as it is through language that children are able to apply ideas and conceptualise their surroundings, both from what the teacher teaches and from what they are able to understand in written and non-written forms. In

addition, Desai (2012) suggests that the combination of student teacher knowledge (prior or new) and other heterogeneous experiences, when shared, can overcome academic challenges which impede the achievement of educational and professional pursuits. The quest for these pursuits motivates student teachers to make use of their identity as a support tool to ameliorate difficult learning contexts caused by an unfamiliar language of instruction which, in this research, is English (L2).

The way in which a teacher constructs their identity could influence the teaching approaches adopted in the teaching-learning process (Costa et al., 2005). It is expected that a qualified teacher would be able to support learners in the use of English for academic purposes and in non-academic contexts, but in South Africa many experienced and beginner teachers are English second-language speakers. This position affects their teaching methods not only in English, but also in other subjects, especially in the Intermediate Phase where English starts to be used as the main LOLT (Costa et al., 2005). Also, the majority of beginner teachers are strongly affected by their individual exposure to school practices as learners, or by their experience as student teachers. (Costa et al., 2005). English as the LOLT seems to be a challenge for both teachers and learners, and calls for bilingualism that accommodates the learners' home languages (Costa, 2005). In this study I assume that student teachers share common beliefs, perceptions and assumptions about learning English as second language. Hence I investigated how student teachers constructed their identities, given the linguistic challenges they encounter in the university setting.

Generally, identity is negotiated according to the context, beliefs and values of an individual or group (Kanno & Stuart, 2011). Similarly, a teacher's professional identity is constructed based on learning experiences during and after training, and the varying assumptions of the individual. Sometimes, the teacher's identity is shaped through performance and shared experiences in teaching practice. Kanno and Stuart (2011) propose that the learning-in-practice experience of English second-language beginner teachers affects their identities as teachers. Through a case study approach of two graduate students and the adoption of a situated learning theoretical framework of an ESL classroom, Kanno and Stuart (2011) show that there is a correlation between the identity development of new graduate teachers and various in-class practices. Hence, they argue for an extensive comprehension of the identity growth in the field of L2 teacher instruction

(Kanno & Stuart, 2011). Against this backdrop, I examined first-year student teachers' journals in order to understand how they constructed their identities through academic writing in English (L2).

2.7.2 Student teachers' multiple identities

This section focuses on the construction of student teachers' identities as individuals, based on their personalities, their linguistic knowledge and their social and cultural affinities. In their study on students' levels of engagement, Krause and Coates (2008) adopted a survey methodology to explore first-year students' engagement at a university in Australia. Based on the data revealed in the First-year Experience Questionnaire (FYEQ), they reported their finding using a seven-category engagement scale and psychometric procedures. The seven engagement categories were the transition engagement scale (TES), academic engagement scale (AES), peer engagement scale (PES), student–staff engagement scale (SES), intellectual engagement scale (IES), online engagement scale (OES) and beyond-class engagement scale (BES). The transition engagement scale (TES) and the academic engagement scale (AES) are relevant to my study because the former covers first-year students' involvement with university life and practices for the period of transition, while the latter deals with the aptitude to manage one's time, study habits and academic achievements (Krause & Coates, 2008). The other five engagements are subsets of these two categories. Therefore, first-year students are likely to construct their identities within these two categories by defining different ways in which they can adapt and participate in university life as they transition from high school to university. This implies that in most instances, individual students negotiate identities (such as their ideals, views and characters) as they interact with other people such as family and society. In this research study, identity construction is examined in the English second-language learning setting at UW. I draw on Krause and Coates (2008) to explain the difficulties experienced by students in constructing self-identities in learning.

Higher education institutions ought to create enabling learning environments for students, but students have to take responsibility for their own learning. This suggests that in the students' bid to engage in learning in a transitional space at university, they assume new identities as first-year undergraduates. The extent to which they involve themselves in learning academic English also depends on their personal perception of the new situation. Krause and Coates (2008:7) describe this point in the life of first-year students as the time in which they identify the 'goodness-of-fit

between themselves and the university'. Therefore, it can be argued that every first-year student teacher must develop a strong self-identity to achieve a transitional or academic strategy. I address the notion self-identity in student teachers by analysing their written reflections in Chapter Five of this thesis.

Another notable form of identity formation is language. Language identity is evident in almost every sphere of life, but in this research study the term is examined from the perspective of second-language learning. Norton (2008) refers to three familiar themes drawn from developing knowledge on three interrelated issues; namely, identity, language learning, and critical pedagogies. Her research foregrounds three important elements: (i) identity, investment and imagined communities; (ii) identity categories and educational change; and (iii) identity and literacy. Together, these three elements highlight the multiple identities that characterise people. These identities revolve around structured relationships, future human possibilities, and target language users (Norton, 2016). Investment refers to a consideration of the psychological and sociological paradigm that language learners use during interactions with others. The significance of an investment in language learning and pedagogy cannot be over-emphasised when it comes to identity construction. Investment and identity construction are influenced by the imagined society and vary according to one's development, ability and interest (Norton, 2016).

These factors corelate with Bourdieu's (1977) concept of investment and Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of community of practice. In the works of Bourdieu, investment is portrayed as an exchange-value that is manifested in the future. In the case of this study, the exchange-value is the role of the second language (English) for instructional purposes.

Norton (2008) summarises Bourdieu's notion of language investment as the understanding which a language learner has of a language as being intricate, promote of multiple identities, with a dynamic and cross functional attribute of time and space that leads to the reproduction of social interactions. Further, she argues that 'an investment in the target language is also an investment in the learner's own identity' (Norton, 2008; Norton, 2016).

Darvin and Norton's (2015) study investigated the interconnectedness of identity, ideology and capital through a comprehensive model of investment, based on the case studies of a female language learner in Uganda and a male language learner in Canada. The study showed that despite

the two learners' imagined communities, they both had the capacity to invest in their learning in a way that recognised their own agency and their capacity to invest in learning through material and symbolic resources. Their learning styles suggested criticism of traditional practices and favoured innovation (Darvin & Norton, 2015). It can be deduced that language learners or language users tend to learn or use a particular language because of the perception that it is beneficial to achieve a particular purpose. With this understanding, this study assumes that student teachers who are not familiar with English academic language will construct an identity with first-language users of English in order to learn the target language.

The second point pertains to the association between the student teachers and their peers who are competent in academic English. Norton (2008) believes that language learners negotiate identity in social, historical and cultural contexts. These contexts imply that student teachers are members of communities who adopt and adhere to other communities with different and specific social values and well-determined historical characteristics. They have to conform to a new culture to become part of it. In this way, they construct new identities. This shows that language plays a great role in shaping a person's identity. In the context of this study, student teachers construct and negotiate their identities through English (L2), the dominant language used in the academic setting.

The academic environment and fellow English second-language learners could be considered the community referred to in Lave and Wenger's notion of the community of practice (COP). The COP could serve as the social learning platform of student teachers in which they are prompted to negotiate identity. Norton (2008) refers to social identity as the connection between the specific language used by a learner as an individual and the language used by the community as an entity of society and the world. Language is mediated through structures such as the law courts, schools, families, social services and workplaces. Therefore, the social context is important in reinforcing identity construction through the use of language (Li, Grimshaw, Nielsen, Judd, Coyte & Graham, 2009; Mercieca, 2017).

2.8 Summary

This chapter has addressed six different ideas relevant to the study objectives. The first section focused on the higher education curriculum. The second section examined academic literacy by providing a broad definition of literacy, discussing literacy as a multifaceted concept from epistemological and ideological perspectives, and how it is used in the South African higher

education context in relation to linguistic, cognitive and sociocultural perspectives. Next, the role of academic writing in learning was discussed, followed by its challenges in relation to English as a second language. The next section discussed various forms of student support in the acquisition of academic writing skills. The last section discussed academic literacy in teacher education and the impact it has on the identity construction of student teachers.

In order to answer the research questions of the study, I need to lay out an appropriate theoretical framework that considers the study objectives, questions and scope, and elaborate on its strengths. I propose to address this issue in the next chapter, Theoretical Framework**.**

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

Research is conducted on the basis of an identifiable problem. The theoretical framework employed sheds light on the problem, forming an instrumental and useful mechanism for understanding a phenomenon derived from a prevailing model or a mixture of models. The theoretical framework is significant since to all intents and purposes, research is the practice of engendering knowledge so as to find appropriate responses to issues of enquiry. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), a theoretical framework enables the researcher to detect and delimit the problem, the research questions that need to be addressed, and the pertinent strategy that will be employed in conducting research. The concept of theory is embedded in the notion of theoretical framework. A theory permits the scientist to link a given study to the vast body of knowledge to which many scientists and investigators have contributed, to define breaches in scientific knowledge, and to suggest recommendations for research to come.

In keeping with the above, I articulate the theoretical framework of the present study according to four theories: Academic Literacies Theory, Theory of Identity, Theory of Identity Construction, and Social Constructivism Theory. These theories are also used to define people's characteristics (which define people's identities) and to uncover how people develop their literacy skills.

In the following section, I describe the first of these four theories, Academic Literacies Theory, in order to discover the factors that influence the identity construction of first-year students in relation to their academic writing. A comprehensive theoretical framework helps to describe the different styles and practices involved in the development of students' academic literacy and identity construction.

3.2 Academic Literacies Theory

Academic Literacies Theory is appropriate in my research study because the development of students' literacy in any language involves their academic reading and writing ability. Lea and Street (2006) explain the main characteristics of academic literacy practices from the student's perspective, indicating that it involves a change in writing patterns, a focus on new genres used in

varying contexts, and the use of appropriate language in literacy practice. These new forms enable the student to handle the social meanings and identities evoked in their writing (Lea & Street, 2006). This denotes that academic literacy involves writing for different contexts, which may be a factor in the academic socialisation of writers.

Academic Literacies Theory can be traced to the late 1990s and the work of popular theorists, Lea and Street (1998), who focused on academic writing in higher education in the United Kingdom (Wingate & Tribble, 2012). In a review of literature, Wingate and Tribble (2012) state that the Academic Literacies model emerged as a result of the lack of academic writing instruction in the UK, and to counteract erroneous views of the media and lecturers regarding the reasons for student failure. Wingate and Tribble (2012) mention that the term 'literacies' was pluralised based on the understanding that there is no single literacy practice as long as students are involved in different disciplines of study (Wingate & Tribble, 2012).

Lea and Street (1998), as cited by Wingate and Tribble (2012), reiterate that owing to the epistemological problem of academic writing in distinction to linguistics, there are three approaches to academic writing that overlap in their application, namely (i) study skills (ii) academic socialisation and (iii) academic literacies.

The study skills approach views literacy and writing as predominantly a personal and intellectual skill. This view emphasises the apparent structures of the language system and supposes that learners have the ability to engage in writing and literacy without any problem in transferring the skills from one situation to another. The academic socialisation approach is interested in the cultural change and training of learners that occurs through activities such as debates. Learners develop the techniques of conversation, writing, discerning and using literacy in accordance with a specific discipline. The academic socialisation approach assumes that the subject matter of debates and the types of writing required are quite constant, and that as soon as learners have acquired and understood the basic guidelines of a specific academic discourse, they can imitate it effectively in writing. The third approach, academic literacies, is interested in meaning creation, identity and supremacy, and focuses on awareness of academic conventions. However, it is argued that the academic literacies approach does not provide guidelines and principles that are required by novice writers in higher education (Lea & Street, 2006). As a result, other academic literacies theories have emerged to try to close this gap. For example, Lea (2004) and Wingate (2010) applied

the principles of academic literacies from the curriculum perspective, examining the relationship between academic literacies and academic writing instruction. These notable researchers concur that the university expectations of novice undergraduate student writers and the nature of support tools given tends to limit their literacy development (Lea, 2004; Wingate, 2010). This may be due to the fact that students' learning capabilities are reduced to a routine literary practice when completing a course, instead of allowing an integrated construction of identities, that makes use of students' prior writing knowledge.

In relation to the above, Lea and Street (2006) and Hungerford-Kresser and Amaro-Jiménez (2012), in different geographical educational settings, conceptualised academic literacies instructionally. They viewed academic literacies as a means of offering education. In their two case studies, Lea and Street (2006) revealed that despite the availability of standard writing manuals provided by lecturers, students' personal identities and 'voices' were conveyed through their writing. They stated, furthermore, that the use of genres and multimodality in students' writing should not be overlooked, particularly in the case of students from minority language groups.

Hungerford-Kresser and Amaro-Jiménez (2012) investigated the impact of academic literacies on the identity development and (re)construction of college students' in Latino, USA. They discovered that students who struggled with academic literacies attributed it to the way they saw themselves and the way others saw them (Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jiménez, 2012). Thus, these researchers applied the framework of academic literacies in two classifications – coursework and social and cultural capital. Hungerford-Kresser and Amaro-Jiménez conclude that students' negotiation of identities, undertaken while gaining momentum in their academic and social engagement, together with a sense of belonging, should not be ignored. From the findings in Hungerford-Kresser and Amaro-Jiménez's (2012) work, it can be argued that having academic skills, also known as 'study skills' (Lea & Street, 1998), may not be sufficient to indicate the readiness of first-year students to engage successfully in tertiary studies.

In light of the foregoing discussion, I concur with Lea and Street (1998) and Hungerford, et al. (2012) that the problem of English academic writing for first-year students can be understood from the perspective of both academic socialisation and academic literacies rather than from the perspective of academic writing skills and conventions only. This is because there is a direct link

between academic socialisation and academic literacies. Students who learn to socialise with others are more likely to develop their academic literacies than those who engage in no active academic socialisation.

The application of Academic Literacies Theory in this research study enhances an understanding of the role of study skills and academic socialisation in students' acquisition of academic literacies.

3.3 Theory of Identity

Since this study aims to explore identity construction in first-year student teachers through English academic writing at a higher education institution in the Western Cape, Identity Theory serves as the fundamental theory of the study. I intend to begin my explanation of this theory by discussing its background. I also point out its limitations and finally show its relevance to the present study.

First, it is important to define the term 'identity' so as to avoid any misunderstanding that might distort meaning later on. In a postmodern world, scholars consider identity as a fluid, diverse and shifting concept that is subject to modifications and contradictions. The modern world considers identity to be unstable, ongoing, negotiated and multiple (Kouhpaeenejad & Gholaminejad, 2014). Identity is also considered a collection of roles or subject positions and a mixture of personal agency and social influences. Throughout history, identity has had various definitions, all of which have common characteristics yet which reflect an evolutionary process regarding identity construction.

Identity may be seen as an adjustable lens through which one may view interactions between individuals in a broad socio-political context (Darragh, 2016). Beijaard (1995: p.282) perceives identity as 'who or what someone is, the various meanings people attach to themselves, or the meanings attributed by others'. Also, identity is how people view themselves in relation to the world, other persons and in different times and spaces (Kouhpaeenejad & Gholaminejad, 2014). In addition, Kouhpaeenejad & Gholaminejad (2014: p.200) state that identity is 'socially organised, reorganised, constructed, co-constructed and constantly reconstructed via language and discourse'.

From a historical perspective, two features of identity have emerged (Kouhpaeenejad & Gholaminejad, 2014). First, identity can unite and assimilate people, evoking a sense of unity, and

second, it can divide and differentiate among people, evoking a sense of uniqueness and division. Identity has social and personal dimensions. The social dimension of identity considers humans as agents who can think, decide and make choices (Kouhpaeenejad & Gholaminejad, 2014). Socially, identity shows people's relationships with their external surroundings, constructed through societal interactions (Kouhpaeenejad & Gholaminejad, 2014). This means that community membership consists of shifting social aspects of identity. Factors such as gender, profession, inclusion and exclusion in region and age are indispensable when it comes to the definition of identity construction in public (Barkhuizen, 2016; Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Bamberg, 2013). These features are considered identity markers.

Two social psychologists, Tajfel and Turner, formulated the Theory of Identity in the 1970s and 1980s. The two introduced the concept of social identity as a way of explaining group and intergroup behaviour (Stets & Burke, 2000). The theory takes a sociological perspective with regard to how people form their identities.

The Theory of Identity is common in language-related research, as there is a direct correlation between language and identity (Wu, 2011; Omoniyi & White, 2006). Wu (2011) concurs with Omoniyi and White (2006) that many individuals believe that identity is determined by the contextual environment in which one enters the world. Many sociologists explore identity in terms of the 'me' construct, meaning the ways in which interpersonal interactions influence an individual's sense of self (Cerulo, 1997).

Joseph (2004) refers to the individual's sense of self as 'the I,' so that identity is subjective rather than objective. Subjectivity refers to personal characteristics and personal experiences and what these imply in the individual's life. A subjective understanding of identity evaluates how implicitly or explicitly the subject's characteristics influence their sense of self. The 'I', the 'me' and the 'self' are inner products developed by the dynamism of cultural features in connection with the individual's will, in which they freely construct their own identity to express who they are. Subjectivity is a passive component of development that refers to the relationship between an individual, their identity and their personality. Therefore, the use of 'I', 'me' and 'self' directs the choices of the individual, expressing their self-images and feelings, which are, of course, subjective.

Ferris, Peck and Banda (2013) argue that an individual's characteristics or sense of belonging is not constant or shaped in one particular way. Therefore, there is no one form of identity. Rather, humans are associated with many identities according to the descriptor or particular situation. Hence, Ferris et al. (2013: 410) contend that 'our identities are not fixed and predetermined, but something we acquire as we are socialised and move through life.'

Based on Ferris et al.'s (2013) insights, I believe that first-year student teachers are likely to construct different identities according to their new learning environment and needs. Embarking on higher education is a means to a better future for many, yet the challenges of using academic English affects students' marks during assessments and their overall academic achievement, thus affecting a key aspect of their identity. In this study, the identity of first-year student teachers will not be examined from the traditional linguistics perspective of 'one language, one identity, one ethnicity' (Ferris, et al., 2013: 410). Instead, I look at identity from the point of view of one focused language, ie, English (L2) for academic purposes, and a multiplicity of identities, based on academic experiences that form social learning platforms.

Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) see identity as falling into four types; personal identity, imposed identity, assumed identity and negotiable identity. According to Zwisler (2018), personal identity is the one unknown to others, to which only the self has access, while an imposed identity is a social identity given by others which cannot be removed by the individual. Assumed identity is a social identity that is not contested, while a negotiable identity is actively deliberated upon in the light of other optional identities. Given that any human being can assume or negotiate an identity, or have one imposed by others, these four forms of identity describe the situation of most first-year students at the university where research was conducted, regardless of their discipline of study.

First, with regard to academic literacy, the selected higher education institution at which these first-year students were enrolled expects students to be relatively competent English users, according to the university's yearbook, Faculty of Education (2019). Students are expected to be already familiar with English for academic purposes. This implies that academic writing in English is one of the requirements for admission to the B. Ed programme. Also, academic English is one of the core modules in this course, and students do not have a choice with regard to this module (Ferris et al., 2013).

Second, students who attend English-medium universities assume the identity of English second-language learners, while some endeavour to socialise in English (L2) in order to belong to this community. Third, although the university imposes academic English on students at different study levels, students on their own assume and negotiate different identities in various contexts. Hence, students assume the identity the university imposes on them as undergraduate students or as either English first- or second-language learners, regardless of their demographic and linguistic backgrounds. Students who have assumed the identity of ESL learners have to develop coping strategies to learn academic English. In this way, they have to negotiate an identity through English (L2). Thus, the focus of my study is to investigate how first-year student teachers negotiate their identities through English (L2) academic writing, free writing in their personal journals, and essay writing, as discussed in the next chapter.

Identity Theory is relevant to this study because it shows that there is a strong connection between literacy and identity construction. The manner in which individuals attain literacy affects their personal perceptions and social positioning, particularly in contexts where there are social inequalities pertaining to gender, healthcare, socio-economic class and power. When people attain literacy, they have a chance to enjoy various life opportunities that can influence their self-esteem and overall sense of wellbeing (Bilikozen, 2016).

Some researchers in the language and identity field argue that certain students are less concerned about learning than about forming a satisfying identity (Poedjiastutie & Oliver, 2017; Carpenter, Flowers, Mertens & Mulhall, 2004). Realistically, many first-year students who are not proficient in English for academic purposes are expected to be proficient English users at the end of a four- or five-year degree programme. However, many struggle to achieve real proficiency in English, which affects their overall academic achievement, which in turn, affects their employability in certain sectors. In this study, student teachers had to demonstrate full proficiency in English as they are expected to teach in English in the Senior Phase.

In light of the direct connection between identity construction and literacy acquisition, Identity Theory is relevant in this study as it helps define how identity is both affected by and affects academic literacy acquisition in first-year student teachers. The theory yields useful insights into the characteristics of the student teachers who participated in my study. It is also a foundational

theoretical framework for the study because the other three theories (Academic Literacies Theory, Theory of Identity Construction, and Social Constructivism) are connected to it. However, the theory of identity is not sufficient on its own, as identity is both a social and a cognitive concept. We have to comprehend by what means identity influences first-year student teachers' identity construction. Below, I discuss the Theory of Identity Construction .

3.4 Theory of Identity Construction

In order to understand the Theory of Identity Construction, it is helpful to describe the similarities and differences between the notions of identity and identity construction. The word 'identity' is used in this study to describe a variety of common attributes that define and make it possible for an individual to belong to a specific group with common characteristics. Thus, this study recognises identity as a deciding factor by which first-year student teachers' academic language challenges may be assessed, through, for example, students' use of English as a second language and their mastery of EDC 111 course material. EDC111 is an academic literacy module offered to all first-year student teachers at UW.

Identity construction, on the other hand, is considered the re-occurring means by which English second-language students sustain their English academic language development (Baker, 2015; Kachru, 1992). From a personal point of view, identity construction in the language context has to do with the determination with which English second-language speakers acquire academic English through every means they can. They do this through a repeated learning process that is not limited to the reading of new materials in the new language; their acquisition of academic writing skills entails learning related vocabulary in the new language, listening to and understanding proficient academic English speakers.

Over the past decade, researchers have given attention to the relationship between identity and identity development theories. A study by Wortham and Rhodes (2012) found that the constructs of both scale and practice in the determination of identity and identity development are key determinants to language learning activities. Similarly, De Costa and Norton (2016) demonstrate how the consequence of a person's identity and its development falls at the intersection of schedules and engaged activities across multiple social spaces.

No doubt, the conscious effort of many language learners to acquire a second language for different uses, including academic purposes, have prompted many to maintain flexibility in the use of language resources (Blommaert, 2010). Often, high levels of motivation in English second-language students make them intensify and persevere in their new learning platforms or in opportunities which arise, resulting in an enhanced quality of intended language for a specific context. Thus, it is only logical that there will be factors that confirm an individual's identity, after which its development or construction can take place within a specific context.

Identity Construction Theory was first mentioned in a book by two sociologists, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, in 1966. According to this theory, one's identity comprises three fundamental components; personal identity, family identity and social identity. Each of the three components is shaped by certain events. Therefore, there is no one identity and identities are always 'performative' in nature. Ferris et al. (2013: 412) define the performativity of identity as 'the way in which our identity is a product of our performance'. In addition, Ferris et al. (2013) state that an identity is formed only after the repetition of certain acts over time.

Identity construction is theorised as a social practice characterised by the 'processes of linguistic and social distinction', in which language users negotiate their identities (Bailey, 2007). This implies that, according to this theory, all participants in my study may be viewed from the perspective of various positions they hold in the social world but, for the purposes of the study, will be viewed in light of the academic sphere (Bailey, 2007). Furthermore, Bailey (2007) posits that identity emanates from 'boundaries that groups construct between themselves, rather than the characteristics of group members' (Bailey, 2007: p. 258). The significance of this quote is that I will not focus on the personal characteristics of individual members of the group of first-year student teachers, but on how they negotiate their common beliefs and challenges as a group, and in groups.

Negotiated identities are socially bound in a twofold manner, i.e. in the way a person is perceived and in the way a person perceives the other. Thus, it can be argued that people define their identities in a subjective manner. Bailey termed these two subjective identity performances as 'self-ascription' and 'ascription by others' (2007: p.258). I am interested in learning how the terms apply to first-year undergraduate students' identity construction through the performance of academic writing, especially in English second-language learners. I will do this by examining whether first-

year student teachers see their own linguistic identity as a strategic tool for academic writing, or whether they believe that the way lecturers or assessors of academic literacy feel about their written tasks affects their use of academic English.

The central motivation of my research is to uncover the relationship between students' constructed identities (language, professional, social and in relation to shared learning challenge) and their writing literacies. The nature of this relationship constitutes a gap in the fields of academic writing and identity construction in English as second language. I believe that if individuals and groups of people can use identity to support each other in multiple ways, this support may also be useful in an educationally challenging context. Individuals tend to have more confidence in speaking to others who speak their own language than to those who do not. Gradually, an unplanned relationship is established between the two language speakers because both parties develop a sense of belonging. In the same way, a student's sense of belonging can develop in different contexts and according to personal beliefs of what may be gained, including learning benefits. In my data analysis, I will apply the principles of the Theory of Identity Construction to first-year student teachers according to the function the theory serves for each student, and in relation to the development of their English academic language in scaffolding their academic writing.

The Theory of Identity and the Theory of Identity Construction are not sufficient to propose a theoretical framework for the present study. Identity is often unstated, contextually influenced and emergent in interactions, but it is important to comprehend more precisely how context and social relationships contribute to identity construction. This comprehension is the aim of the following section.

3.5 Social Constructivism Theory

Social Constructivism Theory was founded in 1978 by a Russian psychologist, Vygotsky, who is now considered the father of social constructivism. Vygotsky (1978) stressed the role of social interactions in developing a child's cognition in any learning context. Vygotsky rejected Piaget's (1972) idea that learning is an active construct of knowledge involving solely a learner's cognitive development or mental powers to retain information. Social constructivism is based on the idea that language precedes thinking, and that interactions between individuals or groups of people promote language learning and the acquisition of knowledge and skills (Kalina & Powell, 2009). Vygotsky did not agree that thinking comes first in the process of language learning. Instead,

Vygotsky proposed a parallel process in which learning and language develop side by side, and where learning is not limited to the individual's realities but is borne of active social interactions within the learning environment and in time. Based on this understanding, the Theory of Social Constructivism proposes that the learning context has a direct influence on the learning process. Thus, the social interactions that occur during language learning must involve the use of engaging tasks or activities that improve learning challenges and help to develop students' critical thinking skills (Hall, 2007).

Like other theories, Social Constructivism Theory is characterised by key features that include the act of learning a piece of knowledge or a set of skills, in addition to groups of individuals, observation, collaboration, dialogue or social interactions, reflection, space, and recognition of the experiences and perspectives of others (Kalina & Powell, 2009; McComas, 2014; Armstrong, 2019). Also, Armstrong (2019) notes that a typical learning event takes place in a social context and develops from the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD), making use of scaffolding. Noteworthily, the application of the ZPD feature of social constructivism will depend on the research methodology, goal(s) and research effort.

This particular research focuses on one of three main lines in the historical use of the zone of proximal development, that is, the setting of interactive learning and joint actions (Winegar, 1988, cited in Van der Veer, Valsiner, Cocking & Renninger, 1993). Joint actions may be the different forms of collaboration that students adapt during learning; for example, students may become aware of each other's prior knowledge and experiences in a particular learning challenge, which would promote fruitful collaboration with one another. Importantly, this learning platform makes it possible for scaffolding to occur – that is, the process of breaking the learning process into separate elements or stages, and developing the tools to maser each element or stage. Over time, students develop mastery, become confident and gain ownership and consciousness of any internalised external knowledge or skill (Van de Pol, Volman & Beishuizen 2010; Mahan, 2022).

Social constructivism emphasises the contextual nature of learning and the construction of knowledge. It theorises that education is socially built and that it develops from mutual communications with one's surroundings (Vygotsky, 1978). In fact, Vygostky was not the first to notice and acknowledge the role of social interactions in learning; various theories that were

essentially social constructivist in essence were introduced in the book *The social construction of reality* by sociologists Berger and Luckman in 1966. The ideas behind these theories were inspired by various thinkers such as Marx, Durkheim and Mead (Andrews, 2012). Mead (1934) argued that human experiences are subjective interpretations of symbolic interactions. As an interpretivist, Mead (1934) held that most social conditions or behaviours evolve as fundamental social processes following the human development of mind, meaning and corresponding symbolic behaviour. Similarly, Durkheim (1938) conceptualises that human behaviours are caused by 'superficial', 'trans' or 'super' human phenomena, particularly social facts. According to Mead and Durkheim's perspectives on social constructivism, social behaviours are subject to time of occurrence, and humans have the ability to control social facts.

In theorising about the influence of English academic writing on the identity construction of first-year student teachers, two other interwoven sociocultural theories are of interest – Situated Learning Theory, as propounded by Lave and Wenger (1991), and scaffolding in the zone of proximal development (ZPD), as developed by Vygotsky (1978).

'Situated learning' proposes that learning occurs by means of associations between individuals and through connections between background knowledge, on the one hand, and informal, authentic, and often unintended contextual learning, on the other. Scaffolding in teaching is a practice by means of which an instructor breaks learning tasks into key stages or elements, and increases support (or 'scaffolds') for learners so as to develop their learning and help them in the mastery of tasks. The teacher executes this by methodically building on learners' understanding and awareness as they are trying to develop new skills. The zone of proximal development refers to the range of tasks an individual can perform with assistance; the aim is to move learners, through scaffolding, to the position where they can perform these tasks without assistance. Teachers sometimes engage learners in tasks that are way too challenging (resulting in their discouragement) or way too easy, informal and not inspiring to them (resulting in their loss of interest). In both cases, no real learning occurs because the tasks or activities do not engage the students at the correct level, within the ZPD. The value of access to the ZPD is undermined if the competent skill user or educator directly or indirectly causes students to reduce their learning effort owing to discouragement or lack of interest in the learning content (Schreiber & Valle, 2013).

Scaffolding is recognised as a key element for improvement, and is often used in classrooms to help learners with skills development. When learners become more experienced, the expert slowly decreases assistance (the scaffolding) until they can achieve the task or apply the skill by themselves. Situated learning, the zone of proximal development and scaffolding are key concepts in understanding learning and the effects of different learning contexts.

I believe that these theories can be appropriately adopted in this study because learning at university provides the student with an opportunity to participate in different communities of practice (Seligmann, 2012). Universities are cosmopolitan places, with students coming from different backgrounds and bringing with them varied cultures. Seligmann concurs that there is no one academic community (2012). In the opinion of Lave and Wenger (1991), learning is inseparable from other non-academic engagements and should not be viewed as related only to teaching methods. They believe that non-academic skills are necessary as learners grow and aspire to higher knowledge, diplomas and degrees. Hence, first-year student teachers are expected to continue to 'dig into' the knowledge and experiences of fellow classmates while learning in a social environment.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) Theory of Situated Learning recognises that learning involves a social context and shared experiences in day-to-day life. Based on this view, Lave and Wenger (cited in Smith, 2003: 1) claim that 'learning involves a process of engagement in a "community of practice."' This means that learning is shaped by people's everyday life. The broad implication is that someone not connected to developments in the world is unlikely to be up to date with society's current requirements. Furthermore, Smith (2003) reiterates the underlying position of Lave and Wenger on what constitutes a community of practice. According to Smith (2003), communities of practice occur in every place and situation where individuals carry out activities, including 'work, school, home, or in our civic and leisure interests'.

This study recognises that the process of learning academic writing and forming an identity, for first year student teachers, is an example of a community of practice in action. The study also explores how students' identities are shaped by their decisions, behaviours and expectations in other situations, thus making use of the Theory of Situated Learning.

Theories based on social constructivism accept that there is an objective reality even though society maintains both subjective and objective realities (Andrews, 2012). Some researchers pay

attention to how people construct and understand knowledge within a certain domain, and have identified three dimensions of domain analysis: ontological, epistemological and sociological (Finke, 2014; Hartel, 2003). An ontological view of domains makes use of concepts which belong to a particular realm of the world, such as biology or politics. Each domain ontology typically models domain-specific definitions of terms. Epistemology focuses on the knowledge of domains and how such knowledge can be obtained, through, for example, language, culture, gender and values in the production of knowledge (Hartel, 2003, p. 2).

Social Constructivism Theory views learning as dependent on the social outcome of relationships rather than on what an individual can achieve based solely on intellect. This research makes use of the epistemological perspective in viewing first-year student teachers in their social domains. Social constructivism theory strongly emphasises people's daily interactions and the language they use to construct their reality and shape how other people see them. These theories view society as both objective and subjective, unlike other theories such as classical grounded theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1991).

3.6 Relevance of the theories

The theories discussed above shed light on how people perceive themselves and how others see them based on events that occur at a particular time and in a particular place. These theories are relevant to this study because they show how language and academic literacies can help people construct their identity and position in society, and how mastery of academic language gives people a sense of identity in society. The study assumes that most first-year students are unable to master academic literacies since they do not have full proficiency in the LOLT. Thus they are unable to form constructive relationships with their lecturers and peers, and neither can they master the complex learning materials required to enhance their academic literacy levels.

On the one hand, the theories reveal that language plays a vital role in the construction of identity. On the other hand, features such gender, sex and religion also determine how people see themselves and how others perceive them.

All the discussed theories are significant in language learning. Social Constructivism Theory shows how language learning helps in the construction of the individual's identity and how people

understand their relationships to the world. According to this theory, relationships are structured across time and space and in relation to how the individual understands future possibilities. This theory helps us understand how and why first-years have the motivation to master language and become literate; they pursue these goals because they relate strongly to a vision of the future that the students hold for themselves.

The discussion in this chapter has shown how related the various theories are to one another. I have outlined the connection between the four theories – Academic Literacies (in relation to writing), Identity, Identity Construction, and Social Constructivism – all of which help to understand the acquisition of English academic language in higher education. As indicated in Chapters One and Two, the challenges of learning not only English as a second language but English as an academic language cause first-year undergraduate student teachers to move between different identities, and to construct new identities through social interactions and in different domains. Figure 1 below shows how the four theories are interrelated.

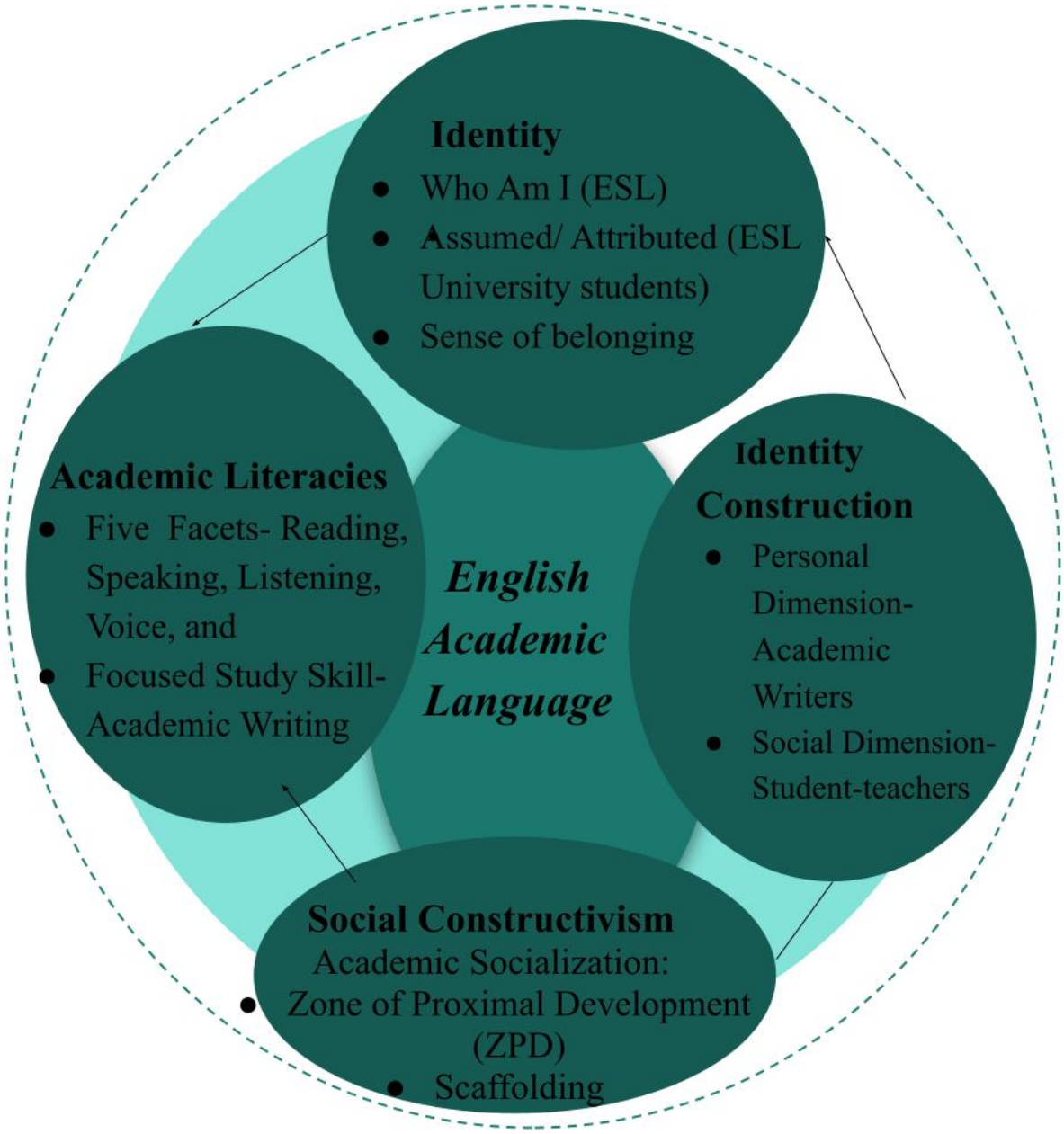


FIGURE 1. The relationships of the four theories that underpins this study.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have described four theoretical frameworks for investigating how first-year student teachers construct their identities through academic writing at a higher education. Academic Literacies Theory places the focus on student's themselves, explaining how students acquire academic 'literacies' through using different genres and writing in and for different contexts. I identified the facet of academic literacies that was focused on – writing – and why this theory is important in the field of higher education.

The Theory of Identity offers perspective on the fluidity of personal identities, showing how identity is not a fixed construct but comprises personal, imposed, assumed and negotiable aspects that change according to experiences and context. The Theory of Identity Construction sheds light on the fluidity of students' identities, showing how they are constructed during the process of acquiring academic literacies in various contexts. Social Constructivism Theory shows how learning is a collaborative undertaking, in which individuals are active participants and in which language and culture play an essential role – as is the case with the first-year students participants in this study.

In the following chapter, I focus on the research methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Four I describe the research methodology adopted in this study, elaborating on the case study research design and its appropriateness. I also discuss the sampling method used for selecting research participants, and the data collection tools, namely, interviews, questionnaires and document analysis, showing how each was used to answer the research questions. The chapter further describes the procedures followed in the data analysis stage of the study, the ethical aspects of the research, and the limitations of the study.

4.2 Research design

The term methodology and design in research are used interchangeably because both entail the use of data collection methods and techniques. Methodology refers to a set of methods and techniques which work in cycles, allowing the research to consider every stage of data finding and to focus on research questions that provide answers in line with the purpose of the study (Henning, 2004). According to Yin (2003), a research design is a scientific reasoning exercise that identifies the information to be collected in order to provide answers to the research questions. Similarly, Creswell (2009) states that research designs are procedures and techniques for investigations that link the conclusions to detailed procedures of data collection and analysis. This implies that a research design involves a predetermined process for attaining an investigative result.

I used a case study design because I wanted to investigate many unknown variables of interest in one specific group of people. The case study approach was appropriate for examining and exploring the perceptions and experiences of the participants in relation to the challenge of academic writing and its role in identity formation. According to Yin (1994:13), a case study is ‘an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomena [sic] within its real context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’. Following Yin’s categorisation of case study types and designs, this study fits within the exploratory single case study type. This design helped me to handle the phenomena under investigation, allowing me to gather detailed, first-hand information about the real learning context

of the English second-language student teachers. This is because all investigative time and resources were centred on these participants.

With regard to first-hand and in-depth data, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 253) state that case study research portrays 'real people in real situations' and that one of its strengths is that it recognises context as a powerful determinant of both causes and effects in their real context. A case study design is ideal for a small group, making it unnecessary to deal with large-scale data, which can pose a challenge during data analysis. Moreover, in this study it allowed me to intensively analyse the trajectories of my selected participants during the period that they took the academic literacy course, enabling me to consider the ways in which their identities were negotiated in academic writing.

4.3 Research approach

Based on the fact that the present study draws from the experiences and perceptions of participants, the qualitative research approach was deemed the best methodology to use. The quantitative approach was not appropriate for the study since the variables under investigation (experiences and perceptions) cannot be quantified. The qualitative research approach facilitates an inquiry into research participants' experiences, which the researcher organises into meaningful units of data, or themes (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, Flick (1998) states that data gathered from the use of qualitative techniques gives valuable contextual information about participants, in contrast to quantitative techniques. The qualitative approach used in this study made room for multiple data interpretations and promoted deep exploration of the phenomenon under review. I wanted to explore the research problem thoroughly, making the qualitative approach the ideal framework for this study.

Tshotsho (2006) affirms that in qualitative research, the investigator emphasises the reciprocity of different variables in real life. The information gathered has to take real-life circumstances into account because if estimation devices are used without reference to the context in which data is gathered, the quality of data will be compromised.

The quantitative technique would have been unrealistic in this study, and likely to yield data that appears precise since it is presented in the form of numbers and percentages, but in reality, would yield little of real value in view of the nature of my research questions. I was interested in the perceptions, experiences and beliefs of my participants, all of which need to be described or explained based on evidence provided. In this sense, Wellington (2015: p. 26) attests that the purpose of adopting an interpretive paradigm in qualitative research is to examine 'shared meanings, and to develop insights into situations' of the research sample. The adoption of the qualitative method enabled me to relate well to the participants, discover their varying perceptions, and analyse their views. It also assisted me in recognising students' different interpretations of their own experiences in academic writing and identity construction.

The qualitative approach yielded an in-depth understanding of the way people understand, act and manage their daily activities in a particular setting. In this case, the qualitative approach helped me understand how first-year student teachers constructed their identity while exposed to academic English learning tasks. Most of them were Afrikaans home-language speakers, and spoke English as an additional language while they adapted to a new learning environment as university students. First-year students need to learn how to fit in with their new environments, which requires them to learn to interact with others as well as master the language of learning and teaching to enhance their academic literacy levels.

4.4 Research paradigm

The research paradigm employed in this case study research is the interpretive paradigm, which facilitates an understanding of the experiences and views of the research sample or population. According to Adams, Khan, Raeside and White (2007), case-oriented studies require an interpretive research philosophy that does not focus solely on causes and effects but aims to explain social phenomena differently.

The interpretive paradigm helps one understand the world through the lens of the subjective experience of people. The paradigm employs interviews, observations and questionnaires to understand how and why people behave the way they do in different circumstances, times and places. The paradigm was suited to this research because by using questionnaires and interviews, it was possible for me to have direct interaction with my study participants (selected first-year

students) to understand their behaviours in their educational surroundings. Based on this paradigm, it was possible to understand what students had to do to construct their identities through the use of academic literacy at the university. The paradigm helped me see my research problem according to different perspectives, since I was forced to ask participants about their experiences and beliefs in relation to the study topic. Guided by Creswell (2013) and by Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), I focused on the experiences and views of the selected participants in my analysis and discussion.

Equally importantly, the qualitative research techniques of interviews, questionnaire and document analysis used in this study were the means of data collection, with data obtained from these three sources being triangulated during data analysis. This, I believe, enabled me to comprehend how the perceptions and experiences of first-year student teachers' identity shape their academic writing in English second-language – and in turn, are shaped by them.

Having discussed the research paradigm, in the following section I discuss the research sample and how it was selected.

4.5 Research sample

This section explains how I selected the participants in this study. Sandelowski (1995) stated that qualitative research sampling strategies do not focus on numbers but primarily on the quality of information obtained from the sample. She added that 'an aesthetic thrust of sampling in qualitative research is that small is beautiful. Yet, inadequate sample sizes can undermine the credibility of research findings' (Sandelowski, 1995: 179). This implies that logic and discretion on my part as the researcher in this study was paramount in the selection of the sample size.

Many sampling techniques are possible in research. However, qualitative research focuses on relatively small samples (Lyell, 2008). Research participants are selected to provide a rich description of their experiences and to help the researcher answer the research questions based on the study problem. Thus, I selected participants who would be able to add rich information to my research topic and were willing to share their experiences.

My research population comprised Academic Literacy (EDC 111) lecturers and first-year undergraduate students enrolled for the Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) programme in the Faculty of Education at the University of Wingate (UW) in the Western Cape Province of South Africa.

Considering that UW has seven faculties with more than 20 000 first-year students, for reasons of procedural feasibility, I decided to restrict the study to the Faculty of Education. Hence the participants are referred to as student teachers. I narrowed down my sample to an academic module that all first-year student teachers enrol for, ie, Academic Literacy and Numeracy (EDC 111). The Faculty of Education offers this module to all first-year undergraduates across its different departments. The module-based curriculum entails community experiences, and writing and reading for academic purposes. According to the Faculty of Education (2019) yearbook, the learning outcomes of the EDC111 module require the students to be able to:

- understand the range of metacognitive and discourse-based strategies that will improve their ability to engage with academic reading and writing tasks;
- develop an awareness of the social, personal, cognitive and knowledge-building aspects of reading and writing; and
- explore a range of strategies and processes for improving writing skills.

Qualitative researchers often adopt random and purposeful sampling to understand the 'information-rich case' that addresses the purpose of the study while enabling the researcher to learn about issues of importance from the participants (Sandelowski, 2000; Patton, 2002). In this study, I used a purposeful sample. On average, there are 180 student teachers who enrol for this course each academic year in the Faculty of Education at UW.

Out of 160 first-year student teachers enrolled for EDC111 in 2019, I selected fifty student teachers who voluntarily completed and returned my questionnaire. The student teachers' consent to participate in the study was the most important factor in the selection of students; hence I purposefully chose twenty student teachers from these fifty to participate in an interview. The twenty students were selected from five tutorial groups. Four students from each of the five tutorial groups were selected because of the rich and relevant information they gave in their completed questionnaires. The other thirty participants were not included in interviews either because the information they gave was incomplete, as explained below, or they declined the invitation to an interview.

Based on the claim that qualitative studies can be conducted even with one participant (Suri, 2011), the twenty participants were considered sufficient to gather rich data and serve as my key

informants in achieving the study objectives. I also confirmed with the twenty student teachers their willingness to be part of the interviews since, ethically, participation has to be voluntary.

The research was conducted on campus but data was gathered both in and outside of the classroom. Interviews were conducted in the students' places of residence at the university. The main reason for the selection of data collection spaces was convenience, both my own and that of the research participants. Costs and the availability of participants also determined the research spaces used.

4.6 Data collection methods

Qualitative research techniques or tools are instruments used in collecting data in the form of words or pictures (Neuman, 2006). This study made use of primary data. According to Kothari (2009), primary data is fresh information that has been collected for the first time. This form of data is original in character.

Based on my research plan (see Table 4.3), I made use of the three basic data collection tools discussed by Kothari (2009) and Cresswell (2013): (i) interviews (ii) questionnaires (iii) document analysis. Race and gender of participants were included not in order to make the demographics comprehensive but to yield useful information on how student identity related to these two constructs.

4.6.1 Open-ended questionnaire

The questionnaire as a data collection tool is popularly used for large-scale data and quantitative research (Young, 2016). Even though this study is qualitative and small-scale, I preferred a questionnaire because of the intercultural nature of the study, the perceived ease of use of the method and the access it can provide to large amounts of data that can be analysed easily (Young, 2016). Furthermore, I adopted it for the purpose of exploring broader perceptions and experiences of student teachers' identity in relation to academic writing. In this study, I used an open-ended questionnaire. This was the most convenient, unbiased and efficient data collection tool to use with the small sample that made up the case of my study.

I had prior communication with the research participants with regard to the time and place we were to meet for the dissemination of the questionnaire. On arrival at the lecture hall, I personally administered the questionnaire to the participants and briefed them on the research questions for

clarification, ensuring that they understood the significance of each question and why they had to complete them.

As the students attended EDC111 lectures in groups, 56 student teachers were supposed to attend the lecture, but 50 were actually present. Fifty questionnaires were therefore handed out. Forty-two (84%) were returned to the researcher; four were blank, while eight had one- or two-word responses. This meant that 12 questionnaires were not useful, while 30 were thoroughly completed. In other words, 30 of the 50 initially distributed questionnaires (60%) were properly answered by the respondents. The departmental affiliation of the thirty respondents consisted of ten (33%) first-year students from the School of Science and Mathematics Education (SSME), and 20 (67%) from the Language Education Department (LED). These two departments admitted students for the Bachelor of Education extended programme, which allows five years to complete the degree. The extended programme is a nationally funded programme that provides access to students who do not meet the admission requirements for the qualification in terms of their admission points. Students enrolled for this programme, most of whom are from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, are given extra support to enhance their academic success.

It is my conviction that the self-administration of the open-ended questionnaires at the tail end of an academic literacy lecture made it easy for me to get 50 first-year student teachers who volunteered to participate in my study. The questionnaire form of data collection enabled me to reach potential participants who might not otherwise have been accessible. I personally administered the questionnaires during the third week of the student teachers' attendance of lectures. It is assumed that findings from the questionnaire were dependable and reliable for a randomly and purposively selected sample.

The questionnaire had more open-ended questions than closed questions. The closed questions covered only the demographics of the participants, while the open-ended questions required the participants to express their beliefs, understanding and experiences of academic writing in higher education and how their experiences with academic writing affected their different identities (see Appendix J). The self-administered questionnaire focused on research questions 1 and 2 of the study, given in Chapter One.

As mentioned earlier, I focused on the 30 questionnaires from which I purposefully selected 20 participants to interview. All students who completed the questionnaire had also given their

consent to be interviewed. This allowed me the flexibility to look out for respondents with similar responses, coherence in responses, same tutorial group number and who spoke English as a second language. Of the twenty interviews, 12 (60%) were female student teachers while the remainder were male interviewees.

4.6.2 Interviews

Interviews are a research method that involves the oral presentation of responses (Kothari, 2009). In this study, I considered the personal interview a branch of field interviews, following Neuman's (2006) characterisation of the field interview. A field interview entails asking non-directed questions, attentive listening, showing interest, a series of interviews, shared experiences, and an informal environment and marker (Neuman, 2006). All of these attributes were considered during the interviews with participants.

As mentioned earlier, interviews were conducted with 20 participants out of the sample size of 50. The 20 interviewees were voluntarily and purposively selected. All 20 were English second-language speakers. The interview setting was the university environment, specifically the students' residence on campus. Settings were flexible and chosen according to the convenience of interviewees; the use of their own residences was advantageous as interviewees tended to feel comfortable and relaxed in their familiar environments. The interviews were conducted one by one and face to face, with each lasting an average of ten minutes. All data from the interviews was triangulated.

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to validate, through verbal responses, the answers given in the returned and completed questionnaires. This means that a set of pre-determined questions was used (Kothari, 2009). Similarly, Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick (2008) attest that semi-structured interviews consist of a number of fundamental questions that delimit the spaces to be investigated, but also permit the investigator or the person investigated to diverge so as to follow an idea or a reaction in depth. This form of interview gives the researcher an opportunity to ask further questions based on interviewees' initial responses. This helped me to collect more in-depth, concrete and realistic data.

Another reason for the use of semi-structured interviews was to deepen my understanding of the role of the students' social learning contexts in enhancing their academic writing in English as second language. I used open-ended questions to gain answers to the first four research questions. These questions covered the students' perceptions of identity, their understanding and experience of academic writing, and factors that affected their identity construction.

Data related to the fourth subsidiary research question ('What are the implications of the student teachers' academic writing proficiency in English (L2) for initial teacher education knowledge?') was not collected by means of interviews. Document analysis, discussed in the following section, helped to determine whether student teachers' identities and academic writing could support their teaching practice (i.e. their disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge) in schools.

Furthermore, I used interviews to gain a deeper understanding of how the students constructed their identities through their academic writing. Interview questions allowed me to seek clarity and probe further for better understanding and to ensure that the reporting and analysis was based on their perspectives. My familiarity with the university environment made it possible to interact with the participants in a non-threatening manner. Thus, I was able to build trust and rapport with the research participants and the established trust in our interactions made it possible for them to share their experiences without fear of being judged.

Two sets of interviews were conducted. The first was conducted during the first term, and the second, comprising follow-up interviews, was conducted with the same participants in the fourth week of the second term. The follow-up interviews enabled me to understand the perceptions and experiences of first-year student teachers when they experienced academic writing at the beginning of their transition into higher education and when they had already had relative exposure to academic writing. In addition, the second interview helped me find answers to the fourth subsidiary research question on student teachers' identities and academic writing as a support system for their practical and pedagogical knowledge. Both sets of interviews provided clarity on the main research question and three subsidiary questions. Both were audio-recorded and later transcribed in readiness for data analysis.

The interviews were conducted in English because it allowed me to transcribe the interviews as presented by the participants without any need for translations. The use of English was to ensure

that the interview information was accessible to me and my participants who were taught through the medium of English.

I treated all participants with respect. I did not adopt an expert position and tried to remain transparent with them at all times. This made it possible for them to talk freely about their experiences. I placed myself in their position as a person who had experienced similar challenges owing to identity and language issues. I explained to the participants that the research was prompted by the fact that first-year students faced challenges regarding language and identity, and that it sought to understand the way that these challenges influenced the academic literacies that students attained at the end of their university years. The transparency put the participants at ease and enabled them to share their experiences in a relaxed manner.

4.6.3 Document analysis

Document analysis is the third research technique I used to collect data for this study. Cresswell (2013) claims that research becomes unwieldy and difficult if the researcher has to locate documents from distant places and still get permission to use the documents.

In this study, I asked and received the permission of the EDC111 lecturer to use the written and assessed tasks of the volunteer first-year students. The EDC lecturer played a significant role in facilitating the collection of students' written and assessed written work. The lecturer took the time to orally inform me of the expectations of the written task and trends (strengths and weaknesses) in the students' work. This indicates that my access to personal and private documents was dependent on permissions granted by the student teachers and the EDC lecturer.

Janesick (1999) claims that journal writing has an immense effect on participants in qualitative research as it helps them to process and refine ideas, beliefs and responses that arise during the research period. She adds that findings from journal writings may be used for triangulation. Furthermore, Janesick (1999:3) states that journal writing allows the researcher to understand the personal representation, claims and authority reflected by the writer of the journal.

Cresswell (2012) claims that research participants are often not comfortable 'journaling'. The term refers to the writing of personal and reflective texts by the participants. He adds that research participants' discomfort might be caused by shyness about their handwriting. Regardless of this

view, a reasonable part of this investigation draws answers from the written texts of participants. I requested the students to keep weekly journals of their experiences of academic writing in English (L2). Throughout the period of data collection, the first-year students showed little interest in this form of data collection. When I checked at the end of the first three weeks, their responses showed that they had given almost no attention to this activity. I concluded that their non-response might be another way to assess students' motivation with regard to writing in general. Also, this form of data required the use of English as second-language, not English as academic language. Nevertheless, I sought the help of a research assistant to administer the students' consent forms and collect their journal writings.

In contrast to related studies conducted in the field of English academic writing among first-year undergraduate students, my research study did not intend to analyse the ways in which students used academic writing conventions. Instead, my interest was in the ways they negotiated and constructed their identities through writing, as prospective teachers.

I examined and analysed how student teachers' identity construction reflected in their writing and how they dealt with the challenge of English academic writing. I did this by analysing their written texts produced for academic assessments as well as their written texts produced for non-academic purposes. For academic assessment writing, I analysed two class assignments related to narrative or descriptive essays and the theory section of the examination assessment. For non-academic writing, I requested the participants to 'journal', that is, to write their personal reflections in a relaxed, non-supervisory and non-evaluative atmosphere. This was done to find out the effect of students' constructed identity in their free writing.

Table 4.1 summarises of the research methodology used in this study.

Table 4.1: Summary of research methodology

Research questions	Methods	Instruments	Source	Analysis
i) What are first-year student teachers' experiences of academic writing in English (L2)?	Interview, questionnaire and document analysis	An interview guide, self-administered questionnaire, written academic assessments and reflective journal writing	Student-teachers	Manual and thematic
(ii) What factors influence student teachers' academic writing in English (L2) and their identity construction?	Interview, questionnaire and document analysis	Interview guide, self-administered questionnaire, written academic assessments and reflective journal writing	Student-teachers	Manual and thematic
(iii) How do first-year student teachers negotiate their identities in the Academic Literacy course taught through the medium of English (L2)?	Interview, questionnaire and document analysis	An interview guide, self-administered questionnaire, written academic assessments and reflective journal writing	Student-teachers	Manual, thematic and content
(iv) What are the implications of the student teachers' academic writing proficiency in English (L2) for initial teacher education knowledge?	None	Emanating from triangulated data	Student-teachers	Manual and thematic

4.7 Data analysis

During this research stage the findings are collated, conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made. The methods of data analysis vary according to the researcher's aims and objectives. Most qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method research base data analysis on the type of research instruments used to collect data.

I used thematic analysis to analyse my data. All data collected by means of the three tools used (open-ended questionnaire, interviews and document analysis) were manually prepared to generate

thematic codes and sub-thematic codes, and the content was then analysed (Boeije, 2010). Themes that emerge from this process are the key results of data analysis that gives the study concrete answers. The essence of the study's outcomes are carried by the themes and their linked sub-themes. Each theme may have sub-themes that together yield an inclusive understanding of information and reveal patterns in the subjects' stories.

To construct the themes in this study, I followed the phases recommended by Constas (1992), as cited in Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen and Snelgrove (2016). Following the process, I moved from origination to nomination through to verification of themes. This involved segmenting the data and re-assembling the units of data with the objective of reproducing the data as findings. The process of segmenting and re-arranging the data is technically referred to as thematic coding. Codes were used to refer to underlying concepts that arose in the study. Notably, all the codes were developed from the research questions and repetitive trends in the data (Cresswell, 2012). A detailed account of data analysis is provided in the following chapter.

4.8 Rigour in research

In this study, I demonstrated academic rigour in three areas; data/conclusion reflexivity, validity, and reliability. Reflexivity was ensured in the way I honestly and informatively interacted with issues regarding my study, stating the problems encountered during the course of the investigation and explaining how these problems were or were not dealt with (Adams, Khan, Raeside & White, 2007).

Validity is known in the works of Adams et al. (2007) as authenticating conclusions. Admittedly, there are no set rules or principles that are used to evaluate the validity or authenticity of conclusions in qualitative research, except that data must be thoroughly examined, as must the adopted techniques used to draw conclusions (Adams et al., 2007). However, Adams et al. (2007, p. 330-331) identified three criteria given by Becker (1958) on how data gathered from each research tool and the entire conclusion of the study can be validated. These criteria are stated in the form of questions:

- ‘How credible was the informant? Were statements made by someone with whom the researcher had a relationship of trust or by someone the researcher had just met? Did the informant have reason to lie?
- Were statements made in response to the researcher’s questions, or were they spontaneous? Spontaneous statements are more likely to indicate what would have been said had the researcher not been present.
- How does the presence or absence of the researcher or the researcher’s informant influence the actions and statements of other group members?’ (Adams et al. 2007: 330-331).

Apart from these three questions that constitute the criteria for data and conclusion validity, Adams et al. (2007) point out that the tacit knowledge of research subjects should be noticed by the researcher. Tacit knowledge is described as ‘a credible sense of understanding of social processes that reflect the researcher’s awareness of participants’ actions as well as their words, and of what they fail to state, feel deeply, and take for granted’ (Adams et al. 2007, p. 331). In a real sense, this tacit knowledge is relevant for validating the responses of participants in the interviews and questionnaires.

The most common validity technique in qualitative research is triangulation. I compared all data from each source to data from the other two sources; in other words, I triangulated data gathered from interviews, questionnaires and document analysis. According to Krathwohl (1998, p. 276), triangulation is ‘a process of using more than one source of information, confirming data from different sources, confirming observations from different observers and confirming information from different data collection methods.’ Marshall and Rossman (1989), cited in Kimizi (2008, p. 167), concur, stating ‘using a combination of different data increases validity as the strengths of one approach can compensate for the weaknesses of another’. In addition to the use of tacit knowledge as a means of validity, I used triangulation.

The third form of rigour that I applied in the study is reliability, although it is generally accepted that 100% certainty is not possible in qualitative research. However, the reliability of the findings and conclusions can be evaluated in light of the naturalistic context of the study. Reliability in the study refers to ‘the consistency of the analytical procedures, including accounting for personal and research method biases that may have influenced the findings’ (Noble & Smith, 2015, p. 34). The

quality of data/conclusion reflexivity, validity and reliability are used to determine the quality of research. Further, Noble and Smith (2015) suggest that researchers can assess the reliability of study findings when they base decisions on the 'soundness' of the research 'in relation to the application and appropriateness of the methods undertaken and the integrity of the final conclusions'. In the course of this research, I made it a goal to be as truthful as possible with my participants and my categorisation of data. Hence the reasoning behind decisions made in this study is clear and transparent.

4.8.1 Validity and reflexivity of research

According to post-structuralist and post-modern theories, the researcher is an important part of the research methodology. The researcher plays a particularly important role in qualitative research, since he or she is an instrument of data collection and interpretation (Xu & Storr, 2012). Qualitative research is considered an interactive process that is value fixed, and therefore researchers should strive to adopt a neutral stance in relation to the subject matter. However, all research is conducted by subjective persons, and there is a need to acknowledge this aspect of unavoidable subjectivity throughout the research. If the researcher acknowledges a degree of subjectivity, it is possible to account for what makes him or her carry out an investigation on the research topic. The researcher as an interviewer plays an important role in shaping how participants construct their reality. In addition, the researcher's experiences, expectations, outlook on life and observations have a high likelihood of influencing how data is collected, analysed and interpreted. These are aspects to be acknowledged while the researcher strives to maintain as much neutrality as possible.

My experience at the university where the research was conducted made me an important research tool in this study. Even though I did not directly influence the participants' response to avoid biased research, my experience made it possible to relate to their responses. Owing to my identity at the university, I was able to identify with and understand the various constructions presented by the participants. Conducting research that has a bearing on one's own experiences brings about a better understanding of the dynamics involved and creates social relationships that inform the topic under investigation. However, I made sure that despite my ability to identify with the participants' experiences, I did not impose my values and opinions on them during interviews.

Reflexivity allows the researcher to acquire an in-depth understanding of the topic under investigation (Cunningham & Carmichael, 2018; Rettke, Pretto, Spichiger, Frei & Spirig, 2018). Reflexivity allows the researcher to draw from their own experiences during the research process in order to understand and identify what the participants are saying. However, the aim of the research remains to understand the research problem from the participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's perspective (Lawal, 2009). The reflexivity of my research was based on Davies' (2008) argument that the products of research are affected by the participants and the processes by which the research was conducted. This means that the results of data collection are based on how the researcher utilises the research tools in data collection.

In this study, I used interviews and questionnaires as research tools for the purpose of triangulation. I used triangulation to validate all collected data. As argued by Bennett and Spalding (2012), triangulation is the most common approach used to validate research data in qualitative research, since it involves the use of more than one source of information to confirm data from different sources and, in the case of secondary data, from different authors who have similar or different opinions on the same subject under investigation (Davies, 2008). It also involves the use of different research methods. Using different sources of data and different research methods increases research validity, as the strength of one data collection method compensates for the weakness of the other. Thus, I used data collected from the questionnaires and interviews so that I could answer my research questions fully. Based on the results gathered from the two data collection methods, I was able to analyse the information accordingly, and compare it to data uncovered through document analysis, to meet the aim of my research topic.

4.8.2 Validity and reliability of the research

Many scholars have criticised qualitative research for its apparent lack of rigour and credibility in relation to traditional quantitative research. Quantitative research concentrates on accuracy of data and the generalisation of the collected data. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is concerned with the reliability of data and whether the research is valid.

The results of qualitative research do not attempt to be generalisable. With this type of research, a multiplicity of data and results can be generalised across various contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research makes use of various strategies that the researcher may use to evaluate

and validate the data. Horsburg (2003) states that the main hallmark of reliability of data is reflexivity, as described above. The description of my process to ensure reliability, given above, shows that I acknowledge my own subjectivity, in the form of my previous experience and familiarity with the university in the context of the research topic. Thus, I have provided the context and background under which the research was conducted.

Also, validity in qualitative research can be assessed on the grounds of the level to which the research offers detailed and sufficient information so that it may be used by the reader to interpret the meaning and context of the information (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Sandvik & McCormack, 2018). Thus, validity depends on data collection and analysis methods. I used triangulation to ensure that results were rich, robust, comprehensive and well developed to meet the research aims (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Triangulation ensured that I used multiple data sources on the study topic to produce an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Even though there are other methods of triangulation such as the theoretical one, data triangulation is relevant to this research since it offers a broad understanding of the findings. I was on the lookout for repetitive or irrelevant data in the results to ensure that data collected and presented was valid, reliable and answered the research questions.

4.9 Ethical considerations

An apt statement of a broad ethical approach to follow, whether in life or in research, is 'Do unto others as you would have them to do to you'. The key idea in this statement is that individuals should treat others in a dignified and respectful way. As a researcher, I am required to follow specific research procedures to ensure a high level of ethics in the way I conduct my research. Failing to observe these procedures might hamper my research plan, subject my study to questioning from authorities in the research space and damage the cordial relationship I hope to enjoy with my research subjects. The ethics of this study were underpinned by six fundamental categories of ethical research as stated by Babbie (1999: p.198), namely: (i) voluntary participation, (ii) no harm to participants, (iii) anonymity and confidentiality, (iv) research identity, (v) analysis and reporting (vi) professional code of ethics.

The first five principles pay attention to the research participants, while the last concerns both the researcher and the participants. I made it a matter of importance to inform my participants during

our first contact that their participation was voluntary. I explained to them that voluntary participation meant that they were not forced to participate and could withdraw their participation at any point during the research should they feel uncomfortable or inconvenienced. I also assured them of a safe space for the research and that no aspect of the data collection process would cause problems or pose any form of threat to their personality.

Generally, research participants who were unwilling to be involved in the data collection process felt this way because of an erroneous perception that their identity might be revealed to outside parties. It was therefore a relief to these participants to hear that they were not required to reveal their identity/names on the questionnaire and that their privacy and confidentiality would be discreetly handled and protected at all times.

In this study, I applied the ethical issue of confidentiality in the way expressed by Yu (2008: p.163): 'Keeping data revealed by the participants to the researcher him/herself'. This implies that no one besides the researcher should be able to access the data. Many participants seemed especially pleased that their real names would not be revealed, and that no identifying information would be shared with anyone at the university or elsewhere. I also made it known to the participants that the study would not interfere with their private life except with their agreement, in the case of keeping a journal. In addition, the relationship between us was cordial but formal and for research purposes only.

I emphatically told the participants that the information I received from them would not be given out to any organisation or persons for no reason. I also assured participants that data collected from them would be personally analysed by me. In addition, I would update them on the progress of the research, and the final report of the research would be made available to them.

To the best of my knowledge, I acted professionally and thoroughly when carrying out my research. As an educator, I believe there is no code of conduct in relation to the profession that is not accommodated by the ethical issues discussed above.

4.10 Summary

In this chapter, I have described the research design, approach, paradigm and sample adopted to conduct this research study. Within the selected research design and paradigm, I adopted a

qualitative single case study approach. I have also described the research site, the population of my study and the number of my sample. I have explained the sampling method, data collection instruments and data analysis methods. I have also presented demographic information on the research participants. The sampling procedure and the importance of using parallel sampling (purposive) procedures was also discussed. The three instruments that I used to collect data – open-ended questionnaires, interviews and document analysis – were described in some detail, as were the methods used to analyse the data. I presented a comprehensive discussion on the academic rigour of the research in terms of its validity, reliability and consistency of findings. Finally, I have presented how research ethics were observed in the conduct of this study, as guided by Babbie (1999).

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA PRESENTATION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data from questionnaires, document analysis and interviews conducted with first-year students teachers in the Education Faculty at the University of Wingate. As indicated in the previous chapter, 50 questionnaires were administered to the students, 42 were returned, and 30 were considered useful for the purpose of data analysis. Twenty of these 30 students took part in one-on-one interviews in five interview groups, and a different set of 20 student teachers from the forty-two participants took part in journal writing, with some overlaps with the group of interviewees.

As stated in Chapter One, the purpose of this study was to investigate first-year students teachers' academic writing in English (L2), and how they constructed their identities. This chapter has two sections; the first covers the demographics of the participants, while the second presents the data and some analysis of it.

5.2 Data presentation

In this section, I present data collected by means of a questionnaire, interviews and student journals, as discussed in the previous chapter.

5.2.1 Questionnaire data: Student demographics

As mentioned earlier, the research involved 50 participants, all of whom received a copy of the questionnaire. Of these 50, 42 returned their questionnaires but only 30 responded to all the questions and completed their questionnaires in some detail. For this reason, these 30 were identified as the main respondents in this study.

The questionnaires revealed that 15 participants (50%) were males, 12 (40%) were females, and the other three (10%) did not indicate their gender. The questionnaire had two language questions, where participants were required to state their first and second languages of communication. Six

males (20%) and five females (16.7%) spoke English as their home language. Twelve participants said they used Afrikaans as their first language of communication; of these 12 participants, five (41.67%) were females, three (25%) were males and three (33.33%) did not mention their gender. Four participants, two males and two females, spoke isiXhosa as their first language. The remaining three participants indicated that they used different first languages; two females spoke SiSwati and Shona as their first languages respectively, while one male said isiZulu was his first language.

The questionnaire data shows that out of the 30 students, most (12) used Afrikaans as their first language, while 11 students spoke English as their first language. Only four students were home language speakers of isiXhosa and three used other languages as their home languages (SiSwati, Shona and isiZulu). From the questionnaire responses, eleven of the thirty participants (36.67%) used English as their first language and nineteen (63.3%) had English as their second language.

The above data, with the addition of the participants' departmental affiliations, is summarised in Table 5.1 below. Figure 2 shows the same information in graphical form.

Table 5.1: Questionnaire data: Student demographics

Items	**Frequency (n = 30)**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender		
Male	15	50
Female	12	40
Unidentified	3	10
Total	30	100
First language of students		
Afrikaans	12	40
IsiXhosa	4	13
English	11	37
Other Languages	3	10
Total	30	100
Second language of students		

Afrikaans	11	37
Xhosa	0	0
English	19	63
Total	30	100
Departmental Affiliation		
School of Science and Mathematics Education (SSME)	10	33.3
Language Education (LED)	20	66.7
Total	30	100

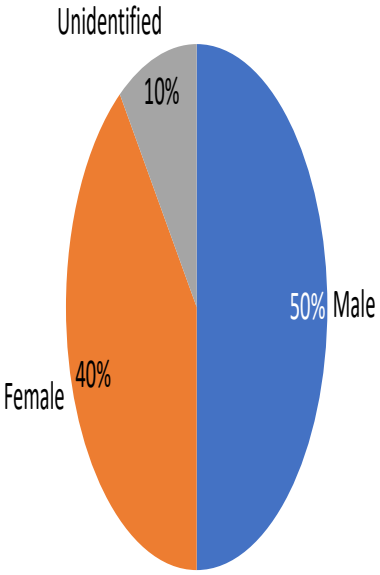


Table 5.1: Gender

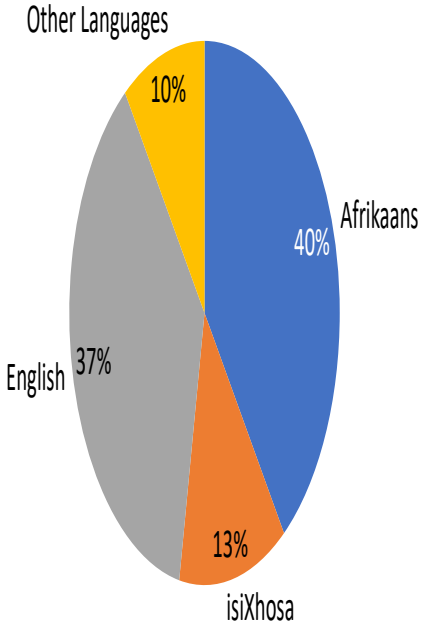


Table 5.1: First Language of Students

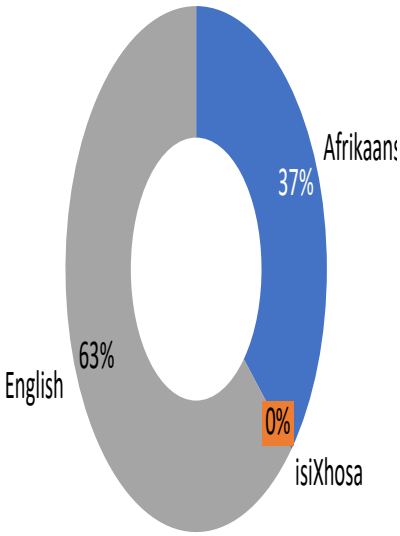


Table 5.1: Second Language of Students

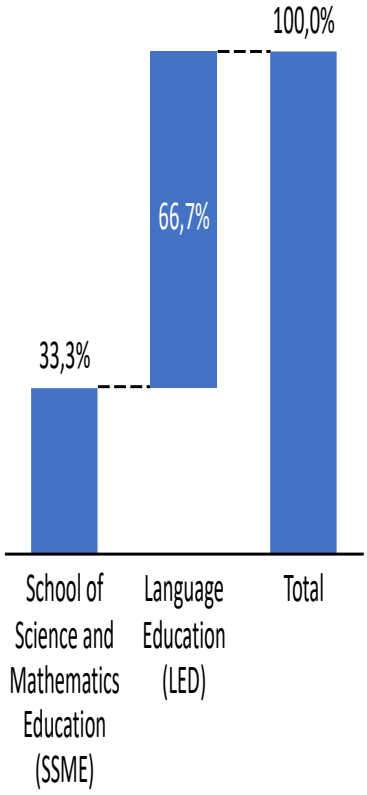


Table 5.1: Departmental Affiliation

Figure 2: Graphical presentation of questionnaire data: Student demographics

I computed the participants' data in relation to the department in which they were registered to establish which department had the highest number of students in this study. The participants were drawn from the School of Science and Mathematics Education (SSME) and the Language Education Department (LED, since these two are the only departments that offer the B. Ed extended programme in the Faculty of Education at UW.

The Language Education Department had the highest number of participants at 20 out of the 30 (66%). The inclusion of many participants from this department was desirable for this study since the topic under investigation was how the acquisition of academic English influenced students' teachers' identity construction. However, the inclusion of students from the School of Science and Mathematics Education was also crucial, since language is essential in any discipline and educational context. Even though the study did not focus on the students' language competencies per se, having a good number of participants from the Language Education Department was an advantage because this department trains students to teach languages (English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa) in schools, with specialisation in the Senior Phase (Grades 7 – 9).

From the data displayed in Table 5.1 and Figure 2 above, it is apparent that most students who took part in this study used Afrikaans as their first language and English as their second language. However, the high rate of students using English as either their first or second language does not imply that they performed well in it. The study's focus was on how the students constructed their identity through English academic writing, which is quite another matter from the ability to speak it conversationally.

In the next section, I present further details on the participants' use of the languages they spoke to illustrate their levels of language proficiency and how they used their languages.

5.2.2 Use of first and second languages

Participants were asked where and when they used their first language. Twenty (67.67%) of the 30 students who completed the questionnaires said they used their first language at home. Six (20%) participants said they used their language with their friends and peers who understood the same language both inside and outside the university, and in the community. The remaining four

(13,33%) said that they used their first language for general purposes, either at the university during tutorials, at church, at the mall and in other social places.

Participants used their first language at home because they felt free, comfortable and less intimidated to use a second language in order to accommodate others. At home, they shared the same language with their friends and relatives, which made it easy to connect without excluding anyone. Furthermore, they were not obligated to use their second language, English, at home because some in their homes and social groups did not even understand English as a second language.

Table 5.2: Questionnaire data on the use of the first language

Item	**Questionnaire Frequency (n =30)**	**Questionnaire %**
Where do you use your first language?		
Home	20	67.6
University	4	13.3
Out of the class	6	20
Family members	6	20
Social media	4	13,3
Friends or peer students	6	20
Workplace	4	13,3
Community	4	13,3
Everywhere necessary	2	6,7
When do you use your first language?		
Communicating with those that use the same language in any situation	26	86.7
Outside of the classroom	4	13.3
Communicating with parents and family members	12	40
Friends or peers/students in and out of the classroom	6	20
Anytime the need arises	15	50
Socialising	10	33.3
Discussing academic content	4	13.3

The data presented in the table above shows the significance of a common language, which in this case does not seem to be a challenge for learning. The data shows that 12 (40%) participants use their first language when communicating with their parents and other family members, while

(33.3%) use their home language in and out of the classrooms (ie, with friends and peers in and outside the classroom). Fifteen (50%) respondents used their first language any time when there was a need to use it. On the other hand, 26 (86.7%) students said that they used their first language when communicating with those who understood the same first language, irrespective of the context.

With regard to when the first language of students was used, data reveals that the first language was widely used when communicating with close associates. It is well known that language strengthens social bonds, as was the case with the 26 (86.7%) students who stated that they used their first language with same-language users. Regardless of whether or not English was their first language, most students at the university used English for both academic and non-academic purposes since it was a common language that accommodated everyone in teaching and learning.

Table 5.3 shows how students used their second language.

Table 5.3: Questionnaire data on the use of second language

Where do you use your second language?	**Frequency (n = 30)**	**Percentage %**
Everywhere necessary	6	20
University	24	80
In classroom	15	50
Social media	3	10
Informal places (church, shopping malls, etc.)	6	20
Home	3	10
When do you use your second language?		
In the classroom	21	70
University	24	80
Communicating with friends and peer students	9	30
Someone not using my first language	12	40
All the time as the need arises	3	10
Parents and family members	6	20
Seldom use	3	10
Socialising	6	20

Of the 30 respondents, twenty-four (80%) stated that they used their second language at university. This is not surprising, since most students at UW were bilingual. They had to communicate in a common language that every other student would comprehend since it would be complicated if each student used their home language at university. Also, UW made it a policy for all students to

recognise and respect other languages, embrace diversity and foster multilingualism. Most students at the university use their second language at university owing to the institution's language policy that promotes the use of English. This explains why most participants – 20 (67.6%) – used their first language at home, and few (13.3%) used it at university.

Of the 30 students, 24 (80%) used their second language (English) in the classroom at university and when communicating with student peers. This shows that second languages are widely used for academic reasons in many contexts (Mose, 2019; Leki, 2017; García & Woodley, 2015).

5.3 Interview data

In the 42 returned questionnaires, 20 students volunteered to take part in journal writing to gather data related to the topic under investigation. Notably, the same 20 students were interviewed. Twenty also gave complete and coherent information on their questionnaires. However, data from the 20 interviewed participants differed from the data on their questionnaires. In interviews, eight of 20 interviewed participants said that Afrikaans was their first language; on the questionnaires, 12 said that Afrikaans was their first language. In interviews, 12 used isiXhosa, English and other languages as their home languages, whereas on the questionnaires, 18 said they used either isiXhosa, English or other languages as their home languages.

However, from the data gathered from both the questionnaires and the interviews, it is clear that most students used their home languages outside the university and communicated in English at the university, since it was the main LOLT. During interviews, some students claimed that they preferred to use English, as it enabled them to interact with people from different language backgrounds. However, while at home or while interacting with other people who shared the same language, they comfortably communicated in their first language to connect with each other.

Table 5.4 below shows the demographics of the 20 students who participated in interviews. Notably, eight of the twenty interviewees participated in both data collection techniques – questionnaires and interviews.

Figure 3 shows the same information in graphical form.

Table 5.4: Interview data: Student demographics

Items	Frequency (n = 20)	Percentage%
Gender		
Male	8	40
Female	12	60
Total	20	100
1st language of Participants		
Afrikaans	8	40
isiXhosa	6	30
English	4	20
Other languages	2	10
Total	20	100
Second language of participants		
Afrikaans	4	20
IsiXhosa	0	0
English	16	80
Total	20	100
Departmental affiliation		
School of Science and Mathematics Education	7	35
Language Education	13	65
Total	20	100

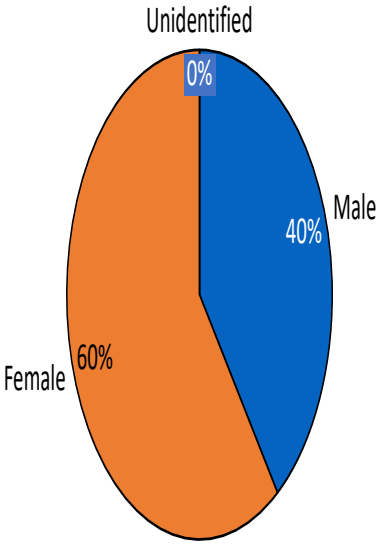


Table 5.4: Gender

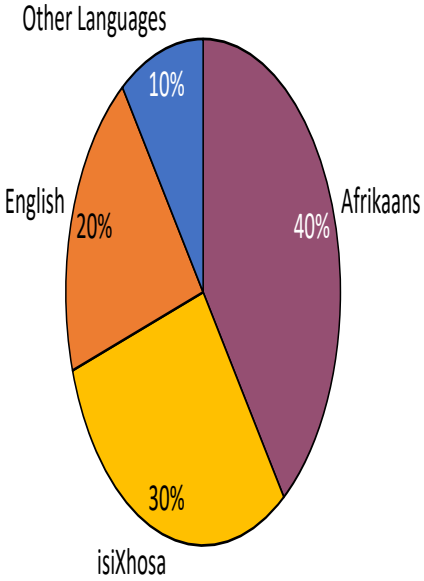


Table 5.4: First Language of Students

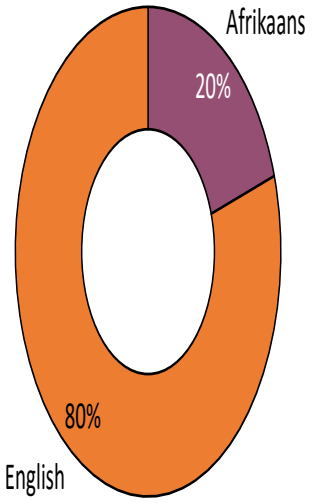


Table 5.4: Second Language of Students

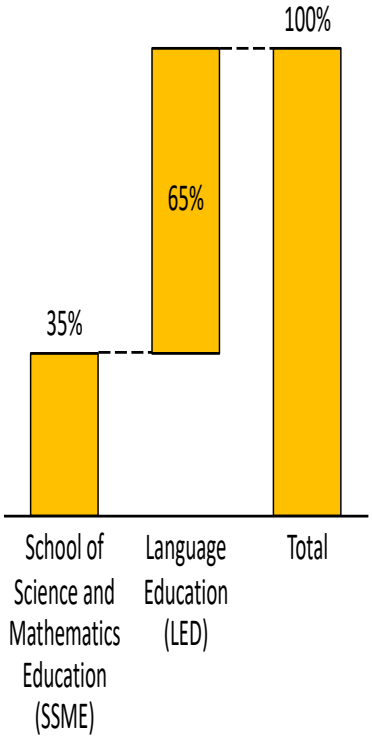


Table 5.4: Departmental Affiliation

Figure 3: Graphical presentation of interview data: Student demographics

Table 5.5 below shows data on the use of both first and second languages. The interviews yielded similar results to the questionnaires.

Table 5.5: Interview data on the use of the first and second languages

Item	Interview frequency n (20)	Interview % (100)
Where do you use your first language?		
Home	15	75
University (general)	20	100
University (out of the class)	8	40
Family members	9	45
Social media	3	15
Friends or peer students	10	50
Workplace	2	10
Community	5	25
Everywhere necessary	3	15
When do you use your first language?		
Communicating with those that use the same language in any situation (general)	9	45
Outside of the classroom	5	25
Communicating with parents and family members	15	75
Friends or peers/students in and out of the classroom	6	30
Anytime the need arises	3	15
Socialising	4	20
Discussing academic related content	6	30
Where do you use your second language?		
Everywhere necessary	4	20
University	5	25
In the classroom	3	15
Social media	3	15
Informal places (church, shopping malls)	7	35
Home	14	70
When do you use your second language?		
In classroom	7	35
University	6	30
Communicating with friends and peer students	10	50
Someone not using my first language	4	20
All the time as the need arises	5	25
Parents and family members	13	65
Seldom use	0	0
Socialising	9	45
In which of the two languages are you more competent?		
English	4	20
Afrikaans	7	35
Xhosa and others	7	35
No response	2	10

How well would you say you know English?		
Above average	3	15
Average	9	45
Below average	8	40
Were you aware of the language of instruction before joining UW?		
Yes	16	80
No	4	20
If yes, what are your perceptions of English as the instructional language at UW?		
• No different to high school	7	44
• A global language	3	19
• Compulsory language at the university	4	25
• No response	2	12

5.3.1 Languages used by students

The 20 interviewees used their first and second languages for both academic purposes at university and non-academic purposes at home. The frequency of use of the two languages among friends and peers both at the university and at home had the highest rate possibly because the use of each language at the time and space. The second-highest number recorded, 12 (92.3%), was for students who used both languages with friends and student peers. The high percentages indicate that students could use both languages while communicating with their friends and peers, both at university and at home, since they felt comfortable interacting in a common language.

Ten (50%) of the 20 participants claimed that they used both languages while discussing academic content, which shows that a large number of students felt a certain level of competence in both languages.

However, only three (15%) of the 20 interviewed students said they were competent in English. Nine (45%) said they were average – confident only in their first language – and eight (40%) said that their knowledge of English was below average. Of all 20 participants, 16 (80%) said they had been aware that English was the instructional language before they joined the institution, while four (20%) said that they had not been aware that English was the instructional language. Even though a high number had been aware of this policy, their competency levels were still too low to foster confidence in its use.

The data gathered using both questionnaires and interviews is vital because it shows some of the challenges experienced by first-year students while learning and conversing in English. Considering that English is the language of instruction at UW, it is apparent that more than half interviewed considered themselves not competent in this language. Only four participants recorded competency in the language during interviews, while the data gathered from questionnaires shows that over 70% of the students were comfortable using their second language. However, whenever they had the chance in the classroom or elsewhere at university, they socialised and engaged in tutorials in their first language, in which they were more comfortable and understood each other better.

Most of the students (80%) did not use English as their first language, based on data from both the interviews and questionnaires. This shows that they used English at university because they had to, not because they understood the language well.

During interviews, four students said they were competent in English as it was their first language. However, their competence in speaking did not necessarily translate into competence in writing. It was also challenging for English non-native language speakers to communicate verbally using their second language, but since English was the language of instruction at the institution, they had to. It was also challenging for English native speakers to interact with those who spoke English as their second language, but the institution required everyone to have the necessary English skills before enrolling.

Both the questionnaire and interviews investigated the students' understanding and experience of academic writing, as discussed in the following section.

5.3.2 Student teachers' understanding and experience of academic writing

Most of the students stated that they were unfamiliar with the term 'academic writing'. They added that they did not know that writing essays at high school differed immensely from academic writing as first-year undergraduates at UW. This was their response to both the questionnaire and interview questions that sought to understand how they became aware of the term 'academic writing' and what their understanding of the term was.

Of 22 participants who answered the question about their understanding of academic writing, 21 (95.5%) said that they learned about the term at UW. A small percentage had heard the term used in their last year at school. Two students said that they discovered the term only after reading the question on the questionnaire. The fact that most students (95.5%) learned about the term during their first semester at university shows that although they had to write essays in English at high school, they had never been taught the principles of academic written English.

With regard to how students viewed themselves as academic writers, 21 of the 28 participants who answered the question on challenges with academic writing said they faced challenges as academic writers because they had to discover new knowledge and skills to in order to become competent. Two students said they had been excellent academic writers since primary or secondary school.

From the interviews, 13 of the 16 participants who answered the question on ability said that they could cope with the language, even though it was challenging compared to what they had been exposed to before joining UW. Three said they had been excellent writers before joining UW. The large number of students who believed they were good writers but acknowledged that they had a lot to learn implies that many students were not confident in their academic literacy skills in English.

Both the questionnaire and interviews required the students to compare their use of academic writing at high school with the level required at university. The interview data shows that 16 (80%) of the 20 interviewed participants regarded English academic writing as more difficult at university than at high school, as one had to learn to write more professionally and use more complex language. The same responses were obtained from the 27 participants who answered this question on the questionnaires. Twenty-four (24) said that university written English was more complex in structure and required them to work harder to improve their language use.

Out of the 24 participants who answered the questionnaire question on the challenges of English academic writing, four (16.7%) stated that academic English at UW was not challenging for them since English was their first language. The other 20 (83.3%) indicated that English academic writing at UW was complex as they had to deal with new terns and a more complex structure and

at the same time avoid grammatical errors. Those who said it was challenging said that they were used to more straightforward language in primary and secondary school, but language became markedly more complex once they joined UW.

Another question covered their experience of English academic writing as first-year undergraduate students. Out of the 30 participants, 25 answered this question. Four (16%) stated that it had always been easy for them to understand English, four (16%) said that at first it was challenging, but they made progress over time, while the other 17 (68%) said they still found it challenging to deal with the complexity of English at UW since it was different from what they were used to before joining the institution. The high number of students struggling with academic writing shows that English academic writing was a challenge for the majority of first-year students at UW.

Concerning the students' views on the value of English academic writing, 23 (76.7%) said that English academic writing was essential for both students and learners because it gave them a chance to enhance their competence in the language. Two students said that by doing written English tasks, they acquired new terms and sentence structures through research and constant engagement with the English language. One student said that doing English assignments helped them strengthen their competency and aspirations regarding international jobs. The responses indicate that students understood the importance of writing practice to enhance their English writing competence.

Of the 25 students who responded to the question on using English only for academic writing, 23 felt that English should remain the language of academic writing at the institution because it is an international language. Overall, the student teachers seemed determined to learn it. Two students said it was good to use English, but the institution should also use local languages such as isiXhosa and Afrikaans to help those who did not understand English well.

In interviews, 18 participants stated that even though not all students were competent in English, it was the desired language of academic writing, and helped connect all students since UW is an international institution. Two students stated if it were used alongside local languages, it would be easy to deal with the competency issues facing many students. The high number of students

supporting the use of English regardless of their limited proficiency shows that students understood the importance of academic writing, irrespective of their language backgrounds.

5.4 Data from student journals

As mentioned earlier, I used document analysis to gather information on the challenges experienced by first-year students in English academic writing. Twenty students engaged in journal writing on their experiences as first-year student teachers at UW. Fourteen of the 20 said that it was hard to adapt to the new environment, since they were used to speaking their home languages. One student said that after joining the institution, they had to communicate in English since it was part of the university's policy. The following excerpt reveals a number on interesting insights on the experience of acquiring academic English. :

Excerpt D1

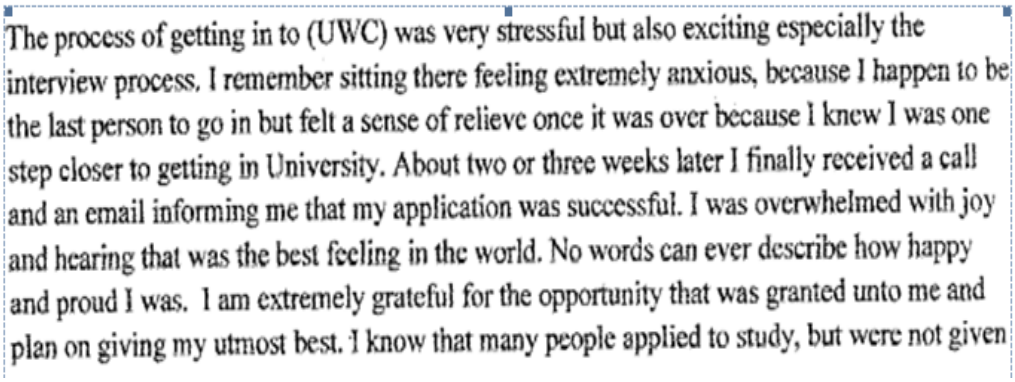
> Challenges are always toughest-thing in life to face. I have many of them, speaking in English in fluent-way was the toughest challenge as my communication skill was bad earlier. Learning English as a second language at high school was not considered problematic because teacher's simplified ad explained the English lesson via the medium of their mother tongue. Learning English at high school was not difficult because some of the subjects we learnt were taught in English and explanation done in IsiXhosa. We were even allowed to use our mother tongue to asked and answer the questions. The fact that we were taught English by English second language speakers at high school posed a problem, because at University we taught by English first language speakers. The intonation and fast pronunciation of some words was very different to what we were accustomed.
>
> The lecturers were just lecture ring and it was difficult for me to follow because they were very fast. I found difficult in coping with pronunciation because they speak with low tone and they are very fast. It was confusing because some lecturers were rolling (fast pronunciation) when handling a lecture, so that is why I could not understand the content. There were cases where I was afraid to ask question in class and would not consult lecturers and tutors even though I did not understand, as I was afraid to make mistakes. Before I go to them I had to practice what I was going to say.

Another student reiterated that at high school, English was simple, while at the university it was complicated. Although, classroom observation is not one of the research methods used in this study, I relate to personal observations made during tutorials. I noted that four students (20%)

asked the tutor to repeat what they had explained. They usually stared at the tutor during explanations before asking them to repeat what they had said because they had difficulty understanding certain words used. I noted that this happened with students who were more fluent in English than with students who were less fluent. It is possible that the less fluent ones understood even less but were not bothering to ask for repetitions as such requests might have meant asking for most of the content to be repeated.

The challenges expressed by students in their journals confirmed what they said in interviews regarding their understanding of the lesson content, their accents and poor pronunciation of words which rendered them difficult to understand by others during class presentations. The student in Excerpt D2 also spoke of having difficulty following the lecturers because their pronunciation was not familiar to the student.

Excerpt D2


The process of getting in to (UWC) was very stressful but also exciting especially the interview process. I remember sitting there feeling extremely anxious, because I happen to be the last person to go in but felt a sense of relieve once it was over because I knew I was one step closer to getting in University. About two or three weeks later I finally received a call and an email informing me that my application was successful. I was overwhelmed with joy and hearing that was the best feeling in the world. No words can ever describe how happy and proud I was. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity that was granted unto me and plan on giving my utmost best. I know that many people applied to study, but were not given

From the data that emerged from interviews, questionnaires and document analysis, it is apparent that many first-years students (approximately 85%) experienced language challenges and had to develop new strategies to adapt to the new learning environment and communicate in English. Most had low proficiency in it. It appears that students' low proficiency in English (L2) affected their interaction with each other and with their lecturers. In fact, even those who said they were competent in English during interviews did not want to admit to being competent since they thought others would consider them boastful.

In the following section, I discuss some of the language-related challenges faced by UW first-year student teachers in English academic writing.

5.5 Language-related challenges encountered by students

The challenges that participants encountered included low proficiency in English (both spoken and written), limited vocabularies, and accent and pronunciation issues, along with other challenges, as discussed below.

5.5.1 Low English language proficiency

The last portion of Table 5.5 above shows data gathered from the interviewees on language competency. Only three (15%) of the 20 participants said they were competent in English. The other 17 students (85%) said they were either average or below average in English. These three competency levels are a broad indication of the extent to which interviewees were able to use English (L2) for all academic activities, including understanding instructions given by their lecturers and tutors, academic writing, reading and other forms of assessments.

The number of first-year students experiencing language challenges is higher than those who said they were confident in using English since it was their first language. Based on the data, it is evident that most students found English challenging to learn since they had to master a high level in order to comprehend their learning materials. As a result, they had to devise strategies to manage the language aspects of their academic tasks and assessments. Many had joined the university with low English competency levels, and had to make rapid improvements to comprehend the English expected of them when engaging with learning materials. This is evident in the Excerpt D3 below.

Excerpt D3

negative attitude to English second language. My writing skills have been adversely affected through this English second language problem. I was unable to express my views succinctly when writing. It was very difficult to me to make or put my views clearly when writing the assignments. My tutor used to say my language is poor. When I wrote my essay, I used to take them to the writing centre. But I got that I failed that assignment whereas I answered what they asked.

Excerpt D3 expresses quite eloquently how a lack of academic writing skills have affected her performance at university. She goes as far as to say that her writing skills have been 'adversely affected' by the problem. It is possible that this student had confidence in her abilities when leaving high school, where the level demanded was lower; here, she may have experienced such a steep increase in the level demanded that her confidence took a drop, affecting her abilities.

5.5.2 Difficulties with accent and pronunciation

During interviews, the first-year students stated that they lacked confidence in presenting their work orally because of their accents, pronunciation and limited vocabulary to communicate effectively with their peers. They could not recognise new words in English and this made it difficult to read with understanding. These challenges were especially pronounced in the first semester at UW as they had just transitioned from high school. Some of these difficulties are evident in the following excerpt.

Excerpt D4

It was difficult to me because I was not use to speak English. It was not easy to communicate with my fellow students because most of the students speak English. At high school we spoke the same language, as the school contained learners from the same racial group. I had difficulty at university because I have to communicate with different racial and linguistic groups. English is the only common language. The difficulties I had in communicating resulted in low self-esteem and a

Several participants mentioned that the demand for and use of English (L2) at the university differed from its use at high school level.

Excerpt D4 also points to differences in the students' linguistic backgrounds and the difficulties of communicating across racial and linguistic boundaries. From other written submissions, too, it was clear that having to communicate in English with different language groups affected the students' self-esteem negatively, causing them to begin to feel inferior to their peers who were competent in English. This affected their interactions and socialisation with them. Thus it can be seen that lack of English language proficiency affected not only their academic work, but also their social interactions with fellow students. They felt intimidated by their peers who were competent in writing and speaking English, and were more comfortable with students who spoke English at the same level as they did – usually those who shared a language background. As a result, students tended to create groups based on who was fluent and confident in English and those who was not. Therefore, it could be said that English is not only a barrier to learning, but also affects students' emotional and social life, causing a measure of division among students according to their proficiency levels in it.

Data from the students' journals concur with the interview and questionnaire data with regard to the challenges experienced by the first-year student teachers in English academic writing. The triangulated data shows that the students experienced language-related challenges with regard to reading and writing, recognising new words, lack of appropriate vocabulary, difficulty in oral presentations and lack of confidence in the use of English (L2).

Specifically, the interview data revealed that nine of the 20 participants (45%) had pronunciation and accent insecurity. Four (20%) said that they lacked confidence as other students kept on correcting them and even laughing at them, at times, when they made mistakes while expressing themselves in English. The Afrikaans and isiXhosa-speaking first-year students said that they sometimes found it challenging to understand the accent of some of their lecturers and peers who spoke English as a home language, and the same was felt by Afrikaans- and English-speaking students when communicating with students who spoke isiXhosa as their home language. Understanding each other is crucial, as students have to understand the ideas they are taught, and, in addition, these participants frequently had to collaborate on academic activities. Moreover, they were bound by the university language policy which promoted English as the LOLT. This implies that the challenges experienced by students were not solely about their proficiency levels in the

language, but were also associated with cognitive and affective disadvantages which had an impact on their learning.

The following excerpts from interviews indicate how the students' lack of vocabulary affected their learning, especially their academic writing. Pseudonyms are used to protect the students' identities.

Excerpt X1

> **Pumla:** '*I feel, like … moderate. Sometime I feel like I am under writing because sometime I realise the language context I am using is not good and there are instances I feel like, okay I am a bit moderate but it's never advanced. I do not wanna lie - it's always a battle to express it on paper.'*
>
> **Michelle:** *'I still have a lot to learn on grammar and vocabulary but I know that practice makes perfect.'*
>
> **Alex:** *'It is very complicated. I get that some words are very strong and technical. That lead me to lose the understanding of their instruction.'*
>
> **Laila:** *'Academically, I use different kinds of words which are more different from those of high school.'*

These comments show that a good vocabulary and the facility to use words aptly is essential in academic writing. All mentioned the challenges they experienced, which ranged from lack of grammatical competence to lack of sufficient vocabulary, which affected their academic writing negatively.

5.6 Enhancing students' academic writing in English (L2)

Following questions about challenges experienced in English academic writing, students were asked about the support they felt they needed in this regard. This question was answered by 24 participants in the questionnaire. Four students (23.3%) said that they could not identify any tool that would enhance their academic writing competence. Ten (41.7) students said they relied on

constant reading, class assignments, and those who were competent in the language. Six students talked about reading newspapers and using dictionaries to learn the meanings of new words. Four said that the module on Academic Literacy, known as EDC111, had been of great help in enhancing their English competence.

From the interviews carried out with 20 students, 12 (60%) said classwork and interacting with other students had helped them enhance their competence in English. Four (20%) said they had mentors who guided them on the best way to strengthen their academic writing competence. Two (10%) said they relied on dictionaries and the internet, and the remaining two (10%) said EDC111 had been of great help.

Some of the participants said they relied on their mentors to improve their English competency. Based on the data, it is clear that students understood that they had challenges with academic writing and yet all showed a positive attitude in trying to improve it.

Students were asked how they coped with the challenge of English academic writing, especially those who did not speak English as a home language. Twenty-one students answered this question in the questionnaires. Eighteen (90%) said they did not use their local languages to cope with their academic writing challenges since the university required them to use English, and the reading materials were written in English. Three students (15%) said even though they were proficient in their home languages, they did not understand English very well, and there was no material written in their first languages, ie, Afrikaans or isiXhosa, that they could use to boost their comprehension.

The students' responses indicate that English was the preferred language of learning. Even if students wanted to use their first languages, this would have been impossible because there were no relevant materials written in these languages.

5.7 Exploring the multilingual learning context

In this section, I describe the students' experiences of interacting with peers who did not share the same home language. The discussion is based on data collected from the interviews and questionnaires.

The students' responses indicate how students felt and reacted in situations where they had to use one language, two languages or more languages to communicate.

5.7.1 Embracing bi- and multilingualism

The students were asked to explain how they felt when they were exposed to situations where they had to speak two languages. Over fifty percent (56%) of the students said that it was a struggle to deal with more than one language in their communication, especially the English and Afrikaans-speaking students, while the remaining percentage (44%) indicated that they had no problem incorporating the other languages, especially to socialise with others. Only six of the 30 participants said they could communicate in a language other than English, even though at times it was difficult. They indicated that they enjoyed doing so because speaking in someone's language made the other person feel better and gain a sense of belonging. The following excerpt from an interview illustrates this point.

Excerpt X2

Carole: *'I am comfortable ... I can communicate with anyone alongside. It does not matter what background you come from, so long as you can speak a bit of English or a bit of Afrikaans. I can still communicate with them anyhow. Because anyone at the university can manage to communicate with someone else ...'*

While the use of languages other than English was challenging for a high number of students, some said that they found it easy, as they were competent in other languages. From observations of the students, it was apparent that the multilingual learning context of UW favoured those whose home language was not English; English first-language speakers found multilingualism more challenging than other students did. These participants had not been exposed to a multilingual setting before, since they studied in schools where English was the only language of communication. Thus they found the new multilingual environment unfamiliar and challenging, especially in the area of socialising with peers.

However, data from interviews and journals show that many students would prefer to have used their mother tongue to communicate in both academic and informal situations. They were forced by the UW language policy to use English in academic situations, since this was the university's policy. The use of multiple languages would have made it easier for the student teachers to deal with the social language barriers and identity issues they experienced owing to their low proficiency levels in English. Since language proficiency is one of the challenges faced by most students at UW, allowing the use of two languages in teaching and learning might help students learn other languages, strengthen their proficiency and develop bilingual skills.

The interview data shows that 100% of the participants liked to interact with multilingual people in an adaptable way so that they could learn from each other. The data shows that the participants understood the significance of learning more than one language and appreciated the use of social multilingualism as it enhanced their cognition and created room for discovering new things. All the participants were interested in learning something new from those who spoke a different language. In an academic setting, learning more than one language plays a vital role in boosting students' confidence. While learning something new, one is bound to make mistakes, which is part of the learning process. Learning a new language means that a person is willing to get out of their comfort zone, and comes with a sense of accomplishment, in that the person is able to converse with someone in the other person's home language. The fact that learning new languages boosts one's confidence suggests the advantages enjoyed by student teachers who engage in such activities. With high confidence, one can interact with others and determine which language is suitable for academic and personal communication.

In addition, participants who showed flexibility in the matter of language , showing themselves to be willing to learn from others, felt that they benefitted even more broadly, since multilingual interactions helped them understand the differences between people and cultures. Exploring new language and cultural practices helps people draw comparisons with what is familiar to them. The data clearly shows that the participants positioned themselves in an adaptable way and were willing to learn from one another; all also recognised the role of language in helping one discover new things.

Interestingly, the data shows that some participants believed that they were different from those who spoke languages other than their own, while others believed people are not that different, irrespective of the language they used. One student said that people were different in terms of language and culture, and that when they were around people who all spoke different languages, they could use only the language understandable to all – English. This is evident in the following excerpt:

Excerpt X3

Desiree: '*What I do, I always use the basic common communication language, English. I mean, if I am sitting with people who do not understand my languag, - what's the use of a language that cannot be understood? So I always use the basic language, which is English, and when it comes to culture, I am always open to learning about other people. Not that I have to believe them, not that I have to follow their cultures, but obviously to be open-minded, to be aware.'*

Another student responded that when he was around people who spoke a different language to his, he chose not to assume they were different. He said that a study of linguistics had shown that many people had similar linguistic origins. He stressed that mutual understanding is still possible despite language differences, as show in the following excerpt.

Excerpt X4

Zola*: 'Yeah, the role of individuals to the languages I have is that we all as people coming from different backgrounds. Linguistics tells us that we are not different, after all. Like we learn that Bantu language is where we derive our language. So you see, we are all alike in a sort of a way, especially in understanding the individuals. Myself, I am not that much different with the next person because when I look at the history, it's like we all come from the same place somewhere because when I look at the Bantu language, it tells all our languages, isiXhosa, Ndebele, isiSwati … all that it shows is that we are closely related*.'

The two responses above show subtly different perspectives on how people behave around multilingual individuals. The arguments converge on the point of having the desire to learn from

others; even though, as mentioned by 'Desiree', one may not wish to assimilate the 'other' language and culture, there is an openness to the idea of discovering what goes on in other parts of the world among all the participants. The desire to learn from others shows the significance of language in education. Whether or not people use the same language, there is still a chance to learn from each other, provided one is willing to do so. UW could consider revisiting its language policy in a way that fosters even greater interaction and cultural exchange among students while allowing those whose first language is not English to work in their own home language occasionally to achieve competency in their field of study.

Even though some student teachers felt comfortable using two languages, some were used to only one language. This implies that the institution could consider bilingualism as an alternative to monolingualism where English is used to the exclusion of all other languages. It also indicates there is an opportunity to use students' linguistic repertoires in addition to English for learning purposes in academic settings such as tutorial classes. This would strengthen bi- and multilingualism, which is embraced in the language policy.

5.7.2 Use of a common language

While some of the student teachers embraced bi/multilingualism, others believed in monolingual practices. The participants argued that communicating with a person speaking the same language, either in an academic setting or in other situations was easy and straightforward. When using the same language, it was easy to exchange ideas and learn from each other. The students' responses showed that using the same languages had added advantages such as making meaning of the learning content and the ability to use the language fluently and confidently. They claimed that using a similar language boosted one's confidence, since people could easily connect with each other. The connection established while using a common language is vital in communication, either in an academic setting or social situations, because the ability to communicate with others is one of the most rewarding human experiences.

In addition, the students' responses show the importance of language in helping student teachers master academic literacies and develop a sense of belonging in their new environment. English is the instructional language at UW, and all student teachers are expected to have adequate skills in

writing and reading in English. Even though some participants said that they lacked advanced English writing and reading skills, the fact that they could communicate in English was vital in helping establish connections with peers.

In addition, using the same language in non-academic situations was felt to be advantageous by these students. One said that interacting using a common language was less formal, making it easy for people to establish direct connections. They concurred that it was easy to exchange ideas and learn from each other when a common language was adopted. Also, the data shows that the use of a common language was felt to be ideal for avoiding misunderstandings since it allowed participants to know what would and not would not be offensive. Those who were familiar with only one language could feel left out and uncomfortable if others failed to make an effort to speak their language, which affected their self-confidence. The data proves that having one common language is essential for establishing strong bonds, either professionally or informally. It also shows that there is a strong relationship between language and identity, as revealed in the following section.

5.8 Factors influencing students' learning of English academic writing

The section focuses on the factors which have an impact on students' learning of English (L2) writing, based on the students' responses as presented above. These factors include linguistic, sociocultural and affective factors.

5.8.1 Linguistic factors

As indicated earlier, the UW language policy requires the use of English as the medium of instruction. Even though English is a second language for many, the university expects all students to have competency in English to be eligible for enrolment. Students must have a minimum percentage of 50% in English home or additional language to be considered for admission in any undergraduate qualification at UW.

The interview data shows that 80% of the students were comfortable with English as the language of instruction at UW. Most explained that communicating and learning in English helped them

enhance their writing and reading skills. The students mentioned that English involved various aspects which equipped them with skills they needed for academic development and personal growth. One student responded that the language policy helped her learn English and fostered her academic growth.

Excerpt X5

> **Lorna:** *'Linguistics obviously plays a role in the academic development because it helps you in the understanding of the language - how people use the language and how you can learn how a sentence starts, and you can certainly understand others. It can also help in the educational process because it's what you make out of your academics.'*

As shown in excerpt X6 below, another student claimed that English contributed to her academic excellence, especially her reading of relevant educational materials. She mentioned how it advanced her vocabulary. She said:

Excerpt X6

> **Lungi:** *'It has quite a great impact on me because from what I learn from lectures and tutorials, I can implement in my tasks; I can use a much higher English and words in my tasks. So, therefore, I can obtain a higher percentage in my marks.'*

From these two responses, it can be deduced students are eager to learn English for academic achievement and for personal advancement. In other words, the acquisition of a high level of English has an impact on their performance as university students and on their advancement in life.

As a developing country, South Africa invests in higher education to produce graduates who can contribute to the economy by becoming effective and efficient human capital. Hence, irrespective of the discipline they choose to study, all graduates need to be competent in the language(s) of the economy, which is predominantly English. This implies that that student teachers have to learn

English not only for their academic performance, but for their own understanding and that of the learners they will teach.

Also, since English is the common language of instruction and business globally, most educational materials are written in English. This means that student who have high-level English reading and writing skills can access a vast reservoir of academic content through the internet which they can use to enhance their ongoing academic development. English is the most spoken and written language in the world, a fact that UW embraces. UW understands the value of English, and that is why it has made it compulsory as the language of instruction. It also enables the university to accommodate international students who do not speak South Africa's other native languages. Although some students may have challenges in communicating in English, once they enrol, they become motivated to improve their English by interacting with others who are fluent in the language. The responses provided by the participants are in line with the global community's views about the value of the English language.

In the following section, I discuss the sociocultural factors that influence students' learning of English academic writing. These factors emerged from the triangulation of data from interviews and student journals.

5.8.2 Sociocultural factors

The sociocultural factors that influence English language acquisition include home language, beliefs, social organisations, social status and attitudes, among others. From the data, the students seemed to understand the impact of sociocultural factors on their learning of English academic writing. For example, one student stated that personal beliefs influenced how student teachers concentrated on their learning. Another stated that one could not always rely on one's own beliefs to advance one's academic literacy, but belief in the sense of faith could determine their eventual success. The excerpt below reveals the participant's view that one should allow oneself to be affected by other people's beliefs in the sociocultural environment, and value ideas that are not one's own.

Excerpt X7

Thando: '*Academic excellence … you cannot always use your beliefs - you need to read about what other people say. Then you need to compare in terms, sometimes in assignments … you cannot just write only about your beliefs, you see, you need to read and listen to what the other people are saying.'*

In total, 90% of the students claimed that collaboration, harmony and understanding among students was beneficial for their learning. Of 30 participants who answered the questionnaires, 24 (80%) seemed to understand that sociocultural factors were influential forces in society since they shaped the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of people. This showed that they understood the role of sociocultural factors in learning. Even though the student teachers came from different backgrounds, spoke different home languages and had various attitudes and behaviours, they shared the same African social values, namely, interaction, collaboration and harmony. These values are encouraged in the fundamental cultures in which they were raised. The use of a common language created the means for student teachers to learn from one another's beliefs, religions, attitudes and social organisation. If people can communicate using a common language, they can easily associate and share values and attitudes, which may affect the learning process.

Based on responses recorded earlier on the effects of language on learning, it is clear that most students are comfortable using English and felt there was no point in using a language that others could not understand. They acknowledged that English was especially useful in an international institution such as UW. Three interviewees (15%) argued that apart from broad sociocultural factors, the sociocultural setting of the university itself, which embraced diversity, had a significant influence on learning. I believe that the university makes it possible for students to interact and collaborate with each other for academic achievement. The language policy of the university fosters the use of a common language and seems to have the possibly unintended effect of bringing students together to share beliefs and help one another. This worked out in the students' favour, as they were supportive of one another's attempts to improve their English and showed positive behaviours and attitudes towards learning.

One student wrote in her journal that challenges were learning experiences that should not pull anyone down, and commented that the university motivated them to become better. This belief helped her deal not only with the language challenges she faced, but also with life's adversities.

She referred to the loss of her family members, including her mother and brothers. She explained that when growing up, her mother always told her that challenges were not meant to bring one down but to help one grow and move to higher levels. Thus, her attitude and behaviour helped her cope with language challenges at university and shaped her identity. This is shown in Excerpt D5 below.

Excerpt D5:

A valuable lesson I have learned is that you can accomplish anything in life if you put your mind to it. Never allow people and their negativity to dim your light or make you feel like you are worthless. The good things in life don't come easy and working hard for the things you want will make you appreciate it even more. I wish I had done better in school because it impacted my life tremendously. However, I also believe things happen for a reason. I have learned to let go and look forward to what lies ahead. I do not look back with regret because it made me wiser, stronger and shaped me into the young lady I am today. I know my journey is just beginning and what I experienced is just another piece of the puzzle.

I would like to advise people in my situation to never give up even if you feel like the most worthless person on earth. Let that be your motivation and preserve through the hardships and harsh judgments. You are never too old to learn and time will pass in any case. Surround yourself with people that are a motivation to you and care for you. Also take the time to better yourself in other areas and do not wait for things to happen make them happen. Do not lose sight of the goals and remember that God will not open a door and bring you to a certain point just to leave you by yourself. I give him all the glory, honor and praise because I could not have done it on my own including my family.

In conclusion, failure is not about how many times you fall down, but refusing to get back up. Look beyond the obstacles and always have hope.

The first paragraph of this excerpt reveals how factors such as belief system, motivation and goal-setting influence the construction of one's identity. I deduced from the excerpt that the student was motivated by her disposition to life in general and the lessons derived from her life challenges. It is evident that this student teacher saw challenges as parts of a puzzle that could be solved, and this attitude helped her to deal with personal and academic challenges. It also enabled her to construct a sense of self and a strong linguistic identity.

Interestingly, the excerpt's second paragraph indicates that the participant may have derived much of her sense of identity from her religious beliefs, which enabled her to cope with the challenges encountered in day-to-day living. In contrast, another student mentioned that God has nothing to do with a person's English academic writing ability since academic literacy development is first and foremost a result of the students' own motivation to skilfully use the language.

In the following section I discuss data on the affective factors that shape students' emotions and attitudes, which in turn seemed to influence their learning of academic writing in English (L2).

5.8.3 Affective factors

Of the 30 students who filled in the questionnaire, 22 answered the question of how they felt when they wrote in English. I grouped their responses into three categories; comfortable, very comfortable and uncomfortable. Fourteen students (64%) said they felt comfortable writing in English even though they experienced challenges with aspects such as spelling and grammar. This group felt that even though they were not completely adept at the use of English, it was not that difficult. One student among the 14 said she felt 'liberated'. Only six (27.3%) students said they felt very comfortable writing in English since they had no issues with grammar or spelling. The remaining three (13,6%) said they were uncomfortable writing in English because they made numerous grammar and vocabulary errors and that they had a lot to learn. One student among the three said she felt completely lost when writing in English.

Similar responses were noted from the 20 students who were interviewed. Two of them said they were very comfortable with English, 15 said they were comfortable and three said they were uncomfortable and felt that they had a lot to learn. These self-assessments do not necessarily reflect their actual abilities.

Concerning the question on how well they used English, of the 17 students who answered this question, six said they used English very well. Three said they had used English since primary school and it had never been an issue. The other two said they used English very well because since joining UW, interacting with others and doing assignments had enhanced their academic writing skills.

The questionnaire and interview data show that a significant number of students (90%) had either minor or severe challenges when it came to writing in English (L2). Some did not have the confidence to write because the English grammar and vocabulary seemed to be too much of an obstacle. Considering the high number of students who were not comfortable with English

academic writing, it can be said that English was not only a barrier for first-year students' spoken or oral language, but was also a challenge in writing.

5.9 English academic literacy and students' identity construction

This section presents data that emanates from the questionnaires, interviews and student journals on factors that influence students' identity construction. The data shows that several factors shaped students' identity construction, including their home languages and social beliefs. These factors are discussed below.

5.9.1 The role of the home language

From the data gathered through the questionnaires, twenty of students (67%) said that they used their home language at the university in the classroom during tutorials, and outside the university when they interacted with their peers, as indicated in Table 5.2. During the interviews, students were asked how they used their home language in the acquisition of English language skills. Eight students (40%) said that they used their home language to transfer skills and knowledge, which helped them advance their reading skills in English. Logically, if students have better reading skills in their first language, it is easier for them to transfer the same skills to their second language, which is an advantage to their learning. However, there are factors that can impede this transfer of the same skills to their second language, such as culture, cognition and linguistic distance.

Five (25%) students said their second language had helped them adopt new social skills, which facilitated better interaction with English-speaking teachers and students. When students interacted with their peers who understood their local language, they exchanged ideas and perceptions about things that enabled them to grasp new ideas. When interacting with English-speaking students, it was easy to share their experiences based on what they had learned; they could help exchange their skills and at the same, take advantage of what English-speaking students and teachers had to offer, so that they could succeed in learning.

The other seven students said that their home language helped them advance their English literacy levels. Through interaction with their peers and collaboration, they drew individual mind maps in their home languages before translating certain tasks into English academic language. The students

ensured that they gave their assignments to a competent English language user to review them, or they would create at least a draft or two of their essays before final submission.

Based on the responses, it is apparent that students used their first language to cope with English academic writing literacy. When they exchanged knowledge and skills with lecturers and peers by using their home language, they could learn new concepts to advance their thinking and at the same time, interact with other English-speaking persons to support them in learning the language. This shows the importance of the home language in assisting the student teachers to construct new language identities as English writers at UW (ie, self and social identities).

Also, the participants established a sense of belonging as they interacted with others in the new academic community, and developed the motivation and confidence to use English for academic purposes.

5.9.2 Students' personalities and social beliefs

Interviews revealed that the students' personalities and beliefs played a significant role in the approach they took to English academic tasks. Students believed that continuous reading and writing practice in English helped them to learn and master articulate and well-structured texts in English (L2), to varying extents. For example, three (15%) students said that they used English at university to ensure that they communicated effectively, and their communication skills were translated to their writing. In excerpt X8, one stated:

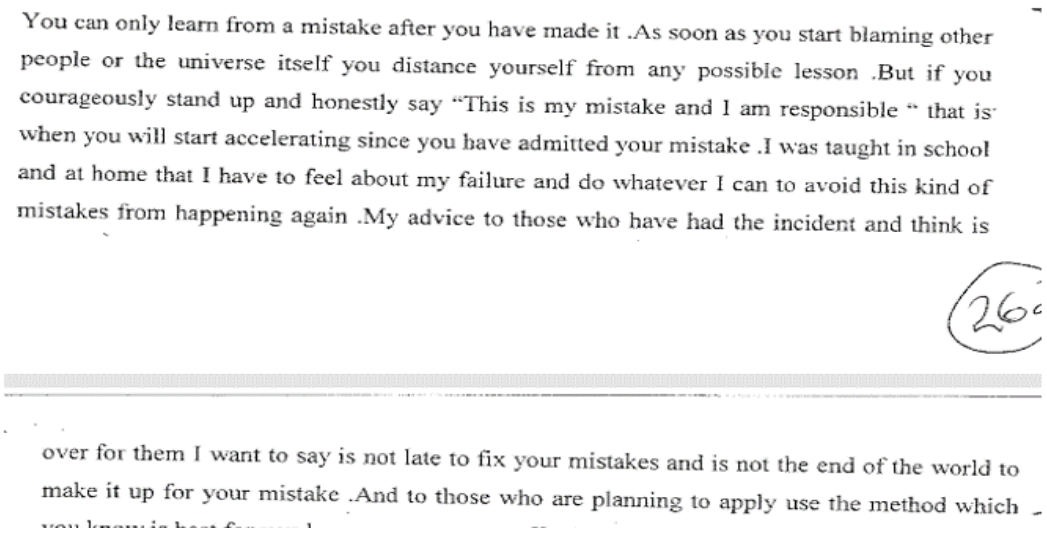
> **Sipho:** *'I always communicate here in varsity in English so that I can improve the way I speak and the way I socialise and how I know what I know. Sometimes when I write some short stories to engage with academic writing like when I read dictionaries – that's it.'*

The other six (30%) students explained that their personalities and beliefs had a lot to do with the way they wrote their academic tasks. In excerpt X9, one said:

> **Sindie:** *'I will say these beliefs helped me write in an academic way or in a formal*

way. So there has to be ... so the result is to improve how to communicate in an academic way, and I am doing education here in the varsity so that when I communicate with learners in future, I can relate to references, I can respond academically in a way that learners will understand.'

From the journals, one student also said that when growing up, his parents and teachers instilled in him a belief that people learn from their mistakes, and failure did not determine one's future. He believed that even if he made a mistake, he could use the mistake to enhance his academic writing skills. Therefore he was not afraid of making mistakes to learn new things. If he failed, he would rectify his mistake by doing more work and seek help from those who understood better. This helped him to improve his academic writing. This is indicated in the following journal entry, excerpt D6:



You can only learn from a mistake after you have made it .As soon as you start blaming other people or the universe itself you distance yourself from any possible lesson .But if you courageously stand up and honestly say "This is my mistake and I am responsible " that is when you will start accelerating since you have admitted your mistake .I was taught in school and at home that I have to feel about my failure and do whatever I can to avoid this kind of mistakes from happening again .My advice to those who have had the incident and think is

over for them I want to say is not late to fix your mistakes and is not the end of the world to make it up for your mistake .And to those who are planning to apply use the method which

Another student explained that her personal experiences shaped her attitudes toward learning academic writing. What the student gained from taking part in English writing tutorials and helping others, using their home language, helped her advance in her English academic writing skills.

Based on the responses received from some participants, it is apparent that beliefs and personalities have a significant impact on learning the English language. Through trial and error, and through helping one another, students felt they developed stronger characters, which encouraged them to

work hard and help each other, regardless of the mistakes they made in their English academic writing.

Furthermore, during interviews, 80% of students explained that they used their personalities and religious beliefs in academic writing. For example, one student said she used her biblical beliefs in each piece of her writing to encourage others who experienced the same challenges. She stated in excerpt X10:

> **Grace:** *'Yeah, I think recently in Lan 105 assignment, she asks us to provide suggestions on what we will advise someone in that situation at the end of the day, at the end of my writing. I used Ephesians chapter 4: 13 where the Bible talks of all things work for good for those … I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me. I used that at the end of my writing to encourage anyone in that situation that all things are possible to anyone that believes. I used my belief system, now, to counsel someone in the academic writing context. So my belief system plays a role there.'*

Another student stated that his personality influenced everything in his academic writing, in that he did not rely only on books and the internet; his own perspective, too, was critical. Excerpt X11 states:

> **Lionel:** *'I also think my outlook to life molds the way I behave, which helped me in my writing because it gives me the freedom of expression into my work in terms of my personal point of view, my voice – that is, what* I *think. Not what the internet says or what the book says or what the functionalists say but what I feel in my perspective on the task.'*

Based on the above data, it appears that the majority of first-year students used their personalities and beliefs to support their academic writing. The participants argued that the use of their own beliefs and personalities helped to boost their confidence and relate to others in learning activities, resulting in improved marks. Their personalities and beliefs influenced their attitudes and behaviours, and enhanced their performance.

Concerning possible conflict of beliefs and the effect this might have on students' knowledge, four participants stated that they experienced no conflicts in beliefs, while 14 said that at times, conflict over differing beliefs showed in their academic writing. Six participants did not comment on this question. Among those who experienced no conflict, one had this to say, in excerpt 12:

> **Craig:** *'For me there is no conflict with beliefs, personalities or knowledge because academic English is learning, because you've already learned English in high school. It's just a transition on how to write English in an educational way so that in future I can read these essays, if I can write books and kinds of stuff so that people can read them and understand academically ... so it's a question of transition. Otherwise there is no conflict with beliefs and personality.'*

Two students who stated that they did experience conflict had this to say in excerpts 13 and 14:

> **Poppy:** '*I can say that point is like when you are given a topic on an essay about beliefs ... so your beliefs might be different from someone else's, you see, because we have different cultures and beliefs, you see.'*

> **Greta:** '*Sometimes I can get, like, conflict, but the way I believe my personality can have conflict with my academic writing ... the way I do things ... academic writing becomes too high. Social networks, for example, like, we're writing differently as compared to academic writing, so there can be a conflict somehow.'*

The above responses show that the students had different opinions regarding whether or not conflict over beliefs affected their writing. Differences in their languages, personalities and beliefs influenced their attitudes to and perceptions of academic writing.

With regard to the influence of students' home languages, social backgrounds and personal beliefs on academic writing, four students (25%) stated that their language and social backgrounds helped them cope with academic writing challenges because they had always used English as their language of instruction and communication. Eight students (40%) explained that their beliefs and personalities helped them have a favourable attitude towards learning English, and this helped

them improve their English academic writing. Students clearly had different perspectives on the influence of language, background and beliefs on their identities as English writers.

Twelve students said that at times, language limited their beliefs and personalities because how they felt was complex and hard to express in English. Their beliefs were based on personal experiences, culture, tradition and ideas picked up in their home languages. These factors affected how they behaved and they sometimes struggled to explain their personalities and beliefs in their academic writing.

Four of the students raised the issue of the rules they had to apply in academic writing. This suggests that students had to write according to the academic writing conventions even though they did not believe in them, - they are the rules of grammar and vocabulary. The participants' responses show the importance of language in shaping students' identity constructions.

Fourteen participants responded to the question of how student teachers draw on their beliefs and personalities in academic writing. Eight said that their beliefs influenced their behaviour and attitudes. One student said that he did not believe in failure. His character and personality motivated him to work very hard to avoid failure. Six participants argued that they chose not to involve their personalities and beliefs because academic writing has rules that one should follow and their personal views were not part of these.

On the question about the impact of beliefs and personalities on students' academic writing, fifteen participants responded. Excerpt 15 below is one such response.

> **Ludwe:** '*Okay, I can say that my beliefs and my personality play a big role in academic writing because … uh … your beliefs, like your norms and values, help you a lot to ... almost, like, it humbles you when you write. Your personality traits also help in your writing process, because you become one with the paper. Yeah, yeah, what you feel and how you write is like it becomes one, yeah.'*

From the responses, it is apparent that students' beliefs and personalities had a considerable impact on their academic writing, and the majority drew on them to enhance their English writing.

Twenty students responded to the question of whether the lecturers and tutors recognised their beliefs and personalities in their academic writing. One student explained that when students wrote narratives essays that included their personal experiences, it was easy for the lecturers and tutors to recognise the personalities and beliefs of the writers, since they were reflected in the text. The other two students said that the lecturers and tutors respected students' perspectives on various topics because they knew their views were based on beliefs and personalities. The responses show that both the students and lecturers embrace the students' personalities and beliefs, as personal expression was encouraged by lecturers and willingly given by the students.

5.9.3 English (L2) and identity construction

Students were asked how their English (L2) writing portrayed their self or personal identity, ie, how they negotiated their identity through English (L2). Of the 20 responses, 14 said that English academic writing did not accommodate their second-language identity since they had to write in the third person and not in the first person. In excerpt 16, a student stated:

> *'Okay. I can say also it does not accommodate my self-identity because most of the time when you write in academic writing, like, you write in the third person narration. You don't include yourself, you don't use the first person narration.'*

Another student argued that their personal identities were not recognised because they had to follow rules in their writing which did not allow for the expression of their personalities and beliefs.

Six students, however, said that English academic writing accommodated their identities. One student claimed that fluency and good understanding of English grammar opened doors to English medium universities, which shaped their identities. Others said they could not negotiate their self-identities in English (L2) writing owing to limited proficiency in the language. Quite a few students associated proficiency in English with better opportunities and more affluent schools where English is the main medium of instruction.

Concerning academic writing conventions, 14 students argued that these conventions helped them enhance their competence, which was demonstrated in how they expressed themselves. However, five students argued that academic writing limited their expressive ability as writers. In excerpt 17, a student stated

> '*It has limited my expressive ability as a writer in terms of the number of words … when you are writing an essay in academic writing, you don't use contractions, also. In high school, I use contractions mostly so that I cannot exceed the number of words. With such an example, it has limited my expressive ability as a writer*.'

Academic writing is a practice influenced by conditions such as language skills, social constructs, disposition toward the subject, and knowledge of academic conventions and vocabulary, all of which that help coordinate the writer's thoughts as intended (Hyland, 2019; Grabe, & Kaplan, 2014). From the responses, it is evident that academic writing has some benefits for identity construction, and yet also imposes limitations, in some cases, since students experienced writing differently. Some had positive experiences while others experienced English academic writing as a limitation to their expression.

5.10 Students' academic writing skills and teaching practice in schools

This section describes how the student teachers' sense of identity and writing skills could enhance their teaching practice in schools. The 18 participants who answered this question said that they would use their characters and beliefs to enhance learning through writing and reading useful material such as newspapers, articles and scholarly journals.

Some participants claimed that a strong sense of identity among teachers and learners would enhance learning. The participants believed that the adoption of multiple identities – as first-year students, English second-language academic writers and professionals (prospective teachers) – would enable them to feel part of the school fraternity and boost their confidence in facing the challenges related to English academic writing in schools. With regard to how the three forms of adopted identity referred to above might support academic writing, two students expressed their opinions in excerpt X18 and X19 as follows:

Lucy: *'I think ... this is one of the most laudable things I have ever experienced and have come to learn. In academic writing, we are told not to put in our feelings ... academic writing makes you feel more professional ... It gives you the sense that you are a scholar.'*

Lizo*: 'I personally think I am going to be a good teacher, a great teacher in fact, because I cannot only teach people about linguistics or the use of my linguistic experience until I am done with the higher degree. I am going to explain to them in depth. I am going to prepare them better for university, better than I was prepared. I am going to put more love into my teaching. So, they are better equipped and they are basically prepared to university straight - they know what to expect and how to expect it.'*

The above two excerpts reveal that the student teachers had gained the momentum and motivation to continue confidently in their use of English (L2) for academic writing, and that this confidence translated into their confidence both as scholars and as prospective teachers. This suggests that the students are able to shift between their two languages and are confident to teach their peers and prospective learners in the English language. Based on their responses, I believe that they consider themselves privileged to have experienced linguistic challenges for academic purposes during their first year at the university. The students clearly intended to use their experiences when they became teachers to help their learners improve their use of English as a second language, and look forward to preparing senior grade students for university.

In addition, four students commented that their acquired English academic writing skills would be transferred into their teaching, which would help senior phase learners learn the English academic language required at university, as stated in excerpts X20 and X21 below.

Glen: *'For me, I would use it, to be quite honest, even if I have to explain myself or whatever I need to do in class - even if it takes time. Because as a leaner whose home language is not isiXhosa and that learner has been taught in isiXhosa from grade R to, let's say grade 5 or 7, then they now have to transit to the English and*

they do not understand. They are used to instruction for the past seven years in isiXhosa. So here comes now this teacher who speaks in English, so sometimes if you come across a learner that speaks the same as you, you may do a favour to the learner by explaining it in the same language that you guys understand and then construct it in English. I think that will be much better.'

Lutho: *'I will explain in Xhosa if the child does not understand what I am saying. So yeah. It will improve learning.'*

Excerpts X20 and X21 show that some student teachers are cognisant of the role of their home languages in helping learners develop English academic language skills for higher education. These student teachers maintained that it would be helpful to be able to explain concepts in their learners' home language first, and later or simultaneously in English. The four interviewed students may have reasoned that it does not make sense to abruptly transfer learners from a home language of instruction for more than six years to a new language, when the teacher can easily facilitate the change using a gradual process that does not impede academic learning or progression.

5.11 Summary

This chapter has presented data collected by means of a questionnaire, interviews and student journals in order to address the research questions and objectives stipulated in Chapter One of this thesis. The triangulation of data reveals that student teachers in English (L2) academic writing experience a number of challenges with the use of academic English, both on its own and in relation to their identities and identity construction. The chapter has also shown the role of language, beliefs and personalities in the student teachers' identity construction, and, lastly, how student teachers' newly constructed identities could affect their teaching in schools.

In the following chapter, I discusses the findings that emerged from the analysed data.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive discussion of the research findings and their implications for students' identity construction in English (L2). The findings are informed by the five objectives stated in Chapter One which guide this research study. I have made use of the research evidence presented in Chapter Five and the theories discussed in Chapter Three; namely, the Theory of Identity and the Theory of Identity Construction, both of which shed light on how first-year student teachers construct their identity in a multilingual institution.

As a point of departure, I discuss the findings – both the barriers and enablers – that pertain to the acquisition of students' proficiency in English (L2) academic writing.

6.2 The impact of English (L2) as the LOLT

The analysed data shows that numerous language-related issues negatively affect first-year students' academic writing. These issues include students' limited proficiency in English, and perceived inadequacies in oral or productive language with regard to students' accents and pronunciation, which many felt restricted their ability to express themselves in academic writing. On the other hand, students' positive attitudes and motivation seemed to be enablers to student teachers' academic writing in English (L2), as shown in the discussion below.

6.2.1 Students' limited proficiency in academic writing

The findings indicate that students have varying levels of English proficiency. Some, particularly those whose home language was English, had the advantage of a baseline proficiency in the language and felt they did not struggle unduly with English academic writing; others, especially those who did not speak English as a home language, had to deal with various challenges to master their tasks and assignments. From the results, it is apparent that students who had the lowest proficiency in English experienced the most difficulties in comprehending their educational materials and were unable to handle their tasks and assignments well. This was an academic challenge, as all students are expected to have good mastery of English (L2), the LOLT at the

university. This finding is supported by Bharuthram's (2012; 2017) and Ngwenya's (2010) research, which shows that many students join higher education institutions without the necessary ability in academic reading and writing. These two researchers attribute low proficiency levels in first-year students to the use of code-switching in the lower levels of education (Bharuthram, 2012). However, other linguistic scholars regard code-switching as an important linguistic resource in learning (Muthusamy, Muniandy, Kandasam, Hussin, Subramaniam & Farashaiyan, 2020; Maluleke, 2019). Either way, it appears that code-switching is not formally exploited as an academic resource in higher education.

Students' low proficiency in English seemed to affect their self-esteem. In this study, I discovered that owing to language-related challenges, some first-year students portrayed introverted behaviours and lacked the confidence to connect or socialise with others from different language backgrounds. Some experienced challenges with pronunciation, mastering new words and understanding what was being communicated by lecturers and tutors. The same students felt intimidated by their peers who were proficient in English, which affected their self-esteem. This lack of confidence affected relationships, both with peers and lecturers. They were afraid to ask or answer questions because of the lack of confidence and fear of intimidation, and they could not get help or support from their lecturers and tutors. As the evidence shows, it was the English home language speakers who raised questions in tutorials, having both confidence in their ability to formulate a question and to show their lack of understanding on individual points. One is left to wonder how many of the concepts raised in tutorials are understood by students who lack the confidence to ask questions. Research shows that introverted behaviour in the learning context does not facilitate meaningful learning, but perpetuates rote learning and anti-social skills among students (Wong & Chiu, 2019; Elliott, Hendry, Ayres, Blackman, Browning, Colebrook & White, 2019).

Research shows that many English second-language students lack cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), also referred to as academic English, even though they have acquired basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) in the language (Bharuthram, 2012; Kadhim, 2018). The role of CALP in the academic progression of the students at UW cannot be overlooked, because of its strong connection with the writing and reading skills of students. University students are expected to use academic English for academic purposes, which needs strong CALP rather

than day-to-day English (BICS), which is mainly for socialisation and informal communication. Many students spoke Afrikaans or isiXhosa as their first languages at home and with peers. They perceived English as a language to use at the university. Given this, it could be argued that their limited use of English affected their academic writing and reading literacy skills, hindering their CALP in English, the language of instruction at the university. This is not surprising because, as argued by Bharuthram (2012), the interpersonal communicative skills of a first language are acquired and developed into language proficiency. The lack of English language proficiency in reading and writing had a negative effect on the students' ability to cope with their complex and demanding academic tasks in English (L2).

As shown in the analysed data, low proficiency in English also affects the students' confidence and motivation in learning. In other words, limited proficiency in the LOLT could be a barrier to effective learning. This finding concurs with Cummins' view that an individual's CALP level is the most important element in learning, and builds on BICS (Cummins, 2000). In the same vein, this study has viewed academic language proficiency as the degree to which students can use and control their oral and written skills for the purpose of growth within academia (Cummins, 2000).

As highlighted above, English (L2) is one of the fundamental challenges which hinder students' acquisition of academic literacy, which has implications for their educational and personal development. This finding is in line with research by Bamgbose (2007) which indicates various problems that hinder literacy development, such as the low status of language(s) other than English, and inadequacy of literacy materials.

Other than the above challenges identified by this research on issues affecting students' academic literacy, there are other factors that cannot be ignored. Some of the students went to schools where they were taught in their first language (such as Afrikaans), which created difficulties for them when they entered university and had to switch abruptly to English (L2) as the LOLT. Many found English challenging because of its complex rules and vast vocabulary, along with the specific demands of academic English. Many could not comprehend some of the English learning materials. This certainly affected their sense of self. Orton's (2008) research shows that language not only helps students succeed academically but also helps them construct a stable identity in a new environment. Lack of proficiency in English (L2) seemed to impact not only these students'

academic performance but also their free interaction and socialisation with others, which in turn reduced their opportunities for growing in the use of the language. It created boundaries between different language groups instead of enhancing linguistic and social cohesion.

6.2.2 Limited productive language skills

The second challenge experienced by students related to their productive language skills in the form of pronunciation and accent. A high number of students claimed that they experienced difficulties communicating with others owing to their accents and inadequate pronunciation, which affected their confidence in class oral presentations. Some were unable to identify new words or find appropriate terms to use while communicating with their lecturers and other students. These challenges seemed to affect the students' confidence and motivation to interact freely with others. Avoidance of public speaking became a means of avoiding ridicule and intimidation by others, especially by those who were fluent in English.

As a result, many of the first-year students used their home languages most of the time, reserving English for lecturers, assignments and assessments only. Interestingly, the same students also experienced difficulties in understanding their lecturers' and peers' pronunciation. Some had to ask their peers, lecturers and tutors to repeat what they had said.

In the educational setting, each student is expected to have advanced proficiency levels in the language used for teaching and learning, in terms of vocabulary and sentence structure. In this study, students explained that they had to deal with complicated English vocabulary in reading and writing. The inability to master English vocabulary could explain why they had pronunciation and word recognition challenges. Van Dyk (2019) argues that high school students advancing to higher institutions where the instructional language is complex are unintentionally limited by having to study English vocabulary and pronunciation in the classroom, which affected their interactions with fluent peers, lecturers and tutors. Consequently, there seemed to be communication barriers between English first-language speakers and their peers who spoke English as a second or third language.

Van Dyk (2019) also states that many students find it challenging to comprehend what their tutors and lecturers are communicating owing to their low proficiency in the language of instruction. This affects their attention and focus during learning and teaching sessions. In this study, I noticed that some students' attention was divided when lecturers used certain words and phrases. Students would stare at them blankly, a sure sign that they did not comprehend what the lecturers intended to communicate. Those who were fluent in English did not show this behaviour. They had no issues with the accent, pronunciation and vocabularies because they had good proficiency in English.

The lack of understanding of certain terms (i.e. a deficient vocabulary) among first-year students seemed to be a learning barrier, as they struggled to receive and give assistance to each other during group work, being unable to use the necessary terminology with ease. This was not a problem in groups where they could use a different home language shared by all in the group.

In some instances, there was a lack of communication between the tutor and the students, which affected the students' learning. While the language policy of the institution promotes multilingualism, students are expected to have a certain level of competency in English, while other languages are embraced in teaching and assessment. Bharuthram (2012) argues that the reason why bilingual first-year students cannot understand lecture materials is that they find most terms unfamiliar and the vocabulary technical and beyond their level. As a result, they cannot acquire adequate vocabulary to use in all tasks and assignments for personal and educational growth. Furthermore, Bharuthram (2012) states that vocabulary is a challenge for bilingual students, regardless of their study level. Although the current study shows that some students had begun to understand complex English terms, many still struggled with certain terms – and hence with certain concepts – used in specialised modules. I reason that if the students could consistently and effectively communicate, read and write in advanced English and use appropriate terms in the instructional language, they would experience fewer difficulties as they progressed in their studies. Their lack of familiarity with the terms used means that they miss out on important concepts needed to build their cognitive structure in their field of study. This shows the significance of being supported with language learning strategies that students could adopt to enhance their academic literacy levels in English.

The analysed data shows that the students preferred to consult a group of peers who had similar experiences or were at the same level of English language proficiency. Although they interacted freely in such groups, it is possible that the input they gave and received from each other was not at the level needed to comprehend the learning material. In fact, these interactions may have exacerbated the challenge, simply reinforcing incomplete or erroneous ideas. On the other hand, such groups clearly had benefits in building confidence both socially and in terms of academic ability up to a certain level. Possibly they helped students to grasp fundamental points.

Overall, it appears that the inadequate use of English for academic and non-academic purposes is the reason that most students experience challenges relating to reading, writing and communication in English. These challenges seemed to have both a direct and indirect effect on their ability to master the academic content taught through the English medium.

Kadhim (2018) emphasises the significance of linguistic knowledge in the form of vocabulary and sentence construction in students' written work. An effective strategy for English (L2) students is to learn new words and employ the new vocabulary soon afterwards in academic writing. However, the findings of this study show that more than half the students felt that their written work was too casual, with various uncertainties, reiterations and inadequate sentences. This was owing to their limited vocabulary in English (L2) which had a negative effect on their literacy skills. In line with Kadhim's (2018) argument, I believe that the more time students spend reading, the more they assimilate and self-practise the use of the new words (vocabulary) to improve their academic writing.

6.2.3 Translanguaging as a linguistic resource

Based on my understanding of translanguaging, and responses obtained in this research, allowing students to use their first languages as part of the learning process has benefits. Firstly, translanguaging promotes deeper comprehension and helps students understand subject matter better than when using an unfamiliar language. When students interact with each other using a common language that they understand well, they can discuss a topic easily and exchange ideas and information more effectively. Therefore, translanguaging strategies help students traverse learning content and translate the home language knowledge and skills to English. Using English only may limit their understanding (García, Johnson & Seltzer, 2017; Joseph, 2015).

Second, translanguaging helps first-year students develop language skills that will enable them to interact with their learning materials better and derive more from lectures. In this way, it puts them in a better position to understand English. For example, educators could develop a platform where English is used as the language of instruction while students' home languages are used as the medium of discussion among students. If students managed to translate and understand what is taught in English and discussed it using their home languages, it would enable them to understand the concepts and then associate the concepts with specific English terms. They would be able to transfer their home language skills and knowledge to the task of understanding the content, then transfer the content back into English, a process which involves dealing closely with the material. Thus it is my contention that allowing students to use their home languages in the learning context would help them understand both the content and English better. The systematic use of a translanguaging strategy could minimise the language-related challenges experienced by first-year students, and support their meaningful learning.

6.2.4 Affective development

The analysed data shows that in spite of difficulties, student teachers developed positive attitudes and personal motivation as language learning strategies. They adopted certain strategies to learn English and enjoy its social and educational benefits. For example, Chapter Five records that many students found it challenging to do oral presentations owing to their accents and poor pronunciation. They could hardly recognise new words, which made it difficult for them to communicate. However, by using online dictionaries and reading articles in newspapers, they managed to improve their vocabularies and pronunciation. They adopted appropriate approaches to deal with complex academic English language challenges. The students seemed to understand that English tasks and assignments would continue to advance, and showed a commensurate interest in improving their academic skills in English. This finding corresponds with research by Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009), who argued that students use three forms of motivation: instrumental, integrative and personal. Instrumental motivation is that which is based on one or more purposes that influence a person to take an action towards a set goal. The students' motivation to integrate and proficiently use English l(L2) for academic purposes and to communicate with

lecturers, tutors and other students influenced them to continuously engage in the language learning process. Thus, these students made use of instrumental motivation.

Personal motivation in language learning refers to self-will or the personal interest in achieving something; in this case, in learning English for general use, such as shopping, communication with people outside the university and in the workplace (Sylvén, 2017). I believe that the bilingual student teachers were self-motivated to learn the English language because it is the language of instruction and is associated with a degree of prestige.

The three motivational levels seemed to influence the students' attitudes to learn English as an academic language and the language of socialising. Therefore, the findings of this study correspond with Al-Tamimi and Shuib's (2009) findings in terms of two fundamental instrumental motivations – academic achievement and socialisation. I believe that as prospective professional teachers, the students wanted to learn English language not only for academic purposes but also to be able to teach their own learners effectively through the medium of English.

I established earlier in my study that educator support is an essential element for assisting students to deal with language-related challenges. For example, a bilingual first-year student in this study who had difficulties with comprehending written material made the effort to practise reading using tools such as newspapers, books and articles in order to overcome their reading challenges without pressure and in good time. Discontinuing their studies owing to English related difficulties was 'not an option'. Students need to consider a regular reading schedule of academic literature in English, in addition to asking lecturers and peers for assistance, in order to handle their academic literacy challenges.

6.3 First-year student teachers' identities

One of my research goals was to understand how student teachers perceived themselves in the multilingual learning context. Participants answered various questions on this topic. As indicated in Chapter Five, I asked how students saw themselves when in situations where they had to speak languages different from their home languages. The findings discussed below emerged from the analysed data on the student teachers' self-perceptions.

6.3.1 Sense of belonging and communicative competence

Most students said they preferred to communicate in their home language but were obliged to use English since it is the language of instruction of the institution. Also, they had to interact with others who did not understand their first languages, which forced them to use English for social interaction as well as academic interaction. Based on the analysed data, it seems that a high number of students preferred to use their first languages and believed that if the institution allowed the use of multiple languages, it would be easier to handle some of the academic challenges and identity construction issues they experienced.

In this study, the identity perception of the student teachers at UW corresponds with the findings of Cummins et al.'s (2015) research, in that the multilingual learning context does not necessarily facilitate students' identity construction, since the insistence on English for all academic tasks limits their academic and literacy engagement. As argued by Desai (2012), language plays a significant role in helping students adapt to new people and new surroundings, enabling them to make sense of what is being communicated through spoken or written words. The argument by Desai (2012) is in line with what was indicated by students in the multilingual learning environment of UW. The results show the importance of a common language for communication, but also indicate that those who cannot understand the dominant language tend to be excluded from academic and social communication. Thus, academic collaboration settings such as tutorial classes should consider embracing the use of languages that all students understand well in order to promote language diversity and inclusion for social cohesion.

Students already use their first-language skills to understand their second language better. Transferable skills enable students to paraphrase, summarise, skim and master the learning content. Kassab (2021) claims that undergraduate students find it helpful to use the skills acquired in a first language, not only in the reading and writing tasks of their literature and cultural studies, but also in all other academic courses taught through the medium of English. Another piece of research shows that the performance of English second-language writers and multiple text comprehension is improved as a result of the transferability of writing competence in a setting that allows the use of L1 and L2 (Cheong, Zhu, Li & Wen, 2019).

The results of this study further show that when the participants interacted with those who shared their language, they did not experience difficulties and could easily connect and share views and opinions on personal and educational issues. The findings indicate that students established interactions with those who shared the same language. Similarly, Desai (2012) stressed the importance of the home language in communication. Based on the findings, it can be argued that English is these students' shared language, whether spoken as a first or second language. In this study, English helped the students-teachers to exchange viewpoints on academic materials and personal experiences and beliefs, and this appeared to be helpful not only at the individual level, but also in the area of building a community of practice among themselves. This explain why UW prefers to have its students communicate using English (L2) as a common language.

However, some students displayed basic skills in English, but could not hold a fruitful discussion with peers during group exchanges. According to the literature on basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), an English language learner may communicate smoothly with his peers about lunch, music, video games, and what he did during the weekend, but struggle with his academic lessons such as chemistry (PLB, 2021). This shows that the students' BICS could be misleading, as they do not necessarily show the students' academic proficiency in the language which is needed for meaningful learning.

The findings also show that students enjoyed interacting with others in English when they did not share the same home languages. They considered their interaction a learning experience, even though they had to communicate in basic English because of their low competence in this language.

Nel and Müller (2010) argue that language plays a vital role in helping people establish links with others confidently. The fact that students explained that they were willing to learn from others is an indication that they understood the importance of learning a language. Learning a new language involves the identities of the students, because language is a social practice in which meaning and value are embedded, both of which affect a person's sense of identity. The findings show that even though the participants believed they differed with regard to language identities, they were willing to learn and discover new things with regard to the use of English (L2). It could be said that by acquiring new information from their peers, the student teachers developed a sense of belonging to a community of practice, which is vital for academic and personal advancement. In relation to

this finding, Halimovna (2020) maintains that learning a language is very important in society because it fosters communication and a sense of belonging among individuals.

Nel and Muller (2010) indicates that language proficiency influences students' learning capabilities. In this study, it could be argued that while student teachers regarded English as an academic barrier, it was also the language that enabled a crossing of bridges, since students used it to communicate with each other. They also used it to access learning materials to enrich their knowledge. Students are able to communicate with a large number of people if they speak and understand English (Rao, 2019). While this view is contested owing to objections to the hegemony of English across the globe, recent research shows that immigrants use English to integrate into their host countries, as English is regarded as an international language (Kemende & Nomlomo, 2019). In the context of this study, English plays an important role in the lives of students, as it enhances their oral and written communication (Leo, 2021) and fosters a sense of belonging to an academic community. This is turn, feeds into students' sense of identity in a positive way.

6.3.2 Positive institutional culture and collaborative learning

As discussed in the previous chapters, the student teachers were asked to explain the role played by their sociocultural backgrounds in language learning and teaching. From the findings, language and beliefs seem to have an impact on how student teachers interacted during the teaching and learning process. The student teachers argued that sociocultural factors determined their attitudes, behaviours and values. They perceived every challenge as a learning opportunity and utilised it to learn and help those around them. A high number of them argued that the institutional culture had had a significant impact on their attitudes and behaviours towards teaching and learning. Even though the use of English (L2) as a common language was challenging for those who had low proficiency in it, the institutional culture had created a positive learning and teaching environment where everyone could interact to exchange ideas and perspectives on different matters.

This finding aligns with the view that language serves a crucial social purpose by fostering sentiments of group identity and solidarity through transmitting values, beliefs and practices (Gravelin, Biernat & Bucher, 2019). Sociocultural factors influence one's language in terms of word choices, and they also foster one's ability to express one's identity. In the case of this study,

student teachers developed a group identity through the use English, as indicated in the data presented in Chapter Five.

The students' responses showed that even though they came from different sociocultural backgrounds and had to use English (L2) as the main language of communication and instruction, they had embraced the learning of this language and took every opportunity to learn it for academic purposes. Their different sociocultural and language backgrounds did not limit them, and they interacted with each other to improve their literacy skills in English (L2). Their willingness to learn together is supported by Chung, Noor and Mathew (2020), who view collaborative learning as a means to behaviour change. In this study, it could be said that collaborative learning was one of the factors that influenced the student teachers' academic writing in a positive way through peer support.

Institutional culture has an impact on how we perceive the world and our society, and how we communicate with one another. Being a part of a culture has an impact on how we learn, remember, communicate and act (Kryshtanovych, Bezena, Hoi, Kaminska & Partyko, 2021). Sociocultural background therefore strongly influences learning and teaching approaches. The goal of classroom culture is to create an environment in which students feel safe and free to participate. It is supposed to be a place where everyone feels embraced and included in everything (Fitria, 2018,) but this is not always the case for students of minority languages.

6.4 Student teachers' experiences of academic writing

The findings show that the student teachers were at different competency levels with regard to speaking, reading and writing in English. Students who have high competency levels in English have a better chance of performing well in academic writing than those who are less competent (Agrawal & McNair, 2021). The findings of this study align with this view, as discussed below.

6.4.1 Challenges with English academic writing

The findings of this study show that a small number of students were fluent and did not experience any challenges with writing in English, while the majority struggled with grammar, spelling and sentence construction. However, some among the latter group showed remarkable improvements as a result of tutor and peer support. It is important to note that the majority of those who did not

experience challenges were English home-language speakers. Research by Deane et al. (2008) indicates some of the challenges people experience in writing in English, especially those who have low proficiency in the language; these include writing proficiency, language and literacy skills, document creation, document management skills and critical thinking skills. Deane et al. (2008) argue that for an individual to become an expert in academic writing, they have to solve some complex problems that are not limited to writing proficiency, language and literacy skills.

Most of the students did not know what academic writing was until they joined UW, and found the sudden shift from school-level English to the English required at university extremely challenging. However, as indicated earlier, this challenge affected first-year students who did not speak English as their first language. Those who had used English since childhood had no difficulties with grammar, spelling, or complicated sentence structures in English.

The student teachers developed coping strategies to enhance their knowledge and skills in academic writing. Firstly, it is evident from the data that the online dictionary was useful in supporting students in learning new words. Some also consulted extra-curricular reading materials and practised writing in the form of assignments, which helped them master new knowledge and skills in English (L2) academic literacy. The findings also show that some students made a conscious effort to read newspapers and articles to enhance their knowledge of English, which enabled them to transfer what they learned from reading to their academic writing tasks and assignments.

Also, some associated themselves with those who were fluent in English so that they could learn from them. Some relied on their tutors to improve their competency levels. This practice could be associated with Vysgotsky's notion of scaffolding and the community of practice, which is crucial as a learning support (Van de Pol, Volman & Beishuizen 2010; Armstrong, 2019; Mahan, 2022). Based on these findings, it is apparent that students understood their difficulties with English academic writing, and had devised their own strategies that would enhance their learning of academic writing in English.

6.4.2 Impact of the university language policy

As discussed in Chapter Five, most of the students who participated in the study were bilingual English second-language speakers who spoke either Afrikaans or isiXhosa as home languages. UW is an international institution that caters for multilingual students and lecturers, and its policy recognises English as the main language of instruction, while other languages may be used to support learning and teaching. The university requires students to use English as the language of academic writing regardless of their competency levels. It expects students to have a fundamental understanding of English and to be able to use it for academic purposes. Thus, English is valued as the language of instruction and of academic writing at the institution. While many students had limited proficiency in it, they claimed that using English helped them advance their academic literacy levels. They were determined to learn new skills and knowledge useful for effective learning and teaching. They combined English with their first language in the form of code switching and mixing when dealing with their peers who understood their home language. Interestingly, a high number of students supported the use of English as the language of instruction. This is not surprising, given that English enjoys high status in business and society.

The literature indicates that both native and second-language speakers have to learn English for academic purposes (Mauranen et al, 2010). Although the task may be easier for native speakers, they, too have to learn and develop academic literacy in this language (Mauranen et al., 2010). As shown in the findings, the student teachers had various approaches to deal with English-related challenges. Even though most struggled with academic writing, support was provided to them in the form of tutorial programmes and group discussions. This practice is in line with the view expressed by Curry and Lillis (2002) that academic writing enables students to understand and explain the subject content using the right academic language. It sharpens their reasoning ability and develops their capacity to think critically (Curry and Lillis, 2002), as it is used for learning, assessment and understanding the discipline or subject content.

Considering that UW is a multicultural and multilingual university, the non-recognition of other languages for learning and teaching purposes is a matter of concern, especially considering that the policy is informed by social justice principles. While English is the most recognised language of communication across the globe, it is crucial that the UW policy is inclusive of other languages. The use of these languages should be practical and not only recognised on paper.

Based on the discussion in this section, I have covered enough data to fulfil the aim of the study regarding student teacher experiences with English academic language usage.

In the following section my focus is on students' identity construction in relation to academic writing.

6.5 Identity construction through academic writing

One of the objectives of this study was to investigate how first-year student teachers used academic writing to construct their identities at UW. The first question I asked the participants under this theme was how they used language as English second-language learners for social and academic purposes, and to their advantage.

6.5.1 Language and identity construction

The findings show that most of the students used their home languages to interact with peers inside and outside the classroom. They argued that incorporating both languages helped them transfer skills from their first language into English (L2). The use of the home language helped exchange ideas and knowledge, which were vital for enhancing their academic writing and reading skills in English.

The use of the home language alongside English was part of the construction of a new identity for these students; they no longer identified as members of their home language and culture only, but as members of a new, academia-based community. Their practice of using both languages alongside one another could be understood in relation to the scholarly claim that language has a significant impact on identity construction (Li, 2015; Norton, 2016). Students' new identity construction becomes apparent when students begin to assume and maintain the skills that characterise them as proficient academic writers in English (L2) with regard to new vocabulary and coherence in writing.

Furthermore, most students developed the ability to interact at some level with their peers who spoke English fluently. The students felt the need to advance their English academic writing skills to fit into the new learning context. Thus, there was shift from their home language identity. It can

be said that this shift gave them a sense of belonging, as they communicated through a common language with people from diverse language backgrounds. In this way, language shaped these students' identities, especially as they expressed their opinions through new words and phrases learned in the academic environment (Karam, 2018).

At the same time, language was used to reinforce old identities, since language clearly plays a role in revealing the individual's social status, ethnicity, nationality and gender. People who identify with a certain group usually speak the same dialect or language. In this study, the student teachers tended to socialise more with those who spoke the same language, using their home language in such instances. They used English (L2) in the classroom for academic purposes or to communicate with other students who had a different home language. This implies that the students used English (L2) mainly for academic growth, and to meet the linguistic requirements of the university, as stipulated in the language policy. To some extent, their retained their original linguistic identity.

Research by Bialystok (2005), based on language acquisition models, argues that language and conceptual systems characterise a learner's single mind. The single mind as used in this statement refers to the individuality experience in language learning and use. Bialystok (2005) goes further to explain that adopting two languages in a learning situation helps with learning and enhancing competency levels. This supports the claims by the student teachers that using both languages helped them gain skills in reading and writing in English, despite the challenges they experienced in academic writing. They could communicate their beliefs and values to each other. In using language for this important social function, they were able to bolster feelings of identity and solidarity with those who spoke the same language.

The study findings indicate that most students were bilingual. The ability to use both their home language and English implied the blending of skills and knowledge that students held in each of their two or more languages, which affirmed their sense of identity. According to Sung (2020), bilingualism is a significant factor in shaping one's personality and has an impact on one's perceptions, values and conduct. Bilingualism entails not only the ability to communicate in two languages, but also the development of two distinct personalities which become apparent in any kind of engagement (Sung, 2020). It is an ability that clearly fosters confidence in a multicultural and multilingual society such as South Africa.

6.5.2 Student teachers' beliefs and identity construction

The analysed data indicates that language, beliefs, values and personalities played a vital role in students' academic writing and in their identity construction. Most students claimed that their beliefs, values and characters helped enhance their skills in English academic writing, and they used the same skills to develop their reading capabilities.

The findings indicate that the students' sociocultural backgrounds influenced their beliefs and personalities and their desire to learn English (L2). As people's beliefs and experiences are a significant element of their identities (Bouman, Steg & Kiers, 2018), the findings of this study suggest that student teachers' experiences with academic writing were influenced by their personal identities and values. They displayed positive attitudes towards the challenge of academic writing in English which seems to have led to an improvement in their academic writing.

Krause and Coates (2008) argue that people adopt various identities based on their context. The authors also explain that even though learning institutions have to create enabling learning environments, students have the responsibility to want to learn. This argument corresponds with the students' responses that their beliefs and values played a role in their desire to acquire new knowledge and skills to enhance their abilities in academic writing. This is in line with Hattie and Clarke's (2018) view that individuals are motivated by their values, beliefs and personalities to gain knowledge and skills that may be used in mastering new tasks.

The first-year students' personalities, beliefs and values regarding academic writing success seemed to be based on the high value they placed on higher education. They were determined to understand English and to use it to strengthen their academic writing since this was a means to ultimate success in studies and the acquisition of better livelihoods and lifestyles. Hence they were determined to interact with fluent English speakers and be recognised as part of the university. In this way, English academic writing was a way of negotiating a new identity at the institution. In this regard, Gallucci (2014) states that individuals develop a composite identity through a process of societal conditioning and their own lived experiences. The degree to which people are willing to negotiate second-language identities, or, alternatively, oppose them, is directly determined by

how they perceive their link to the new context, and by how those relationships are built over time and across boundaries. In this study, the student teachers negotiated new identities as they interacted with others and built relationships as a means of support in acquiring better academic literacy skills in English (L2).

The study findings shed light on the relationship between academic writing and identity construction. For instance, when asked to write stories, student teachers based them on their past experiences and the desire to fit in to the new context. I believe academic writing is not a neutral activity that students acquire like any other physical skill, but involves the writers' entire being. In this case, students' experiences, beliefs and values influenced how they wrote, because each written piece reflected their being. This was recorded in their journals, where some students referred to some of their writing being inspired by personal experiences and beliefs. Thus, as they engaged in academic writing, they gained a sense of where they came from and brought this knowledge into the act of writing.

Although the students had to adapt to using English as the language of academic writing, this did not change the experiences, values and beliefs that they brought to the task. Many narrated in their journals how their experiences, beliefs and values affected their English academic writing. Their responses showed that their academic writing was greatly influenced by their home languages, beliefs and knowledge. Through academic writing, they began to understand themselves better, along with their motivation to learn English. Writing in English allowed them to use their beliefs, social and academic knowledge in a way that enabled them to fit in to the new educational and multilingual setting. In this way, they had to negotiate and construct new identities with a diverse group of students.

The analysed data also shows that many students' writing was based on their characters, personalities, religious and social beliefs. These personalities and beliefs were based on the experiences, knowledge and values in which they were socialised. As argued by Salamonson et al. (2010), academic writing is vital as it serves as a means of communication, conveying specific knowledge in various fields. When students write academically, they are required to analyse, show understanding, think critically and use different techniques and styles as required. However, their

ability to write is influenced by their self-efficacy (their ability to use their beliefs and personalities), which has a significant impact on their academic writing.

In addition, students' beliefs and personalities determined their attitudes and behaviours with regard to academic writing. Positive role models in childhood, religious convictions and the strong desire to make something of themselves served as motivators to engage in academic tasks. In addition, their personal beliefs and personalities influenced what they wrote in academic tasks; they clearly brought themselves to certain tasks rather than relying entirely on educational materials. For some, their beliefs and personalities instilled positive behaviours and attitudes that enhanced their academic writing, and they used them to their advantage.

However, the study results show that the student teachers had differing experiences when it came to the inclusion of their personalities and beliefs in their English academic writing. There were also conflicting views concerning the use of home languages and English (L2). One view was that the students' home languages was an added advantage for learning, especially for those who were fluent in English. The second one was that English academic writing hindered the expression of students' beliefs and personalities, especially among those who did not speak English as a home language. These students used their home languages to communicate, both at home and with their university peers and they found English (L2) academic writing cognitively demanding, to the extent that it negatively affected their self-perceptions and esteem.

Norton (2008) argues that language differentiates between people and those around them and in the broader social world. She also claims that language is a form of identity which influences students' attitudes and behaviours (Norton, 2008). The argument by Norton (2008) supports my findings on student personalities and beliefs which, at times, conflicted with academic writing procedures. For example, some students wanted to include their beliefs and personalities in their academic writing but had to follow specific procedures and educational materials, which in some instances, were against their beliefs. While first-language English speakers also had to adjust to the advanced academic English used at the university, the task was far less challenging to them since they had been exposed to the language from early childhood.

Another interesting finding is that the majority of students acknowledged and appreciated the role of their home languages in coping with academic writing in English (L2). In addition, they indicated that their beliefs and personalities influenced how they responded to academic writing difficulties and helped them make the effort to enhance their competency levels in English (L2). These findings show the influence of sociocultural factors, including language, on the students' attitudes and behaviours when facing academic writing challenges.

Clark (2005) argues that students' experiences may influence them in a positive or negative manner when it comes to learning and teaching. This is clearly true, since a student's motivation and perseverance in education is determined by their attitudes, behaviours and beliefs. Based on this finding, it is apparent that most students had positive attitudes towards English academic writing which they used to advance their knowledge and literacy skills for effective learning. UW requires students to be responsible writers with individual voices as part of constructing their identities at the institution, regardless of their diverse linguistic backgrounds. Through the English academic literacy module, students are developed into critical thinkers who are able to apply their literacy writing skills effectively in other subjects across the curriculum and beyond their university studies.

In light of the challenges experienced by the students, the institution endeavours to create an enabling environment where all students are able to interact with each other to exchange ideas and information, which seemed to work with regard to improving their academic writing in English. This finding ties in with the notion of a community of practice (COP), which is important, not only in learning, but also in developing group identities (Li, Grimshaw, Nielsen, Judd, Coyte & Graham, 2009; Mercieca, 2017; Bottoms, Pegg, Adams, Risser & Wu, 2020).

The analysed data also reveals two main factors that influence student teachers' identity construction: cognition and linguistic distance between the students' home languages and English. The students' understanding of who they are (which comes from their cultural background) and who they plan to become (professional teachers) was portrayed in their academic writing. Writers may announce their presence in a written text and will often use the first-person pronoun to portray their identity. With practice, students develop a sense of self-understanding and confidence through academic writing that encourages this approach, because it allows them to gain experience

in expressing their stories succinctly and in relation to academic concepts. This expands their own ideas.

Regarding the factors that influence the student teachers' identity construction, the study findings show that the acquisition of English academic writing skills has an impact on the student teachers' identity construction.

6.5.3 Impact of students' cognition levels on identity construction

Identity and motivation may be powerful and valuable tools for exploring students' sociocultural contexts and for examining language learning and discourse (Tarhan & Balban, 2014). This implies that students have to learn the language of power in order to navigate the education space from the sociocultural, political and economic perspectives. In the context of this study, the student teachers had to be proficient in English, the language of tuition at the institution. In learning the skill of academic writing in English, they had to assume new language identities as second-language learners, and to negotiate new identities in their interaction with their peers. This finding corroborates with research by Salamonson et al. (2010), who state that bilingual students learn a new language after adopting appropriate strategies needed to eradicate language-related challenges, and in learning the new language, they acquire a new identity. However, this does not mean that students should be restricted in using their home languages in class, especially in circumstances where these languages could be the linguistic and cognitive resource needed to help them master academic content. This finding indicates that students construct new identities when they engage in academic writing. It also shows that students' attitudes and motivation to learn academic writing in English contributes to their identity construction as they interact with others from various language backgrounds.

From the responses I received from some students, it is apparent that people's backgrounds shape who they are and what they aspire to become in the future. This is supported by Identity Theory, which claims that a person's identity determines their characteristics and that identity is formed in the culture or surroundings in which a person was born and raised (Stets & Burke, 2000). Understanding identity serves as a basis for assessing the choices made by individuals, and is valuable for understanding the moral, social and intellectual development of students (Gilliver-Brown & Johnson, 2019; Nomlomo, Stofile & Sivasubramaniam, 2018). Thus, identities should

be incorporated in learning because an individual's values, beliefs and attitudes shape their motivation to learn or teach. Thus, identity becomes an important aspect of what people bring to the act of learning and their motivation to achieve.

It appears that the institution does not only help student teachers succeed in academic writing, but also aims to produce critical thinkers. The ability to think critically is enhanced by students' aptitudes to solve complex problems through academic writing and to interact with others for personal and educational growth.

6.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the findings of my study. The findings have shown how first-year students understand and experience academic writing. I have discussed how students construct their identities and the factors that influence their identity construction. The findings have shown that student teachers understand the significance of their personalities and beliefs as a contribution to academic writing, and that their motivation and attitudes influence their academic writing in English. Similarly, their acquisition of English academic writing skills influenced their identities.

The findings also indicate that, despite the many challenges they face, most students have positive experiences of English for personal and educational achievement.

In the following chapter, I provide the conclusion and limitations of my research, and make recommendations on the basis of the findings.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter One, the purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between identity construction and the academic writing of first-year student teachers who were English second-language speakers at UW. The study focused on the impact of English (L2) on students' academic writing for learning and assessment, and how student teachers' identities were reflected in and affected by their academic writing. The study also focused on students' experiences of academic writing in higher education. In an attempt to understand students' language-related challenges, the study made use of four theories: Academic Literacies Theory, Identity Theory, the Theory of Identity Construction and the Theory of Social Constructivism. It also used the concept of translanguaging and the motivation gained by students in using translanguaging in their self-devised learning strategies. The strategies they employed helped the students grasp academic content and motivated them to work past language-related challenges to construct new linguistic identities at UW.

This chapter provides a summary of the study findings, draws conclusions and makes recommendations on the basis of the study findings. The limitations of this study are highlighted. Two sets of recommendations are made: one for practitioners in the field of academic literacy, and one for other academics who aspire to conduct further research to surpass the scope and findings of this research.

7.2 Summary of findings

The section summarises the findings in relation to the study objectives stated in Chapter One of this thesis.

7.2.1 Language-related challenges experienced by first-year student teachers

This finding addresses the first objective of my study. My study revealed that over 63% of first-year student teachers at UW face language-related challenges. Most of these students are first-

language speakers of Afrikaans or isiXhosa and show limited proficiency in academic writing, especially with regard to English vocabulary and grammatical rules.

The findings under this objective indicate that many student teachers struggle with academic writing in English during their first semester as they transition from high school to tertiary education. They have to learn new terms and more complex language structures, and lack confidence when they writing in English (L2). The most common language-related challenges are grammar and vocabulary. The findings also show that the students improve as they adapt to English as the main medium of instruction at UW. They adopt a number of strategies such as making use of peer and tutor support and using dictionaries to deal with their language-related challenges.

Both the students and educators experienced difficulties in comprehending what others said, with many students stating that they were aware that their own accents prevented others from understanding them. Many students, in turn, found the accents of their peers and educators strange and could often not understand what was being communicated to them. Accents were clearly a problem in communication. In addition, many students struggled to understand the English learning materials. The combination of difficulty with accents and non-comprehension of texts meant that many students lacked the confidence to interact with lecturers and peers who were fluent in English. This suggests that the issue of accents can discourage students from participating in discussions, so that accent becomes a double obstacle for them – they lack comprehension of what is being said, and are afraid to participate for fear of being subject to ridicule. Orelus (2021) concurs that accent and pronunciation play an important role in how information is consumed.

The study findings also show that many students could not use English well in academic writing, and struggled with the basic rules of grammar. Although they could speak the language relatively well, they struggled to write in the accepted, conventional academic writing style. Nor could they express themselves well in academic discussions – they had basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) but not cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Based on this finding, it is apparent that students experienced difficulties with English academic writing, especially in the first semester of their studies. The level of English used at the university was more advanced than they were accustomed to, and they were unable to handle their tasks and assignments effectively. Given this, it could be argued that they were unable to establish English language identities easily.

This was not the case for all – those who had a basic level of proficiency found it easier to adapt to academic writing and therefore to adopt the identity of users of academic English.

Without an understanding of the language of instruction, students cannot use it to their advantage. Language is a key factor in learning, since it helps learners acquire the necessary terminology, and hence the concepts underlying the terminology. Without a firm grasp of the language used, students never acquire a full understanding of the fundamental concepts of their chosen discipline.

In other words, those who are fluent in English are in a better position to interact and understand the academic content than those who are second- or third-language speakers of this language. Therefore, it can be concluded that first-year student teachers' low proficiency in English is one of the challenges that influences their academic writing, which is key to learning and achievement across the curriculum.

As students learn, they engage with educators, peers and educational materials to learn things they do not understand and know (Chung, Hwang & Lai, 2019). Over 60% of the students said they used both languages (first and second languages) in classrooms and tutorials, and when interacting with others. The findings show that language was key to helping them acquire new and advanced skills and knowledge. In overcoming their language challenges, students' made use of their home languages to grasp new ideas. In their home language, they interacted freely with those who shared the language. This in turn developed their confidence, enabling them to interact more with English first-language speakers, who inspired them to improve their English for personal and educational growth. English-first language speakers acted as informal tutors and many felt they learned a great deal simply by speaking to them. It appears that peer interaction and support was advantageous to the student teachers, as they showed improvement in academic writing in the second semester of the year.

The student teachers were clearly aware of their academic literacy challenges, and adopted certain strategies, such as translanguaging, to deal with them. They used these strategies to adapt to the styles of teaching and learning used at the institution so that they could remain motivated and open to new experiences. As a result of the strategies they adopted, the majority of first-year student

teachers were motivated to meet the requirements and expectations of English academic writing as university students.

Despite the language-related challenges they faced, most first-year students acknowledged the value of English as the language of instruction at the institution. They regarded the UW language policy as a means of strengthening their low academic writing skills in English, which in turn determined their academic achievement and prepared them for the world of teaching where a high level of English would be required. However, they felt that if the institution allowed them to use their home languages in addition to English, they would be better able to deal with language-related challenges. Use of the home language would enable them to grasp concepts and relate specific concepts to terminology, thus enhancing their grasp of the subjects they were taught and allowing them to engage in a higher level of English academic writing. This is in an indication of the students' awareness of the value of additive bilingualism in learning.

7.2.2 English (L2) academic writing and identity construction

This section describes how student teachers constructed their identity so that they could easily connect with others at UW despite their language-related challenges. From the findings discussed in Chapter Six, it is apparent that language, personalities and beliefs played a big role in the construction of identities among first-year student teachers at UW.

Personality traits and beliefs affect student teachers' propensity to learn, in that a strong sense of identity gave students the self-belief that they could overcome challenges and master their academic content. Most displayed strong personalities and beliefs, which motivated them to work hard, despite the academic challenges they experienced. They adopted positive attitudes that motivated them to overcome challenges, and all aspired to improve their English academic writing.

In addition, from the findings, it is apparent that many students constructed new and enhanced identities owing to improvements in their academic writing. Their high levels of motivation, which can be attributed to the diverse languages they were exposed to, along with their personalities and beliefs, all combined to shape new identities at the university.

Some of the Afrikaans and isiXhosa-speaking students experienced challenges in connecting with others who did not share the same language. Many shared that they struggled with the complex language structure and vocabulary of English, yet enjoyed learning it as the language of learning, knowing that the improvements they made would assist them in their careers as teachers. This willingness to live with the difficulties and to strive to overcome them may be attributed to the hegemony of English as an international language. Some found the language relatively easy, as they had attended English monolingual schools, with unsystematic code switching and mixing.

As discussed in Chapter Two, language plays a vital role in connecting people. When people interact using a common language, there is no barrier to communication; they are free to exchange ideas and learn from each other, and thus to acquire new skills and knowledge which they need to succeed in education. The study findings show that while the students used their home languages to interact with each other, they used English as the common language of communication when interacting with peers who did not use their language. In other words, the students enjoyed using a common language for social interaction or communication. However, students chose to use English as the language of communication at UW as the institution required them to understand English for academic purposes. Also, student teachers had to engage with English academic writing which helped them improve in both written and spoken English. They therefore used their first language and English to construct new identities, regardless of the obstacles they faced.

In view of the above, it appears that the first-year students' identity construction was shaped not only by their beliefs and personalities, but also by their social and cultural backgrounds and past experiences, which enabled them to interact and to deal with academic challenges in a positive way. The student teachers' sociocultural backgrounds created an enabling environment for their academic and personal success.

The findings indicate that some of the positive benefits with regard to identity construction included their conviction that they were responsible for their own success in academic writing. Their confidence and cultural values prompted them to work together in small groups, which kept them motivated to achieve their educational goals. This finding is in line with the Theory of Identity Construction as discussed in Chapter Three, which explains that a person's confidence and character can give them the ability to overcome challenges experienced in learning.

Since language is a key aspect of identity, proficiency in a common language is of significance in teaching and learning as it determines the nature and depth of the identity formed. The study results show that while the student teachers used their home language in and outside the classroom at UW, they also exhibited determination and confidence in mastering English (L2) academic writing to achieve success in their studies. In this way, they maintained their home languages as markers of their identity, while aspiring to be competent users of English (L2) and thus shaping new identities as competent English speakers.

Chang, Chen and Chatham-Carpenter (2016) claim that identity is formed at birth, but sociologists have proved otherwise. It is argued that identity is not unified; instead it adapts in various cultural settings, with culture determining how individuals behave in group settings (Cerulo & Ruane, 2021; Hooper, Mynard, Sampson & Taw, 2019). Identity is related to the way in which persons think about themselves. The Theory of Identity Construction discussed in Chapter Three shows that interpersonal interactions influence how people perceive themselves and who they want to become (Stanko, Dahm, Lahneman & Richter, 2022). The findings of this study are consistent with this view, as the students' identities were shaped by their sociocultural capital in the form of their home languages and beliefs. When they joined UW, they were motivated to learn better English and began to construct new language identities. This construction of new identities appears to have had a significant effect on the learning of the first-year students, who used their home languages as linguistic resources in this process. It appeared that the use of their home languages reinforced their identities and hence their confidence; this in turn gave them the willingness to engage in new learning tasks that involved speaking and writing in English, despite their difficulties.

Effective learning depends on students' openness and motivation. As students construct their identities, they begin to discover themselves in many ways, and to learn new skills and knowledge. This happen through many channels, including self-reflection on what they are doing and why they are doing it. In this process, mindfulness develops; an awareness of the self and the processes that are shaping one's own development. This mindfulness and self-awareness seemed to help the students, making them aware of their progress and giving them the motivation to persist in spite of obstacles.

It seems that UW has created a fairly enabling environment that helped the first-year students develop a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging played a big role in enhancing their language identity construction. The use of English as the language of teaching and learning propelled the students to work hard at it and improve their literacy levels in academic writing. In the process, they constructed new, English language identities, supported by a sense of belonging to the institution.

Therefore, this finding has addressed one of the objectives on how students-teachers constructed their identity at UW.

7.2.3 Implications for initial teacher education (ITE) knowledge

The findings discussed above suggest that student identities play a big role in teacher education. Student teachers should be exposed to different kinds of knowledge, in accordance with the minimum requirements for teacher education qualifications (DHET), namely disciplinary, pedagogical, situational learning, fundamental and practical learning.

Knowledge of any specific discipline is key to an individual's development, and particularly in the case of teachers who have to teach the discipline. Regardless of the teacher's years of teaching, specialised knowledge is important for a successful career in teaching. Student teachers need to have a general understanding of disciplines or subject areas such as sociology, philosophy, economics and the history of education, in addition to literacy and numeracy (DHET, 2015). Many student teachers have to acquire specialised knowledge in certain fields; this study takes the view that a knowledge of academic literacy writing, gained during the first-year undergraduate teacher curriculum, is a valuable and indeed essential addition to their discipline-specific knowledge, since they will have to teach learners to write according to the levels of academic literacy appropriate to their grades.

An important facet of any teacher education programme is the impartation of two forms of pedagogical knowledge, namely, general and specialised content. The general pedagogical knowledge refers to knowledge of the fundamentals of teaching and learning, including principles, practices, teaching and assessment strategies, and familiarity with the curriculum (DHET, 2015).

Specialised content refers to the ability to tailor these fundamentals to the needs of each learner in class so that no child is excluded from learning as a result of varied pedagogical context. It is my point of view that there are opportunities for beginner teachers to improve their acquisition of both forms of pedagogical knowledge as they reflect on their own experiences of initial teacher education. Beginner teachers who promote inclusive education are more likely to create and facilitate learning platforms that facilitate learners' academic success (DHET, 2015). This type of teacher knowledge is closely linked to situational knowledge.

Situational knowledge involves an awareness of many learning scenarios and places of learning apart from classrooms. Hence, situational knowledge involves learning about the various contexts in which learning occurs and helping learners to attain set academic goals no matter what their personal background or situation. It is assumed that student teachers will do well if they make conscientious efforts to understand their learners' learning difficulties when they become qualified teachers. It is important that teachers recognise these learning challenges that vary from learner to learner, and assist them to master content that will assist learners to create and adopt additional identities.

As indicated in this research, a key identity marker is the ability to use English well, so that low proficiency in English hampers identity construction for students aspiring to identify as competent teachers. It is a requirement for graduates of any teacher education programme in South Africa to possess the ability to communicate proficiently in a second official language. Teacher education graduates must also demonstrate knowledge and skills in using information and communication technologies (ICTs), along with their academic literacies (DHET, 2015). I am optimistic that if the student teachers continue on the path of self-determination and resilience in dealing with the challenges of English second language and academic literacy in the Bachelor of Education programme, they will acquire sufficient knowledge to become competent professional teachers. However, student teachers will have to keep abreast of developments in ICT.

The fifth type of knowledge required for ITE is experiential knowledge. In the first one to three years of being a professional teacher, it is expected that challenges will be reduced and teaching will become less daunting as teachers apply the academic knowledge types acquired during their ITE. The results of their diligence application of concepts and skills, along with their experience

in academic writing in English second language, will be shown in the authentic and effective learning space (DHET, 2015).

Based on the findings, it is clear that student teachers understand the influence of personalities and beliefs on learning English, since students made use of their life experiences in achieving their academic goals. This implies that they understand that academic writing is not only used for educational purposes but also teaches students how to respond to life situations, influencing what students aspire to become. Academic writing is therefore essential for students' personal growth. Student teachers develop greater confidence as they discover themselves through numerous tasks that involve English academic writing. Having undertaken these tasks regularly over four years, they are in a better position to support their learners in acquiring academic writing literacy as an important life skill.

Student teachers' identities shape the values that they bring to education and enable them to form fruitful relationships with those around them. Both strong values and good relationships promote successful teaching. The UW community is diverse with regard to culture and language, thus imparting a sense of the value of diversity in the educational setting. In addition, the many languages used highlight the need for a common language, English, thus forcing students to use and improve in written and spoken English. Their mastery of English enhances their self-concept and adds a new strand to their identities. Thus, they use English in the construction and negotiation of new identities in an enabling learning environment. As discussed in Chapter Three, the relationship between learning and teacher identities is not theoretical only but has implications for initial teacher education, which includes disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge.

Evidently, this study has several implications for initial teacher education, one of which is the decolonisation of disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge. Within the context of higher education and specifically in initial teacher education, it is important for policy makers and educational leadership to reach consensus on educational policy with regard to the instructional language(s), and strategies that can motivate English second-language learners in the various ITE programmes in South Africa (Van Dyk, 2019; Boughey & McKenna, 2016; Casale & Posel, 2011). Based on my interactions with the students, I believe that the students' academic performance ought to inform a revision of South African higher education policies. These policies and guidelines have

to meet a pressing need to decolonise the higher education curriculum that is currently not inclusive, student-focused, motivational or meaningful to the majority of students whose languages are not used in teaching and learning. It is not surprising that this study's findings about language challenges in the academic writing of first-year student teachers in UW show no change in relation to research conducted in the past decade (Bharuthram & McKenna, 2012; Canagarajah, 2013; Chokwe, 2013 Pineteh, 2014; Lillis, 2019; Timmis, Mgqwashu, Naidoo, Muhuro, Trahar, Lucas, & De Wet, 2019). It would be advantageous for student teachers to be exposed to teacher training and teacher peer support programmes that made at least some use of their first language.

Further, in consideration of global developments in education in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, there is a need for student teachers and beginner teachers to be exposed to digital learning platforms for effective and efficient pedagogic practices. It is obvious that there is a wide gap in the use of technology in instructional delivery in the educational context (Drijvers, Gitirana, Monaghan, Okumus, Besnier, Pfeiffer, et al., 2019; List, 2019; Bower, DeWitt & Lai, 2020). Hence, digital transformation and training is pertinent for initial teacher education programmes on a global scale. In the case of this study, I observed that before the upsurge of the Covid-19 pandemic, many students had already learned how to use some of the Microsoft Office programmes such as Word, PowerPoint, editing tools, emails, online videos and the use of their student portal. The shift to digital for educational purposes, along with synchronous and asynchronous learning, must be given more attention by educational stakeholders. This innovation could contribute significantly to the learning of academic literacy and writing in terms of digital literacy.

Recently, researchers have drawn attention to the need for an integration of information and communication technology (ICT) tools in the classroom as some pre-service teachers display inadequate technological readiness (Ndlovu, Ramdhany, Spangenberg & Govender, 2020; Bayaga, Bossé, Sevier, Fountain, Williams, Bosire, & Blignaut, 2021).

Based on the findings of this study, the teacher educators do not need tuition in the use of any digital platform to scaffold learning. However, they did not use online English support tools on academic writing on online platforms such as YouTube, webinars and blogs, nor, it appeared, were they encouraged to do so. Although this study did not give attention to any aspect of digital

technology in teaching and learning, there was no mention of how lecturers or tutors used ICT tools to facilitate academic literacy for first-year undergraduate students. In fact, during the practicum periods, student teachers could find opportunities to use online educational resources in teaching students and build on their experiences. It is my belief that if student were encouraged to make use of such tools, they might be inspired to create similar online learning videos and materials to support their English second-language learners in the classroom. This view is supported by Gallucci (2014) and Trouche (2016), who believe that ICT can be used effectively for individual and collaborative learning.

7.3 Study limitations

As in all research, this study was subject to certain limitations in the areas of time, scope, methodology and language group representation.

7.3.1. Limited time and research scope

Since time and budget were limited, this research focused on a small group of first-year student teachers who acted as the target population for my research. As discussed in Chapter Four, 30 participants took part in the study, completing the questionnaires, while 20 were interviewed. These 20 students volunteered to take part in journal writing. The target population used for this study was small, considering that the problem under investigation probably affects a large number of first-year student teachers at UW and beyond. Thus, there is a need for more time and a wider focus to conduct a study of this nature in future.

7.3.2 Methodology limitations

I found it challenging to analyse how different translanguaging strategies used by first-year student teachers helped them cope with language-related difficulties at UW. I gathered minimal data in this area since student teachers argued that factors such as the language policy prevented them from using translanguaging as a strategy to deal with language-related challenges. Also, I did not gather enough data on how students gained knowledge and skills from their fluent peers by emulating their accents and pronunciation to enhance their communication in English, and I would like to have discovered such information. If the study focus were on how particular translanguaging strategies helped first-year bilingual students deal with language-related

challenges, I would have made a point of capturing more data on this issue. However, translanguaging was one of many strategies used by the bilingual students in their oral communication, and was not the focus of this study.

7.3.3 Language representation

Most of the participants in the study came from isiXhosa and Afrikaans language groups, as shown in Chapter Five. Other South African language groups such as isiNdebele, SiSwati and Sesotho were poorly represented in the study. Thus, the research represented only two language groups and some of the challenges and experiences may not be the same as those experienced by other home-language speakers. While this was a limitation, it aligned with the study focus and objectives.

7.4 Recommendations

The study provides two sets of recommendations. The first is directed at UW. The second is directed at academics who aspire to conduct future research on the same topic.

7.4.1 Recommendations for UW

The research indicates that first-year student teachers experienced language-related challenges at the institution, especially during the first semester. It is recommended that the institution implement changes to its language policy to help first-year students more easily adapt to the advanced use of English in its programmes. Specific recommendations are listed below.

7.4.1.1 Review of the language policy

The first recommendation is to review UW's language policy. The findings of this research indicate that there is a huge gap between students who are fluent in English and the bilingual students, who find the English used at the institution complex and often beyond their comprehension. Thus, if the institution reviewed its policy to allow some use of bi- or multilingual teaching pedagogies, it would be easier to include all students and help them connect with their learning material, thus creating an enabling learning environment.

7.4.1.2 Translanguaging as a learning strategy

The second recommendation is to allow translanguaging strategies as a method to cope with language-related challenges. Considering the various challenges experienced by first-year student teachers, allowing the use of their first languages in learning and teaching would help them transfer some skills and knowledge to learn English. It is apparent that most first-year student teachers did not fit in with the English-only policy, and that for them it does not create an enabling learning environment, especially in their first semester. Allowing students to use their home languages in tutorials would help second-language English speakers cope with the challenges they face with regard to access to meaningful learning. I believe that if educators and students interacted in a language they easily understood, it would be possible to eradicate or at least ameliorate language-related challenges, and help students improve low academic literacy levels at UW.

An enabling environment is one that favours not just a particular group of students and teachers, but everyone, in all their diversity. Allowing all students to use both their first and second languages in certain teaching and writing contexts would reduce the obstacles that prevent first-year students from understanding their content and expressing their level of knowledge in assignments. The current learning system favours students and lecturers who are fluent in English, and first-year bilingual students are left behind to deal with complicated English as best they can. It is recommended that the institution devise a policy that allows students to translanguage in certain formal learning contexts, as this would help them acquire important concepts while improving their English.

7.4.1.3 Introducing relevant English modules

The third recommendation is that the university implement more English modules to help first-year students learn the necessary higher level of English. This and other research has shown that English plays a vital role in modern education, since it allows students and teachers to communicate effectively across language backgrounds. For people to understand each other, they must be given time to acquire the complex level of English required at university.

UW has an academic literacy module, EDC 111, which involves community experiences, reading and writing. The module is provided to students across departments in the university to help students learn English and develop academic literacy skills in the English language. From the

findings, this module has helped students advance their English knowledge and skills. Based on my analysis of the findings, such modules would be helpful to all first-year students struggling with language-related challenges. These modules would not only help first-year bilingual students deal with language-related challenges but would help them broaden their world, from opening up job opportunities to enabling them to interact with people from diverse cultures and countries, considering that English is the most used language in the world. English is not only important for achieving academically but for contributing to the socio-economic development of the country, and improving people's quality of life.

Helping students advance their English through academic literacy modules would also prepare them for higher education. Students are in a world where English is continually expanding owing to the influx of new terminology brought on by advances in technology and science. Thus, it is crucial that all students have sufficient knowledge and skills in the English language. Even after attaining degrees, when students enrol for higher studies, English is the common language used, and if students do not have ample skills and knowledge in it, it becomes difficult to advance their education levels.

Currently, most books for students pursuing higher studies such as Masters and Doctorates are published in English, as are many international journals. For all students who want to attain higher studies, a high level of English is a necessity. I believe that the subject is too important to be left to the students' own devices to try to improve on their own while absorbing discipline-specific content – it needs an ongoing focus of its own. If UW increased the number of modules that teach advanced English, it would create a meaningful foundation for students' advancement over the course of their entire university careers. This is not to suggest that other official languages are not important in education. It is crucial that UW considers multilingual education to accommodate other languages that serve as cognitive and linguistic resources in the acquisition of knowledge.

The institution should introduce these modules and assess the success of the students through tasks and exams to discover what they have learned and what could be done to help them eradicate language-related challenges. Some exams could test issues such as pronunciation and vocabulary, others could focus on grammar, academic writing and general communication skills, respectively. Pronunciation and vocabulary, in particular, were raised several times by students as an inhibiting

factor. Thus, considering the significance of English for both academic progress and life after university, it is recommended that the university introduce more modules to help first-year students acquire skills and knowledge in English.

7.4.1.4 Review and the Flexible language policy

The fourth recommendation to the university is to make its language policy flexible. Even though students said that using translanguaging strategies helped them, they were still only allowed to use English language (L2 or L3) in formal settings at the university, including in tutorials. The institution requires its fraternity to have a basic understanding of the English language since students have to connect easily with others regardless of their diversity, and UW is a multilingual university. In order to introduce translanguaging as a strategy, it would be wise to first test the process with a focus group representing the entire institution. Encouraging students to use their first languages together with English when engaging in academic activities would be of great help because translanguaging has proven effective for academic achievement precisely in a multilingual learning context. Translanguaging does not mean that lecturers have to understand the students' first languages; first-year students would use their home language amongst themselves and to find information on the topic under discussion, either using videos or texts and the use of online platform such as WhatsApp groups and Facebook groups

7.4.1.5 Encourage collaborative learning

Another benefit that first-year students could enjoy if the institution allowed them to make greater use of their languages at the university is creating room for better collaboration. If students were allowed to use their first languages in the classroom to discuss learning materials amongst peers who understood the same language, it would boost their confidence, which in turn would increase their ability to co-operate and collaborate. When students work together with their peers and educators, they create an added dimension of learning, facilitating a greater exchange of knowledge and skills. This would help them understand study subjects better than when some students do not engage in learning and teaching owing to language barriers.

Also, I recommend that UW make provision for differentiated English learning modules and tutorials based on students' competency level in the language. As discussed earlier in the paper, specialised tutorials and modules are needed that help students gain advanced skills and knowledge

in the English language, as required in the institution. The institution should consider grouping students based on their competency levels, so each group gets the level of attention and education needed to eradicate their language-related challenges. If students are not grouped based on their competency, they are given the same educational input, which may benefit some but leave others behind with constant struggles in the English language. Having students in groups might help educators concentrate on each group based on the materials they need and the kind of learning and teaching they should receive to deal with their language-related issues.

Also, the faculties could encourage bilingual tutors to take part in tutoring sessions and training modules to help students learn English. The tutors should be bilingual, having both English and either Afrikaans or isiXhosa as the dominant languages of UW. If these tutors interacted with students using their first languages, they may facilitate greater comprehension of content. The tutors could interact with different groups of students based on the language in which they are most competent, be it isiXhosa or Afrikaans. If this were made possible, students would not over-rely on their competent lecturers and peers, as the home language-based modules would give them the skills and knowledge they need to master the subject.

All the recommendations mentioned above are meant to help first-year students in English (L2) academic literacy as they construct their new identities at the institution. It would be advisable for the institution to work on implementing the stated recommendations to change the prevailing situation of struggle and frustration among English second-language speakers, this equipping them on their academic journey.

7.4.2 Recommendations for further research

The study has raised several issues that provide topics for further research. Future research should make use of a large population to gather the views of students from other higher education institutions, language groups and faculties. Language-related issues are not experienced only by first-year students at UW, but by students in other higher education learning institutions. Covering a larger population would create room for wider coverage and the collection of sufficient information to expose various language-related challenges experienced by first-year students, and how they cope with their challenges. A large sample size would yield valuable information on the

nature of the problem in a cluster of higher education institutions, possibly in a single province or across two or more.

Further research is needed in the area of integrating digital technology in initial teacher education in order to help students keep abreast of current global developments in the education sector. Based on the data from this study, it is also important to investigate how information and communication technology (ICT) tools can provide learning support or strategies for English second-language undergraduate students coping with issues of academic literacy and language challenges.

In addition, longitudinal research could be conducted, focusing on how student teachers create and use personal and social identity markers to attain professional teacher identities in an initial teacher education programme Some common identity markers include self, language and culture.

Also, the study recommends further study on the impact of translanguaging as a strategy for enhancing student understanding of discipline-specific content and its effect on the acquisition of English academic writing skills. A question arises as to whether translanguaging helps or hinders the acquisition of skills in academic writing. Also, future studies might focus on the role of educators in translanguaging strategies and what they could do to ensure that these approaches benefit students in the best way possible.

Finally, another aspect that future studies could investigate is the effect of translanguaging as a strategy on speaking and listening, on the one hand, and on reading and writing, on the other. At this stage it is not known which category of learning would benefit most from the strategy, and which might need modifications for maximum impact.

7.5 Conclusion

This study has focused on the experiences of first-year students in a multilingual learning context. The study sought to investigate how first year student teachers constructed and maintained their identities while receiving instructions in English as their second language and engaging in the demanding task of acquiring and applying a university-level competence in English academic writing. The findings have implications not only for teacher education but also for higher education

policies in South Africa. Some of these policies may have to be revisited, and educational curricula and practices will almost certainly have to be decolonised with regard to the languages used in teaching and learning. This is particularly the case in first-year studies. I advocate for flexibility and accommodation of students' first languages and inclusive pedagogies that recognise students' home languages as useful linguistic and learning resources. ITE programmes ought to align with the needs of the communities they serve. This means that the language question must be addressed to ensure that meaningful learning takes place both in higher education and in schools.

The data also revealed that language-related challenges, including academic writing, are ongoing and affect student teachers' identity construction. There is a need to devise strategies that will reduce the centrality of English as the LOLT in the different areas of knowledge that form part of ITE, such as the pedagogical and disciplinary knowledge required for practical learning. I argue that students' academic writing literacy goes beyond the university requirements to their own teaching in schools and functionality in society. For this reason, it is an essential skill to acquire, and its acquisition must be the focus of well-considered strategies that include a dedicated module on the topic for all first-year students.

The study provides insights into the challenges that students face while learning the English language. These challenges include accent and pronunciation issues, and low literacy levels in English. A further insight from the study concerns the construction of identity through academic writing. The data reveals that students' identity construction is affected by two personal dimensions – their self-belief and their long-term goal of becoming teachers – and two social dimensions – assumed identities as university students and English second-language users, and adaptation to the new academic world. The highlight of this finding is that a challenging learning context often promotes student resilience and drive or motivation for better achievement.

The study also shows the significant impact of language on students' identity construction. The fact that personal motivation plays a very large role in language learning and in identity construction is also an insight from this research. One implication of this finding for the teaching of academic writing in higher education is that academic writing has to remain a major part of the assessment of students' knowledge, success and retention. It is geared towards student

participation, engagement, retention and overall academic performance. Academic writing serves as a communication tool that conveys knowledge that has been acquired.

The findings show that identity affects the learning and classroom environment. The professional identity of the teacher is defined by their beliefs and values, along with the commitments they hold as teachers. Personal identity has an important role to play in the construction of professional teacher identity. It can influence the motivation, satisfaction and sense of purpose in their role.

Knowledge contributed by this study to the body of knowledge on higher education includes the importance of language learning and how it affects society at large. Language helps students gain perspective on life and lead successful lives as responsible individuals. It also helps students to develop strong relationships with their teachers and peers. Knowledge contributed by this study concerning construction of identity includes the finding that in the first few semesters of university, students' identities are undergoing rapid changes, and that in this process, students benefit from having a high level of awareness about their developing identities. An understanding of their identity is valuable for their own moral and social development and, for outsiders, serves as a basis for assessing the choices made by the individual. In identity construction, a learning identity lies at the heart of the learning process. Individuals with learning identities portray themselves as learners; they seek and engage in experiences with a learning attitude and believe in their ability to learn.

Also, the study discovered that first-year bilingual students use translanguaging as a strategy to deal with language-related issues, since, whenever they have a chance, they use their local languages to communicate with others who speak the same language. The translanguaging strategy has proven effective in helping them deal with these challenges, and as they progress to higher levels at the university, their challenges reduce. However, it is difficult for them to use their languages in classroom practice since UW's language policy allows only English as the language of communication and instruction. The policy limits them, and they are left to struggle with language-related challenges even though they could use their home languages to grasp concepts and transfer skills and knowledge to help manage course content better. The research finds that there is still a lot that UW could do to change the experiences and perceptions of first-year students

to help them deal with the language-related challenges which currently limit their capability to connect with their peers and educators to construct new identities at the institution.

If the institution worked hard to put into action the recommendations in this research, I believe the perceptions and experiences of first-year students at UW would change. It would become easier for them to learn English, which they use to construct their identities as scholars, which, in turn, affects their motivation and will to succeed. Also, the school should encourage the incorporation of identities, personalities and beliefs in students' academic writing since the incorporation of such elements builds confidence and strengthens students' sense of identity. The research indicates that language plays a vital role in identity construction and therefore, the language-related challenges facing a large number of students at UW should be dealt with for effective teaching and learning. Doing so would promote the benefits of inclusive education, foster the acquisition of ITE knowledge, and ultimately promote the participation and graduation rates of young teachers – and consequently their contribution to the nation's learners.

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APPENDICES

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Faculty of Education, Private Bag X17, Bellville, South Africa

APPENDIX A: INFORMATION SHEET

Title: Investigating First-Year Student Teachers' English (L2) Academic Writing Proficiency and Its Impact on Identity Construction: A Case of a South African University

Overview and Background

Today in South Africa there is a concern about the language of instruction and low literacy levels at all educational levels, including higher education. In higher education, undergraduate students' academic literacy is a major concern. Academic literacy is regarded as the foundation for the students' academic success and a vehicle for their career and life prospects. Many post matriculated students enter higher education without an awareness of the intricacies of the social, linguistics and academic demands of the new space. As a result, they have to negotiate and construct new identities as they try to adjust to the demands of higher education. It is against this background that this research project aims to investigate how first-year student teachers' English (L2) academic writing proficiency impact on their identity construction.

The research objectives are outlined below:

1) To explore first-year student teachers' experience of English (L2) academic writing.
2) To identify and understand the factors that influence student teachers' academic writing in English (L2) and their identity construction.
3) To investigate and analyze how first-year student teachers construct their identity through writing in the Academic Literacy course taught through the medium of English.
4) To determine the implications of the student teachers' academic writing proficiency in English (L2) for their classroom practice as novice teachers in the Senior Phase.

Research Questions

The main research question is:
How does first-year student teachers' academic writing proficiency in English (L2) impact on their identity construction?

The study seeks to address the following research questions:

(i) What are the first-year student teachers' experience of academic writing in English (L2)?

(ii) What factors influence student teachers' academic writing in English (L2) and their identity construction?
(iii) How do first-year student teachers negotiate their identities in the Academic Literacy course taught through the medium of English (L2)?
(iv) What are the implications of the student teachers' academic writing proficiency in English (L2) for initial teacher education knowledge?

Participants, Research Site and Methodology

The participants for this study will be first year student teachers who will be enrolled in 2017 academic year for the Academic Literacy (EDC111) module. Data will be collected in the Faculty of Education at the University of the Western Cape. Qualitative research methodology will best suit this study since the focus is on understanding the perceptions and experiences of student teachers in identity construction and its role in their academic writing.

Ethics Statement

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Should you grant me this permission, you still have the right to withdraw from this exercise at any time and to ask that any information already recorded be deleted and collected written data not to be used. I assure you that your identity will not be revealed in to anyone else except my supervisor. You are free to request a copy of the interview transcription and it will be made available to you. I pledge that your privacy will be respected.

For further details, kindly contact my supervisor whose details are given below.

Student Name: Damilola.I. Joseph

Contact Number: 07393239395

Email: 3371575@myuwc.ac.za

Supervisor's Name: Professor Vuyokazi Nomlomo

Contact Number: 021 – 959 2650/2442

Email: **vnomlomo@uwc.ac.za**

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Faculty of Education, Private Bag X17, Bellville, South Africa

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION LETTER FOR THE REGISTRAR

The Registrar,
University of the Western Cape,
Private Bag X17, Bellville, 7535
South Africa.

Dear Madam

Re: Permission to conduct research at UWC

My name is Damilola Joseph. I am a registered PhD student in the Language Education Department at the above-mentioned University. I am conducting research on how first year student teachers construct their identities through English (L2) academic writing at University of the Western Cape (UWC).

Research Title: Investigating First-Year Student Teachers' English (L2) Academic Writing Proficiency and Its Impact on Identity Construction: A Case of a South African University

The overriding aim of this proposed study is to investigate how first year student teachers at a tertiary institution negotiate and construct their identity and how they use their constructed identities to learn English academic writing during their higher education and professional training. Additionally, this proposed investigation will focus on the experiences and perceptions of first year student teachers on the English academic writing course. The target group will be first year undergraduate student teachers who are registered for the first time at this university.

My research will involve personally administering questionnaires to first year student teachers during their EDC 111 lecture and two face-to-face interview sessions. It will also involve document analysis of academic tasks and participants' journal writing.

The identity of student teachers involved in the study will be kept confidential. Their participation is voluntary and they have the right to withdraw from the research at any time they choose to. The research will not interfere in any way with the functioning of the university or with learning in the classroom. In addition, all participants in the study will remain anonymous. Information received as part of the study will be used for research purposes only. It will not be used in any public platform for any purposes other than to explore and understand the first-year student teachers'

identity construction through academic writing and their perceptions and experiences of the Academic Literacy course offered in English (L2).

I kindly request your permission to proceed with my research at the university.

For further details pertaining to my study, kindly contact my supervisor whose details are given below.

Supervisor's Name: Professor Vuyokazi Nomlomo

Contact Number: 021 – 959 2650/2442

Email: vnomlomo@uwc.ac.za

Yours sincerely

Damilola Ibiwumi Joseph
Student Number: 3371575
Email: 3371575@myuwc.ac.za

University of the Western Cape
Faculty of Education, Private Bag X17, Bellville, South Africa.

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION LETTER FOR THE LECTURER OF EDC 111 MODULE

Dear Dr. ……

My name is Damilola Joseph. I am a registered PhD student in the Language Education Department at the above-mentioned university. I am conducting research on how first year student teachers construct their identities through English (L2) academic writing at University of the Western Cape (UWC).

Research Title: Investigating First-Year Student Teachers' English (L2) Academic Writing Proficiency and Its Impact on Identity Construction: A Case of a South African University

The overriding aim of this proposed study is to investigate how first year student teachers at a tertiary institution negotiate and construct their identity and how they use their constructed identities to learn English academic writing during their higher education and professional training. Additionally, this proposed investigation will focus on the experiences and perceptions of first year student teachers on the English academic writing course. The target group will be first year undergraduate student teachers who are registered for the first time at this university.

My research will involve personally administering questionnaires to first year student teachers during their EDC 111 tutorials and conducting two face-to-face interview sessions. It will also involve document analysis of academic tasks and participants' journal writing. My interviewees will be first year undergraduate students from the Faculty of Education, who are registered for EDC 111 module.

I would like to request your permission to conduct research during the tutorial sessions of your module in the first term. I will use the time allowed during the tutorials to seek students' consent and to personally administer questionnaires to the students and collect the completed forms from them. I will purposively select students from the tutorial groups for an interview and seek their consent to use their written tasks for the purpose of my study.

I assure you that the investigation will not disrupt your tutorial classes. It will be used for data collection in a manner that there is no interference with teaching and learning. All ethical principles such as confidentiality, anonymity, accountability and privacy will be strictly followed. Finally, all data gathered will only be used in the analysis of my research questions and not for any other personal purpose.

Should you agree to assist in this research, please kindly sign the attached consent form.

I hope that my request will be considered.

Yours Sincerely,

Student: Damilola Joseph
Contact Number: 0739323995
Email: 3371575@myuwc.ac.za

Supervisor: Prof. V. Nomlomo
Contact Number: 021 – 959 2650
Email: vnomlomo@uwc.ac.za

University of the Western Cape
Faculty of Education, Private Bag X17, Bellville, South Africa**.**

APPENDIX D: LECTURER'S CONSENT FORM

Please sign the form below. Thank you for your kind assistance.

I have read the information provided above and **DO/DO NOT** (please encircle your choice) give permission for my assigned academic module to be used in this study.

The study was explained to me clearly and I understand that the presence of the researcher will not disrupt or interfere with my students' learning. Participation in this study is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any stage of research. All information will be treated confidentially when writing the thesis in order to protect my identity. I have been promised that my permission to participate in this study will not risk my personal image and that of the university.

Lecturer's signature…….

Date……

University of the Western Cape
Faculty of Education, Private Bag X17, Bellville, South Africa.

APPENDIX E: PERMISSION LETTER TO EDC 111 TUTOR

The EDC111Tutor: …….
Group: ……..…..
Slot: …….

University of the Western Cape
Faculty of Education
Bellville
Cape Town

Dear Sir/Madam

Permission to conduct research in your tutorial group

My name is Damilola Joseph. I am a registered PhD student in the Language Education Department at the above-mentioned university. I am conducting research on how first year student teachers construct their identities through English (L2) academic writing at University of the Western Cape (UWC).

Research Title: Investigating First-Year Student Teachers' English (L2) Academic Writing Proficiency and Its Impact on Identity Construction: A Case of a South African University

The overriding aim of this proposed study is to is to investigate how first-year student teachers' English (L2) academic writing proficiency impact on their identity construction and how they use their constructed identities to learn English academic writing during their higher education and professional training. Additionally, this proposed investigation will focus on the experiences and perceptions of first year student teachers on the English academic writing course. The target group will be first year undergraduate student teachers who are registered for the first time at this university.

My research will involve personally administering questionnaires to first year student teachers during their EDC 111 tutorials and two face-to-face interview sessions. It will also involve document analysis of academic tasks and participants' journal writing. My interviewees will be

first year undergraduate students from the Faculty of Education, who are registered for EDC 111 module.

Dr …… has kindly granted me permission to use the tutorial slots of the EDC111 module to get access to students. I would like to conduct research with your tutorial group in the first semester. I will use the time allowed during the tutorials to seek students' consent and to personally administer questionnaires to the students and collect the completed forms from them. I will purposively select students from the tutorial groups for an interview and seek their consent to use their written tasks for the purpose of my study.

I assure you that the investigation will not disrupt your tutorial classes and will cautiously collect my data, in a manner that there is no interference with teaching and learning. All ethical principles such as confidentiality, anonymity, accountability and privacy will be strictly followed. Finally, all data gathered will only be used in the analysis of my research questions and not for any other personal purpose.
I hope that my request will be consider.

For further information on my research, you can contact my supervisor whose details are provided below:

I hope that you will consider my request.

Yours sincerely

_____

Student: Damilola Joseph
Contact Number: 0739323995
Email: 3371575@myuwc.ac.za

Supervisor: Prof. V. Nomlomo
Contact Number: 021 – 959 2650
Email: vnomlomo@uwc.ac.za

University of the Western Cape
Faculty of Education, Private Bag X17, Bellville, South Africa**.**

APPENDIX F: TUTOR'S CONSENT FORM

Please sign the form below. Thank you for your kind assistance.

I have read the information provided above and **DO/DO NOT** (please encircle your choice) give permission for my tutorial group to be used in this study.

The study was explained to me clearly and I understand that the presence of the researcher will not disrupt or interfere with my students' learning. Participation in this study is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any stage of research. All information will be treated confidentially when writing the thesis in order to protect my identity. I have been promised that my permission to participate in this study will not risk my personal image and that of the university.

Lecturer's signature…….

Date……

University of the Western Cape
Faculty of Education, Private Bag X17, Bellville, South Africa.

APPENDIX G: PERMISSION LETTER TO EDC 111 STUDENTS

Dear EDC111 Student

Re: Permission to participate in my research

My name is Damilola Joseph. I am a registered PhD student in the Language Education Department at the above-mentioned university. I am conducting research on how first year student teachers construct their identities through English (L2) academic writing at University of the Western Cape (UWC).

Research Title: Investigating First-Year Student Teachers' English (L2) Academic Writing Proficiency and Its Impact on Identity Construction: A Case of a South African University

The overriding aim of this proposed study is to is to investigate how first-year student teachers' English (L2) academic writing proficiency impact on their identity construction and how they use their constructed identities to learn English academic writing during their higher education and professional training. Additionally, this proposed investigation will focus on the experiences and perceptions of first year student teachers on the English academic writing course. The target group will be first year undergraduate student teachers who are registered for the first time at this university.

My research will involve personally administering questionnaires to first year student teachers during their EDC 111 tutorials and two face-to-face interview sessions. It will also involve document analysis of academic tasks and participants' journal writing. The interview sessions are particularly meant to get spoken responses of interviewees' view and real-life situations of their identity construction in relation to academic writing. I will triangulate it with the completed questionnaires and document analysis to achieve the goals of this study.

I would like to request you to participate in my research during the first semester of 2017. With your permission, I would like to complete a questionnaire and to look at your written class assignments for EDC111. I would also like you to write your experiences and perceptions of EDC111 on your weekly journal which I will collect at the end of the second term. I will invite you to a face-to-face interview at a time that will be convenient to you.

I assure you that the investigation will not disrupt your academic programme and I will cautiously collect my data in a manner that there is no interference with teaching and learning. All ethical principles such as confidentiality, anonymity, accountability and privacy will be strictly followed.

All the data gathered will only be used in the analysis of my research questions and not for any other personal purpose.

Should you agree to assist in this research, please kindly sign the attached consent form.

For further information on my research, you can contact my supervisor whose details are provided below:

I hope that you will consider my request.

Yours sincerely

_____

Student: Damilola Joseph
Contact Number: 0739323995
Email: 3371575@myuwc.ac.za

Supervisor: Prof. V. Nomlomo
Contact Number: 021 – 959 2650
Email: vnomlomo@uwc.ac.za

University of the Western Cape
Faculty of Education, Private Bag X17, Bellville, South Africa**.**

APPENDIX H: STUDENT'S CONSENT FORM

Please sign the form below. Thank you for your kind assistance.

I have read the information provided above and I **WILL/WILL NOT** (please encircle your choice) participate in the study. I **DO/DO NOT** (please encircle your choice) give permission for my class assignments to be used in this study.

The study was explained to me clearly and I understand that the presence of the researcher will not disrupt or interfere with my learning. Participation in this study is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any stage of research. All information will be treated confidentially when writing the thesis in order to protect my identity. I have been promised that my permission to participate in this study will not risk my personal image and that of the university.

Student Number: …….

Student's signature…….

Tutorial Group: ……

Date ……

University of the Western Cape
Faculty of Education, Private Bag X17, Bellville, South Africa.

APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE

TITLE: Investigating First-Year Student Teachers' English (L2) Academic Writing Proficiency and Its Impact on Identity Construction: A Case of a South African University

Student Number: ……. Tutorial Group Number: …….

Email address ……

SECTION A: Please tick your options.

Demographic / Language Background

1. Gender: Male □ Female □
2. Home/first language: English □ Afrikaans □ Xhosa □ Other_____ (Mention)
3. Second language: English □ Afrikaans □ Xhosa □ Other_____ (Mention)
4. Which of these languages was used to answer questions during matriculation exam? English □ Afrikaans □
5. Which of these languages do you prefer as a medium of instruction? English □ Afrikaans □ Xhosa □
6. Presently, how confident are you in the use of English language for instructional purposes? Below Average of 50% □ average of 50% - 59% □ above 60% - 74% □ 75% & above □
7. Department in Education Faculty: Life Science □ Mathematics & Science □ Language & Literacy □ Psychology □ Comparative Studies □

SECTION B:
Please write in detail your answer to the following questions.

8. Have you been in any multilingual learning situation before? Please explain.
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9. What is your understanding of identity construction in a multilingual learning context?

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9.1. What are the common identities you may construct or develop in a multilingual learning context?

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9.2. Do you believe that the language, social and academic identities can be used by students in a multilingual context? Please explain.

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10. Do you feel that the construction of identities can assist first year English second language student teachers to cope with the problems of English medium of instruction? Please explain.

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11. How can you compare the writing task/ writing for academic purposes in high school and the university?

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12. When did you first become aware of the term 'English academic writing' and what does the term mean to you?

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13. Based on your language and educational backgrounds, would you say that English academic writing is challenging? Give reasons.

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14. Narrate a remarkable experience you had in engaging with English academic writing and the support gained which increased your competency in the use of English for academic writing?

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15. Do you believe that EDC 111 module is the only support you can have to cope with the challenge of English academic writing? Why?

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16. Identify forms of identities that can be constructed when you write for academic purposes and how have these identities supported your English academic writing.

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17. Would you say that your language identity has helped you to cope with the difficulty of English academic writing? Explain.

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University of the Western Cape
Faculty of Education, Private Bag X17, Bellville, South Africa.

APPENDIX J: SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

SECTION A: INFORMATION ON STUDENT-TEACHERS' USE OF LANGUAGE

1. Apart from English language, what other language (s) do you use in most situations?
2. Which of these languages do you consider as your first and second language?
3. Preferably, which one of these languages will you choose for academic learning purposes? Explain your reason(s).
4. What language did you use during high school and for your matriculation exams?
5. Based on your responses and general knowledge of English, are you confident in the use of English language as the medium of instruction for higher education and teacher education?
   - 5.1 If yes, explain how you have excelled in the use of English for academic writing purpose.
   - 5.2 If no, explain how the use of English language has limited your academic writing.
6. Were you aware of the language of instruction at UWC when you registered in this institution?
   - 6.1 If yes, what were your perception(s) of English as a Language of instruction at the university before engaging in any form of instruction at the university?
   - 6.2 If no, when you became aware of English as a Language of instruction, what challenges did you anticipate in coping with learning?

SECTION B: IDENTITY PERCEPTIONS IN MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT

- 7.1 Have you been in any multilingual learning situation before?
- 7.2 What is your understanding of identity in a multilingual context?
- 7.3 What are the common identities you may construct in a multilingual learning context?
- 7.4 Based on your past and current multilingual learning context, how do you view your language, social and academic identities and that of other peer students using English as a Language of instruction?
- 7.5 Given your experience in a multilingual learning context how has any or combination of your language, social or academic identity helped you to cope with the challenge of learning in English second language?
- 7.6 Do you perceive that as a first year student-teacher your forms of identities can support learning in English second language?

SECTION C: STUDENT-TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC WRITING

8. With regard to the language of instruction, can you compare and contrast the writing in high school and the university?
9. Can you discuss your involvement with writing during high school and currently as a first year student-teacher?
10. When did you first become aware of the term 'English academic writing' and how do you understand this term?
11. Based on your linguistic and educational backgrounds, would you say English academic writing is challenging? Give reasons.
12. Relate an outstanding experience you had engaging with English academic writing.
13. Are there benefits or lessons gained that will support your competency and continuity in the use of English for academic writing?
14. Based on your existing knowledge of writing, describe your understanding of English academic writing after your first term academic experiences.