

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE



Challenges and strategies of Academic English Learning:

A Case Study of Somali Students at UWC.

Sumaya Abdulkadir Hassan

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Education at the University of the Western Cape

Supervisor: Prof. Madeyandile Mbelani

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Declaration

I declare that “Challenges and Strategies of Academic English Learning: A Case Study of Somali Students at UWC is my work. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university. All the sources I used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Sumaya Hassan

Date: November 2022



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As I conclude this enriching process, it is with great pleasure and honor that I articulate my indebtedness to my mentors, my well-wishers, my friends and my family, and all that stood by me throughout my years of study and who made this study a truly treasured experience and added to the success of this study:

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I pray that the Almighty Allah will reward them and allow them to continue for many years.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents for their love, endless support, encouragement, and care. My father, Mr Abdulkadir Hassan, who never forgets to ask how my studies are going, and my mother, Hukumo Mohammed, for her continuous support and prayers. Mum and dad, this work is a result of your quiet and unwavering support. Thank you!



Abstract

Low academic English proficiency is a serious educational problem leading to poor performance and wasted years in tertiary institutions among second language students. This study contributes to the field of academic English Proficiency by investigating the degree to which narrative inquiry can reveal the challenges and strategies of acquiring academic English proficiency. Academic English proficiency refers to the ability to know and be able to use general and content-specific English fluently and accurately for academic purposes.

This study investigated the narratives of such considerations found among Somali postgraduate students associated with the University of the Western Cape. This required a qualitative approach where semi-structured interviews were conducted with five students associated with Postgraduate Studies. Data analysis was done using thematic analyses and was rooted in Morrow's epistemological access, Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, and Archer's (1995) notions of structure and agency.

The study found several determinants of the educational migration of Somali postgraduate students to South Africa namely Increased Earning Potential, Career Development, family migration, the global reputation of South African institutions, and that these institutions are English-taught. However, due to the educational state of Somalia, students still faced challenges in all four skills of academic English proficiency even after enrolling in English courses both in Somalia and South Africa. To overcome such challenges Somali postgraduate students employed several strategies namely: Agency, Social environment, and more knowledgeable others (MKOs).

This study adds to the body of research on academic English proficiency and international second language students in Southern Africa. This is because only a few studies exist that look at postgraduate second language students and academic English proficiency. Based on these findings, it anticipated that relevant institutions and policymakers would consider this study's recommendations.

Keywords:

Academic English Proficiency

Postgraduate students

Migration

International students

University of the Western Cape (UWC)

Somali students

Communication competence

Academic writing

Academic reading

MKOs

Student agency

Social environment



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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Migration is widely regarded as a global phenomenon, with more than 250 million people living outside their homeland (Castelli 2018). World migration has long existed; however, the scope, volume, speed, and complexity are unprecedented due to the age of globalization (Liu 2008). South Africa is one such country that continues to witness an influx of immigrants and refugees from various parts of the world since independence, mainly due to its immigration policies and its status as a middle-income country that is seen to be the most developed in Africa. Initially, most immigrants originated from the SADC region; however, there has been a steady increase in immigrants from Central, West, and Eastern Africa in recent years. The main reasons for immigration include political, economic, social, and educational (Kalitanyi & Visser 2010; Gebre et al. 2011).

One of the main factors that attract African immigrants to South Africa is education. This is because South African institutions of higher learning offer internationally recognized academic qualifications, and boast high-quality scientific research institutions and overall good-quality infrastructure. Whereas higher education is relatively underdeveloped in most African countries. Also, most African scholars do not have the privilege of e-learning due to their countries' underdeveloped technology. As a result, the only option in which Africans can obtain specialized education is to migrate to another country for study purposes. For most African international students, South Africa remains the first option. This is because South Africa has easy immigration policies for African students compared to other countries, such as Western countries. It is also more affordable than Western countries and has put in place scholarships and bursaries that also cater to minority immigrant students such as refugees. Moreover, the language of instruction is English, which is spoken in most African Countries (Donaldson & Gatsinzi 2005: 19-22; Kwaramba 2012). However, some students still choose South Africa as their destination for higher education even though they originate from African countries where they had little or no exposure to the English language. This is because English is not spoken as one of the official languages such as the Arab and francophone countries, or in the instance of Somalia, due to the underdevelopment of Higher Education Institutions and the civil unrest.

1.2. Brief Overview of Education in Somalia

In pre-colonial Somalia, the first learning system was an informal system of learning. In this system, the elders taught and trained the young ones. Some of the things they were taught included history, manners, methods of exploiting the environment, responsibilities, military, and fighting skills. This type of learning was a form of non-sedentary nomadic schools. In these schools, the method used was rote learning in which wooden tablets were used. It was directed by religious men who taught students how to read and write and memorize the Quran. This afforded them some kind of familiarity with the Arabic language. Although far from perfect, this type of learning was not imposed from the outside, making it conducive to its recipients' political and socio-economic development. Indigenous education was not unique to Somalia but was an African phenomenon that responded to the locally identified needs of each society. African Education and its progressive development conformed with the successive stages of physical and mental development of the learners, which was through mainly informal means. Hence, pre-colonial African education matched the realities of pre-colonial African society and produced well-rounded personalities to fit into that society (Abdi 1998: 329-39).

As a result, the colonial powers, the British in the northwest and the Italians in the south faced a difficult task in introducing formal education in Somalia. First, the majority of Somali people which is almost 90% of the population at the time lived a nomadic pastoral lifestyle, which severely limited the spread of formal education. Second, anxieties that educated Somali youngsters would be converted arose from the widespread belief that colonial education was spreading Christianity. This produced widespread concern and frequently resulted in conflict. Nevertheless, substantial progress was achieved in constructing education infrastructure in the early to mid-twentieth century, particularly in the years leading up to independence in 1960 (Dawson 1964; Cassanelli & Abdikadir 2007).

Following independence, the Somali government inherited a fragmented and disorganized educational system that was inconsistent, underdeveloped, and influenced by colonial ideology's teachings. The country's south had an Italian education system, while the north had an English school system, with each colonial language serving as the medium of teaching in its territory. It took three years for the newly formed Somali nation to integrate its systems. As a result, three official languages were created, with Arabic joining the two colonial languages (Bennaars et al. 1996). Even though Somali is the mother tongue of Somalis, English, Italian,

and Arabic were named the country's official languages when it gained independence in 1960. Most Somali elites were literate in all or some of these languages at independence, but not in Somali. It should be noted that no script for the Somali language could be agreed upon, either during the colonial era or during the parliamentary years, 1960-1969, due to controversy over technical, religious, and political issues (Laitin et al. 1977).

The civilian regimes did not give the priority required to build strong higher education institutions as was seen in other Eastern African countries such as Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania. After the military takeover led by Siad Barre on October 21, 1969, a significant change in Somalia's higher education potential was implemented. In the euphoria of nationalism, the new military government adopted the Somali language choosing the Latin script as a medium of instruction in schools and encouraging high school admissions. The new government also issued a decree declaring Somali to be the official language of Somalia's political and administrative discourse. As a result, English, Arabic, and Italian were subsequently replaced by Somali in the educational system, albeit to varying degrees. The military regime also carried out a nationwide literacy drive. The introduction of written Somali and the subsequent literacy drive resulted in a significant increase in literacy rates, primary school enrolments, and the number of primary schools (Abdi 1998; Bennaars et al. 1996). Though the military administration made significant progress, the financial stability of higher education institutions remained a burden on the Italian government, the country's previous colonial master.

The introduction of Somali as the official language was seen as a significant step forward in the decolonization process, partly at the expense of Italian, which had previously been the colonial language with the most influence within Somalia (Abdi, 1998; Bennaars et al. 1996). Higher education was the lone exception to the Somalization of the medium of instruction norm. Except for the College of Education in Lafoole, in which the medium of instruction was in English with American backing. Hence, students who went through high school using Somali were compelled to be taught in Italian once they were admitted to the Somali National University, which was funded by the Italian government (Tripodi 1999).

Even though Somalia is one of the few linguistically homogeneous African countries, politicians have long struggled with the language issue. Aside from the lack of development of the Somali language in the early days of the Somali Republic and the dual colonial history (Italian and English), many Somali students moved to different foreign countries for further education, making the choice of a specific language even more difficult. Foreign influence had

always been a factor in Somalia's language policy, with various interest groups campaigning for different languages. For instance, in the early 1960s, the UNESCO Education Planning Group recommended that Somalia use English as its primary language beginning in intermediate school (Abdinoor, 2007).

In 1991 the military junta collapsed, which destroyed all state institutions, including institutions of higher learning. Somalia has been in chronic turmoil since. The brutal fighting rendered all government institutions inoperable, including essential services such as education, even though the private sector restored schools and university studies in the early 1990s. Teachers and instructors were re-established, and curricula and textbooks were transported from various countries and assigned to students. However, no governing body delegated national rules and policies to the education system. Since the central government was restored, it has been unable to govern effectively in many socioeconomic areas of the country, including education. The Ministry of Education has failed to set established standards, and quality assurance policies, provide substantial financial support for education or impose accountability for the country's education instrument (Abdinoor, 2007).

Due to the lack of a state educational authority in post-war Somalia, Somali intellectuals and members of the larger community have stepped in as capable stakeholders. The Somali elite did not succumb entirely to the situation's disillusionment. Instead, they created every strategy to bring together like-minded individuals and groups, both locally and worldwide, to revive the country's higher education system. As a result, post-war Somalia has a considerable number of academic institutions at the tertiary level, mostly privately held universities, compared to the few public higher education institutions of the pre-war era. Even though these community-based academic institutions are making significant contributions to higher education, particularly in the absence of an effective national government, much remains at stake in terms of evaluation and quality assurance, which are critical elements for institutional accreditation and credential acceptance by other educational institutions issuing the same level of certificates (Sinclair, 2002).

Since the breakdown of the state in 1991, both English and Arabic have retained a strong presence in Somali public life. They have grown in popularity in education, the media, and business. This condition of events is linked to the region's and the world's rising geopolitical, economic, and religious realities. It could be argued that the civil war was a blessing in disguise for the private education sector, notably higher education, in that it "transformed the view of

higher education from a public benefit to a traded commodity," attracting more investors to the enterprise (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies 2013, 7).

At present, there is no coherent educational system in Somalia. Planning and implementation are piecemeal, mirroring the wide assortment of schools run by local and international Islamic and Western NGOs or by private individuals on a for-profit basis. Most currently operating schools tend to follow the educational models used in the past, which were adopted from different countries. The two main models are the 4-4-4 system inherited from the post-1960 era and the 6-3-3 system followed in several Arab countries. Both systems add up to twelve years of schooling, compatible with most international schooling systems.

Students may be taught in Arabic, Somali, or English at the elementary school level. The majority of secondary schools employ either Arabic or English as a medium of instruction. There are still heated arguments regarding the benefits and drawbacks of using English or Arabic in schools, notably in areas held by the Islamic Courts Union until recently. The ideas and cultures linked with the two languages exacerbate the disagreements, evoking much of the same emotional responses as the conflict over the Somali script in the 1950s and 1960s.

The availability of textbooks, skilled teachers, secondary-level education options, and access to international universities, on the other hand, is what ultimately decides the language of teaching in any given location. Due to these characteristics and the current circumstances in Somalia, Arabic-medium schools have gained popularity among parents and pupils. According to a survey performed by Novib-Wamy in Mogadishu in 2003, 54 per cent of the parents polled favoured Arabic-medium schools to 38 per cent who selected English-medium schools. Surprisingly, an increasing number of secondary schools employ more than one language. Most primary and secondary schools teach the same courses regardless of the linguistic medium. Islam, mathematics, social sciences, natural sciences, and languages are the core subjects.

Even while the capacity and quality of the current system are considerably less than what a vibrant post-conflict society like Somalia needs, Somalis should take pleasure in their efforts to begin reviving the country's schools today. Unfortunately, since 1990, there has been no systematic research and very minimal reliable data on the country's teaching and learning achievements. Even anecdotal evidence does not disclose what happens in the classroom or how successful the country's primary and secondary school graduates are in society. Yet, despite these flaws, the existing educational system continues to produce thousands of

secondary school graduates (about 20,000 in 2005) who enroll in local and international colleges (Leeson 2007).

Curriculum creation has received sporadic attention, despite requiring skills and resources that many Somali education providers lack. Moreover, many educators have been diverted from the practical responsibilities at hand by lengthy disputes about the legitimacy of designing new curricula for Somalia without a recognized national government. As a result, most schools continue to use a variety of publications, including old Somali-language textbooks from the 1970s and 1980s, as well as imported schoolbooks from Kenya and Arab nations. The textbooks were chosen based on the immediate demand for educational materials rather than any overall policy formed and shared by the Somali community (Samatar, 2001).

The scarcity of qualified teachers in Somalia is a significant hindrance to modern education. Many teachers from before the 1990s have retired, moved out of the country, or changed careers. Untrained people with various degrees of education joined the teaching service to fill the void. Many secondary schools hire engineers and scientists with no formal education to teach math and science, whereas graduates of Islamic schools frequently teach Arabic and Islam. International agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have initiated short-term in-service training programs to address the teacher shortage. While not always well-coordinated, these seminars focus on teaching methods to help teachers deal with the daily issues of classroom management and impart knowledge from the often-inadequate textbooks that are accessible (Samatar 2001).

In response to the increased number of secondary school graduates desiring to continue their education, civil society organizations, international organizations, and local educators initiated a series of higher education initiatives in 1996. Just like the schools, there is currently no network or association to monitor or control the quality of instruction in these newer universities, which do not meet internationally accepted higher education standards. Hence, who should have the authority to develop the basic structure and curriculum for these universities and certify any degrees they issue is a significant concern at the outset (Farah 2009).

Cummings & Van Tonningen (2003) argue the best method to reach the biggest possible audience is to use Somali for teaching and learning in the early primary grades. Basic literacy in Somali is a desired objective for a country with a rich language legacy. Updating and publishing Somali textbooks from the 1970s literacy campaign's heyday can provide a valuable

set of tools for elementary school education. At the same time, many Somali children today begin their education in Quranic schools, where they learn to read and write in Arabic. Primary schooling that combines Somali instruction with ongoing Arabic skill development is a big challenge for both students and instructors. Still, it will provide Somali youngsters with a significant advantage in national and international language arenas.

Also, the early introduction of English will assist Somali students in preparing for higher education, employment with foreign organizations and industries, and engagement with the rest of English-speaking Africa. Moreover, intensive English-language institutes must be established in various parts of the country, with funding from international donors, to train Somali and Arabic-speaking teachers who want to learn English. Though linguistic "retooling" regularly can be time-consuming, it acknowledges Somalia's complex foreign language past. Somalis have long proved their ability to learn multiple languages to pursue their professional ambitions. This ability will provide them with a significant competitive advantage in the emerging global economy (Cassanelli & Abdikadir 2008).

The recent growth of the higher education sector has been considerable. Shortly before the war, Somalia had only one state-owned university located in Mogadishu, enrolling approximately 4000 students (Feyissa et al., 2010). There are now close to 50 higher education institutions (HEIs) of different sizes and capacities functioning across the country and enrolling over 50,000 students. The exponential growth of the higher education sector, especially given the prolonged periods of insecurity experienced in parts of the country, challenges the conventional wisdom that social and economic development ceases in the absence of a central government (Leesen, 2007). The lack of a central government and solid local authorities in Somalia has enabled and encouraged the privatization of the higher education sector. As indicated the consequence is that there is a lack of a regulatory framework to manage the standards of the ever-increasing number of universities across the country.

This has a direct impact on the quality of higher education across Somalia. The lack of regulation by governing bodies and the low capacity of teaching staff has caused the quality of education to suffer considerably. The low capacity of teaching and administrative staff was an alarming rate in 86% of surveyed HEIs. The majority of these institutions of higher learning function without a library, IT facilities, or a science laboratory. There is currently very low research and publication capacity within HEIs. This affects the quality of education, the qualifications students receive, and the competence of graduates entering the public and private sectors in Somalia. From these observations, we can conclude that despite students being

exposed to the English language or Academic English proficiency through textbooks or as a medium of instruction in some of these HEIs, it is not of optimum standards (Kruizenga 2010). This leads us to the following main research question to get a clear picture: what are the narratives of Somali postgraduate students at UWC, where English is the medium of instruction?

1.3 Rationale of Study

My interest in venturing into this study has been motivated by three observations. There is an increasing number of international students from Somalia joining higher education not only in South Africa but worldwide because of the civil unrest in the country (Kritz, 2006). On the one hand, Somali postgrad students struggle with academic writing, communicative competence listening, and writing competence although they were exposed to some English back home (Hsu et al., 2008). On the other hand, even though some of them enrolled in particular courses in English before their postgrad degrees, they continue to struggle with Academic English Proficiency (Sternglass, 2017). Lastly, I am a student at UWC, and as a friend of these students, I have observed their struggles and would like to look into it in-depth.

1.4 Problem Statement

According to Bonin et al., (2017), language proficiency levels reflect the educational attainment levels of students with immigrant backgrounds. Bonin et al. (2007) give an example of European Union member states. In these states, more than a third of the first-generation immigrants report having basic or moderate knowledge of the host country's language only and face unique difficulties employing all of their skills. Andrade states, “Although non-native English speakers submit evidence of English language proficiency for admission purposes, many struggle with the demands of English” (2009: 16). It is clear that having non-native English-speaking students in universities introduces the challenges of assimilating them into the culture of Academic English proficiency - South Africa is an excellent example of this problem.

South Africa is an emerging economy that contributes immensely to regional mobility in the global South, with an influx of immigrants since 1994 and a projection of similar upward patterns in the number of immigrants in 2011–2015. A more recent report by Statistics South Africa stated that it is estimated that the country will receive a net arrival of 1,02 million people between 2016 and 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2018). According to Khan, these patterns of migration with time have become more diverse and complex (2007: 1). Student mobility in

South Africa contributes to the complexity of the ever-changing global and African migratory landscape. South Africa will continue to be a destination of choice in Africa for people seeking economic opportunities and those fleeing war, conflict, and social injustices from their home countries and pursuing higher education. Amongst this group of people are marginalized immigrant youth, who desire and aspire to continue higher education and often migrate under unfavourable conditions. Hence, the vulnerability of migrants is not only limited to shelter and documentation but also to constraints on aspiring to pursue higher education (Magidimisha et al. 2018).

Tertiary education encompasses and plays a vital part in personal and career development. This kind of development, in turn, leads to equal opportunities for employment in the host country. The skills and qualifications gained by migrant youth will ideally contribute to South Africa's economy. In addition, those who return home are positioned as potentially influential members of their communities due to their higher education qualifications. Hence, tertiary education is crucial in building and determining additional opportunities for immigrant youth.

However, accessing it adds to the challenges of navigating their way in South Africa. This is due to the unaffordability and competitive nature of tertiary education in South Africa. For marginalized immigrant youth to access higher education, factors such as documentation, finances, grades, and language skills come into play. These challenges can potentially hinder pursuing higher education among disadvantaged immigrant groups and cause uncertainty about the possibility of realizing any educational aspirations. Despite this glaring reality that disadvantaged immigrant youth encounter the few that overcome these hurdles face the challenge of Academic English Proficiency (Kirk & Gillon, 2009). Hence, the focus of this study which explores the challenges of Academic English Proficiency of Somali postgraduate students at the University of the Western Cape (UWC).

1.5 Research Questions

The primary research question that underpins this study is:

What are the challenges and strategies of Academic English Learning of Somali immigrant students at UWC, where English is the medium of instruction?

1.5.1 Sub Questions

Specifically, this study will respond to the following subsidiary questions:

1. What challenges do Somali postgraduate students at UWC face with Academic English Proficiency?
2. What strategies do Somali postgraduate students at UWC students use to overcome such challenges?

1.7. Aim of the Study

The study's main aim is to investigate and assess the narratives of Somali immigrant students at UWC, where English is the medium of instruction.

1.7.1 Specific Objectives

1. To examine the challenges Somali students face with Academic English Learning
2. To examine the strategies Somali students use to overcome such challenges
3. To examine the effectiveness of such strategies
4. Provide recommendations.

1.8. Significance of the Study

Studies conducted in language education have mainly focused on immigrant students in South African schools. A good example is a fascinating study on French-speaking African immigrants in South Africa. Ngoh & Kajee (2018) explored the immigrant story of a Cameroonian French-speaking community based in Johannesburg with little command of English. The study highlights the pressure of acquiring a new language for integration and interaction with the host communities, most notably for education purposes. Students struggled to cope in schools where English dominates as the language of instruction.

In contrast, their parents struggled with assisting them with schoolwork due to their limited exposure to the English language. The home language of these students is French, or one of many indigenous languages spoken back home. In another study Daniels (2017) focuses on the experiences of Somali immigrant parents in giving educational support to their primary school children based in the Western Cape. The researcher found that the biggest challenge was their lack or limited formal literacy skills in English.

Like their French Cameroonian counterparts, Somalis do not come from an Anglophone country but speak Somali as the official language. In contrast, Arabic is expressed as the second official language and English is the third official language. However, due to the country's state,

the Education sector is not of international standards with no official regulatory bodies. Consequently, there is very little, if any, research on the experiences of Somali postgrad students concerning English language proficiency in South Africa. It is this gap that the study wishes to fill.

1.9 Definition of Key Terms

Academic English Proficiency: Students' ability to use the English language to make and communicate meaning in spoken and written contexts while completing their program of study.

Migration: the movement of people from one location to another due to various factors such as unemployment, technology, the standard of living, etc.

University of the Western Cape: The University of the Western Cape is a public university located in Bellville, a suburb of the City of Cape Town, South Africa.

Second Language Acquisition: Second-language acquisition, sometimes called second-language learning — otherwise referred to as L2 acquisition, is the process in which people learn a second language.

Postgraduate student: anyone who is studying a postgraduate course, including a Master's course, an MPhil, and a PhD, that requires an undergraduate degree as part of the entry requirements.



1.10 Chapter Outline

This research comprises of five chapters. Chapter one provides a brief overview of the research thesis. It offers a background of the thesis, a statement of the problem, and the research questions that guide the study. It highlights the study's objective, and significance of the study and defines the key terms used in the study. The chapter ends with an outline of the structure of the study. Chapter two presents the literature review and explores the theoretical frameworks which frame the study. The frameworks used in this chapter serve as lenses through which the narratives and experiences of migrant students who study using a second language might be viewed and understood. Chapter three describes the research design and methodology. It gives an account of the methodological approach and tools used to collect data. It also addresses the ethical considerations of the study. Chapter four documents and analyses the collected data. Chapter five concludes the findings and presents several recommendations.

Chapter 2 Literature Review And Theoretical Framework

2.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. The first part reviews the literature on language proficiency. The second section documents the theoretical framework, which focuses on Morrow's Epistemological access, Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory, and Archer's agency and structure.

2.2. English Language Proficiency

Language is a crucial aspect of communication, knowledge transfer, social cohesion, and even social transformation. However, in South Africa, the use of language in higher education is unequal and skewed towards English and Afrikaans. This has resulted in a high dropout rate, especially among historically marginalized and disadvantaged groups. These students often face linguistic challenges in their tertiary education journey (Dalvit 2010; Dlodlo 1999).

African indigenous languages are marginalized, despite the post-apartheid language policy that recognizes and values their use in higher education. This inequality has a significant impact on the success of students in tertiary education, particularly those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds or are migrants. Besides linguistic challenges, other factors such as social-economic status and prior schooling can also influence student success in higher education (Heugh 2000; Kapp & Bangeni 2009, 2011)

Studies have shown that the use of a student's language as a medium of instruction can greatly enhance their cognitive abilities and overall success in higher education. This has been proven through both local and international research studies (Cummins 1981, 2000; Madiba 2010, 2013; Wolff 2002). It is imperative that the use of language in higher education be equitable and inclusive, to ensure the success and retention of all students.

2.3 Academic English Proficiency

Existing studies have revealed several factors that contribute to students' academic success in tertiary education. These include academic, cognitive, psychosocial, and demographic factors equally affecting domestic and international students (Li et al., 2010; Schmitt et al., 2009). However, there are other factors unique to international students' academic success in tertiary education. With the global increase of international students at the tertiary level, the focus in research has turned to international students' academic achievement. Determinants of international students' performance have attracted the attention of academic researchers from

many areas. They have tried to determine which variables impact international students' performance positively and negatively (Andrade, 2006). One such determinant that has received the attention of numerous researchers is the empirical findings that indicate the crucial role of Academic English proficiency for international students to complete their studies in English-medium institutions, especially for those students whose first language is not English (Martirosyan et al. 2015: 61).

Language has been proven to be one of the most critical factors in students' academic performance, particularly the relationship between academic success and Academic English proficiency in countries where English is the medium of instruction (Tajmirriahi & Rezvani, 2021). This is because the poor performance of students in the English language at public examinations has been explained as a significant cause for the decline in academic achievement and standard of education (Wilson & Komba, 2012.). In addition, students face difficulties in grasping the contents and concepts of the various subjects of the curriculum entirely. This factor is vital to institutions of higher learning, the international education community, and students. This is because international students contribute to the development and financial resources of host countries (Addow et al. 2013).

International students with limited English proficiency cannot perform everyday academic work in English. Low language proficiency becomes a barrier to learning and academic success at the higher education level. Higher education requires students to seek admission to obtain a score on English language proficiency tests to indicate that they can academically succeed. Although non-native English speakers submit evidence of English language proficiency for admission purposes, many still struggle with the demands of English (Ogunsiji 2009; Maleki & Zangani, 2007; Andrade, 2009).

Kumar and Lal (2014) and Ghenghesh (2015) give examples of numerous studies that have been conducted to show the correlation between academic performance and language. One such example is a study conducted at the secondary level, which showed a connection between these two variables. Another example Kumar and Lal as well as Ghenghesh report is a research conducted in an Iranian university that shows the correlation between academic achievement and language proficiency. It was asserted that their inability to handle and communicate in English impacted their academic success. Yet another study conducted in Nigeria revealed the interdependence of academic success and the level of proficiency in the English language (Ozowuba, 2018). These authors also account for how English language proficiency is a predictive factor for future academic success.

Similarly, Addow et al., (2013) conducted a study among Hispanic students in the United States in which they found a positive relationship between English language proficiency and academic achievement. Yet in another study, Shalaby, (2018) found that in Egypt, where literary Arabic is the official language and Egyptian Arabic is the vernacular, there was a significant but moderate positive relationship between the student's proficiency in English and their overall academic success at the British Universities in Egypt. Based on this evidence, English language proficiency significantly impacts a student's overall academic achievement. In summary, English proficiency is a determinant of academic success for students.

Academic Language proficiency is the ability to perform and speak in an acquired language to the extent that learners can understand and share ideas, information, and concepts necessary for academic success. In addition, academic Language proficiency is the overall ability of an individual to use language appropriately and accurately in its oral and written forms in various settings (Cloud, Genesee, and Hamayan, 2000). Academic success is when a student, teacher, or institution has achieved their educational goals. Academic achievement results from academic work undertaken by a student and is defined as the ability to display through speaking or writing what one has learned in the classroom. While a proficiency test is organized into listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills (Wilson & Komba 2012).

The four domains are interrelated and can develop at different rates and independently of one another. Hence the proficiency of academic English proficiency may differ across the four basic language skills (Hakuta et al., 2000). For example, a student acquiring academic English proficiency may be able to read but not speak at all. While another student could be a stronger writer, others could have more vital speaking and listening skills (Sawir, 2005). In understanding the challenges faced by Somali postgraduate students, it is essential to document their proficiency levels in each domain. Identifying the different demands of each language domain assists in exploring the language struggles that Somali students face at UWC.

2.4 Academic Writing Competence.

Academic writing is conducting research, composing, editing, writing drafts, and producing a final draft. This skill can only be acquired formally through schools or transmitted culturally as an asset of practices (Omaggio 1993; Banda 2003; Zbeida 2020). Numerous researchers, such as Johns 1997; Jordan 1997; Leki & Carson 1997; Prior, 1998) argue that although non-native speaking postgraduate students have been exposed to the English language

in several courses, they still lack Academic English Writing proficiency. This is seen in their struggle to master the correct features of academic writing prose. These scholars further mention that even advanced students exhibit some academic writing errors. As a result, 100 per cent accuracy is almost impossible.

The central aspect of any written text is the application of accurate grammatical rules (James 1998). The unintentionally deviant language occurrence is an error (Corder, 1971). Also, the inability to utilize an available system correctly and the failure to self-correct are referred to as errors (James 1998). Hence, the deviation from grammatical rules and the excellent formedness of written language are classified as errors (De Beaugrande & Dressler 1981). Errors take place in instances where non-linguistic factors come into play. As a result, the approval of a sentence is dependent on the use of the sentence in the correct context and on the proper use of grammatical structure (Lyons 1977; Brown 1994).

Students require additional instruction and relevant input from instructors to get to a point where they can self-correct errors (Krashen & Seliger 1975; Hendrickson 1978). Hence, most instructors focus on correcting errors and maintain that it is an essential part of fixing the problem since students will avoid repeating the errors. They further argue that writing competence can be achieved when rules are taught in formal instruction and errors are corrected. While other instructors maintain that the correction of errors is ineffective in changing language behaviours. This is because writing the correct answers can discourage and the overuse of red ink can affect the student's attitude negatively and discourage them. While in some instances, such corrections are not precise and cause further confusion to the students. Also, students are more likely to put away their written works and hope for fewer comments and red ink on their texts (Hyland 1990; James, 1998; Tshotsho 2006). It is for such reasons that Van der Walt (1994), Hendrickson (1980) and Merino (1989) argue that corrections of grammatical errors should be moderated and that every error should not be corrected. This gives the student a chance to appraise their performance which gives way to grammatical competence. Fanselow (1977) further explains that corrections should be appropriately located and written down explicitly in written form.

Although scholars disagree on when errors should be corrected and when not, they agree on the tolerance of some errors at different stages of Academic writing competence, especially if they do not interfere with cohesion and coherence (Chaudron, 1977; Hendrickson, 1978). Leki and Carson (1997) further argue that grammatical rules and correct linguistic tools should be provided to students. This will help students, judge, self-evaluate and appraise their writing and edit errors.

2.5 Communicative Competence

Tarvin (2014) defines communicative competence (CC) as the ability to communicate or use language in a culturally-appropriate way to accomplish social tasks and make meaning with fluency and efficacy through extended interactions. Chomsky (1965: 4) distinguishes communicative competence between the actual use of language in concrete situations (performance) and the speaker-hearer's language knowledge. Chomsky further states that deviation from the standard in actual performance does not reflect competence. Hence errors in production that affect performance result from several elements that include competence.

On the other hand, Hymes (1972: 280) argues that Chomsky, in his definition, does not include almost everything of socio-cultural significance with the claim that knowing how to form grammatically correct sentences is insufficient to have CC. Hymes takes Chomsky's theory further and argues that four lenses are necessary for CC to be achieved. That is first, a possibility that refers to whether an expression is grammatically possible (Lipan, 2018). Second, feasibility refers to whether the conversers can use the expression and are not limited by psycholinguistic elements such as the inability to process multiple nested clauses or memory limitations (Royce, 2007). For example, even if a locution is grammatically possible, it could be so complex or lengthy that speakers lack the capability of processing the language. Third, appropriateness refers to whether the expression meets the cultural expectations for the desired interaction in that context (Shumin, 2002). While an expression can be grammatically possible and feasible, it can either be appropriate to the local setting such that the intent of the speaker-writer is taken up, as intended, by the listener-reader, or there can be cultural miscues that prevent the message from being understood as intended. Lastly, Occurrence refers to whether the expression is made or not because the expression could be possible, feasible, and appropriate and not occur (Hymes 1972: 286). Hence communication will not happen if the speaker is too timid to speak the statement or is interrupted by another action.

Canale and Swain (1980) mirror Hymes' (1972) claim that grammar rules are incomplete without rules of use and define CC as the interaction and relationship between sociolinguistic competence and grammatical competence. Canale and Swain (1980) further argue that sociolinguistics and grammar features must be included in second language coursework and

assessed and that coursework must not be grammar centred. Similarly, Savignon (2002) agrees with Hymes (1972), Canale, and Swain(1980) and focuses on language as social behaviour and not language learning. Savignon suggests that CC is the ability of language learners to interact with other speakers, perform discrete-point tests of grammatical knowledge and make meaning. In other words, acquiring a second language requires the student to perform in authentic settings and not just have the ability to memorize chunks of language for artificial, planned experiences. Evelin, (2020) further mentions that to achieve CC, students must be able to use language in ways that are efficient in completing their desired tasks in a facile, unconscious manner. While Hall and Pekarek (2011) state that for CC to be achieved, students must have the skills and ability to decode and encode messages with appropriate sociocultural intent. Hence instructors must understand these components for students to fully demonstrate CC.

2.6 Listening Competence

Batova (2013) argues that the most widely used language skill in second language acquisition is Listening. Scholars such as Lynch (1998), Guariento and Morley (2001), and Rost (2006) maintain that acquiring listening competence is a complex process that involves several sources such as lexical, phonological, phonetic, semantic, and prosodic, which enable listeners to interpret spoken messages and to understand in real-time. As a result, students transition from listening as a passive skill unworthy of attention over time to listening as an independent skill important in Academic English proficiency (Mendelsohn 1998; Guariento and Morley 2001; Vandergrift 2008).

Rubin (1982) states that students who speak English as a second language struggle to listen well enough to understand the material presented in class, identify the main ideas in a class, or give directions for assignments. These students further have difficulties presenting clear, concise reports, summaries, or messages in class using language, grammar, and pronunciation appropriately. They also have difficulties organising their ideas for other students to grasp what they are conveying. Such students also struggle with answering questions effectively or asking questions to obtain information. Moreover, such students have difficulties performing the basic social rituals of requesting appointments expressing their feelings on issues, and introducing themselves to others or concluding conversations. Tafaghodtari & Vandergrift (2010) maintain that appropriate scaffolding is required to promote and improve the listening process of students.

2.7 Reading Competence

Pardede (2008) argues that reading is possibly the most intensively and extensively studied language skill by experts in language teaching. Madhumathi and Ghosh (2017:9561) state that reading competence is a multifaceted process that requires motivation, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency. To acquire reading competence, students should be able to process, interpret, and evaluate written words and symbols and other visual cues used in texts to convey meaning. Reading for postgraduate students is much more comprehensive, and scholarly and requires deeper analysis and understanding of the coursework. As a result, postgraduate students who speak English as a second language must be able to read, interpret, and process printed material of varying levels of complexity to achieve academic success.

Students learning English as a second language tend to perform at a higher level in reading than the other three skills. For instance, some students can accurately understand written materials that they could not write with equivalent accuracy or thoroughness or discussorally. This is because the skill of reading necessitates very minimum requirements compared to writing which needs a lot of time to practice and guidance, or speaking, which requires opportunities to interact with sparring partners; reading requires only a text and motivation. The main theories that explain reading acquisition include the bottom-up processing or the traditional approach, the cognitive view theory, the top-down processing, and the metacognitive view (Pardede 2008: 2).

The traditional theory focuses on printed text (Pardede 2008). According to Omaggio (1993: 45-6), this theory was inspired in the 1950s by behaviourist psychology which claimed that learning was based upon “habit formation, brought about by the repeated association of a stimulus with a response” and language learning was characterized as a “response system that humans acquire through automatic conditioning processes,” where “some patterns of language are reinforced (rewarded), and others are not,” and “only those patterns reinforced by the community of language users will persist”. Behaviourism became the basis of the audio-lingual method, which sought to form second language “habits” through drilling, repetition, and error correction.

This theory influenced textbooks for students learning to read English as a second language. As a result, the student's experience or knowledge of the subject matter was given little or no importance. Instead, exercises that focus on literal comprehension were given preference. Most activities were based on recalling and recognizing grammatical and lexical forms, emphasizing decoding and perceptual dimension. At the same time, others argue that knowledge of linguistic features is also necessary for comprehension. However, due to the overreliance on the formal elements of the language, such as words and structure, this model of reading has been dubbed insufficient and has always been under attack. As a result, the cognitive view was introduced to counteract the traditional reading view.

This paradigm shift occurred in the 1960s in the cognitive sciences. The cognitive theory discredited behaviourism. It argued that the mind has an innate learning capacity, drawing from how humans acquired their first language. As a result, this theory significantly impacted ESL/EFL since internal representations of the new language being acquired develop within the learner's mind (Omaggio 1993: 57). With this argument, the cognitive view prioritised the role of background knowledge on top of what appeared on the printed page.

According to Omaggio (1993: 58), there is an essential distinction between rote learning and meaningful learning. For example, rote learning focuses on the rules of a new language or the memorization of lists of isolated words, in which the information is subject to loss or becomes temporary. Hence learning that is not meaningful does not become permanent. On the other hand, meaningful learning occurs when the new information is related to what the learner already knows and is introduced in a relevant context. This will then easily integrate into the student's existing cognitive structure. With the emphasis on meaning, the approach to acquiring a new language focused more on the experience and knowledge of the learner. As a result, the 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of new teaching methods that informed the top-down approach.

Another theory that is similar to the cognitive theory is the schema theory. This theory argues that the learner's background knowledge interacts with the reading task. It shows how the learner's previous experience with the world and understanding is vital to deciphering a text (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Ajideh, 2003). Therefore, background knowledge or schemata plays a fundamental role in one's trial to comprehend a text (Omaggio 1993). The Schema theory divides background knowledge/schemata into formal and content; the latter focuses on the structure and genre, and the former looks at the subject matter of a text. For example, in the formal schemata, a reading text could be a scientific essay, a letter to the editor, or a fictional work, offering the reader an idea of the text (Bilokcuoğlu, 2014).

For example, suppose the reader has the background knowledge that a research paper begins with an 'Introduction' and ends with a 'Conclusion'. In that case, this background knowledge will boost the reader's comprehension and interaction with the article. On the hand, if the reader does not possess this schema, once taught, the learner's reading ability improves with lasting and beneficial effects (Smith 1994).

2.8 Theoretical Framework

My study is rooted in three theoretical frameworks: Morrow's epistemological access, Vygotsky's (1978), sociocultural theory, and Margaret Archer's (1995) agency and structure notion. In this section, I show why these theoretical frameworks are appropriate for this study by first dealing with Morrow's epistemological access, followed by the sociocultural theory, and finally discuss the notion of structure and agency.

2.8.1 Morrow's epistemological access

This sub-section provides a critical analysis of the idea of epistemological access to determine how the concept can be defined within the confines of this thesis. Morrow (2009: iv), a South African researcher who was influential in educational reform, created the word initially. Morrow coined the concept of "epistemological access" while grappling with real issues of higher education policy and practice. He coined the term in a 1992 article titled 'Teaching large classes in higher education, in which he describes two dimensions of access to higher education: institutional access (formal access) and access to the knowledge distributed by the institution (epistemological access), offering a clear distinction between formal access and epistemological access.

Morrow (2009:78) contends that epistemological access is neither a product that can be purchased or sold, given to someone, or stolen nor is it a type of natural growth, such as a plant or body growth. Epistemological access cannot be "provided," "given," or "done" to the learner; nor can it be "automatically" transferred to those who pay their tuition, or even to those who collect handouts and frequently attend classes. This is because epistemological access entails understanding how to be a successful participant in academic practice.

Morrow (2009:78) acknowledges that learners come from a variety of backgrounds and that possessing some things can help one's epistemological access, but it does not guarantee it.

Morrow (2009:78) simply states that “just as no one else can do my running for me, no one else can do my studying for me.”

Morrow was adamant about the individual student's participation, stressing that these are characteristics that can help but do not ensure epistemic access. He does, however, propose that systematic learning is a necessary path forward, noting that “teaching is the practice of organizing systematic learning,” and that ‘teaching is the practice of designing learning programs that foster the gradual development of competencies that cannot be learned in an instant’ (Morrow 2007:15; Du Plooy and Zilindile, 2014).

2.8.2 Socio-cultural theory

According to Vygotsky (1978), knowledge formation is both a social and cognitive process. According to him, the social process of individual knowledge development is centred on the community. Thus, social settings shape how people acquire information and derive meaning from their knowledge. Individuals' social interactions with their communities are mediated through psychological symbols such as language, numbers, arts, and technical equipment such as books and calculators. Vygotsky emphasizes language as one of the social interaction mediations among these symbols. Though there are various types of language, such as symbols, gestures, or motions, the most prevalent type of language, verbal language, is generally employed among study participants because it can make sense of complex and abstract concepts. As a result, Vygotsky regards language as the most crucial tool for gaining access to this social information.

In addition to the previous concept, Vygotsky also believes that learning includes a cognitive process, meaning that learning will be effective only if an interactive process of interaction such as discussion, negotiation, and sharing occurs. Further, he asserts the cognitive process of an individual is influenced by cultural and social factors. In this case, Vygotsky mentions that the first cultural development of people on the social level is called inter-psychological, and the second one lies on the individual or personal level called intra- psychological (Vygotsky, 1978).

This research is centred within the theoretical framework of the Sociocultural perspectives of Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky argued that social interaction plays a significant role in supporting language learning. Vygotsky proposed a sociocultural theory of human learning in which he argues that learning is a social process and originates from human intelligence in a culture or society. His main argument in this theoretical framework is that social interaction plays a

central role in the development of cognition, with the belief that learning occurs on two levels. The first stage is achieved through interaction with others; then, the individual integrates it into their mental structure. In other words, every function in a learner's societal development appears twice; at the social level, between people (*interpsychological*), and at the individual level, inside the learner (*intrapsychological*). This applies equally to logical memory, voluntary attention, and the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as relationships between individuals (Vygotsky, 1978: 57).

On this basis, it's clear that society plays a significant role in language acquisition and teaching since students gain the required language skills through interaction with the teacher and more-skilled peers. In this study, it is hypothesized that Vygotsky's framework will help analyze the success of Somali students in acquiring academic proficiency. It will also document how educators provide Somali students with appropriate learning experiences and support them to realize their potential development.

2.8.3 Social constructivism

Vygotsky introduced the idea of social constructivism in 1978, and there has been a surge of interest in this theory and its implications for classroom education and knowledge acquisition in recent years (John-Steiner and Mahn, 1996:191). Vygotsky's social constructivism theory has three fundamental elements: the zone of proximal development (ZPD), the more knowledgeable other (MKO), and scaffolding, which is often connected with Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (Mahan, 2022). Each of these are discussed individually.

Vygotsky's ZPD is closely associated with the psychology of children's learning and development. The ZPD is defined by Vygotsky (1978:86) as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent issue solving and the level of potential development as determined by problem-solving under adult instruction or in partnership with a more capable peer." In other words, the ZPD is the gap between what a learner can achieve on his or her own and what he or she can only do with the help of an adult or a more proficient peer. The ZPD distinguishes two stages of development: real development and the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978:85). While real development refers to a child's already matured mental functions, the ZPD refers to those that are still evolving. In other words, actual development refers to a child's mental functions that are already active, whereas the ZPD is concerned with mental development functions that are not yet active. According to this viewpoint, actual development is backwards looking, whereas the ZPD is forward-looking.

The ZPD assesses a child's realized mental capacity as well as her unrealized intellectual potential. Thus, Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that determining a child's overall mental progress requires determining both his/her real development and ZPD.

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The MKO collaborates with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is a gap analysis in which the learning facilitator determines the learner's ability to accomplish a task independently and when the learner will receive MKO assistance and guidance to finish a task. According to Vygotsky, learning occurs in the area between independence and the need for supervision, known as the ZPD.

Consider an inner circle representing what a learner already knows and an outside most circle representing what the learner does not know as a graphic for the ZPD. The centre circle reflects what the student is capable of accomplishing or discovering on their own. Learning takes place in the inner circle, the gap between independence and full support. Within this zone, the learner is most receptive to MKO instruction and coaching. The MKO should guide while allowing the learner to build their skills. Fostering independence will assist the learner to attain higher mental functions faster.

However, the learning process must be fostered and directed. This is accomplished by delegating the role of an MKO. The MKO, according to Dahm and De Angelis (2018), is someone who has a superior understanding or a higher competence level than the learner, especially about a certain task, concept, or process. The MKO is traditionally a learner's teacher or an older adult. This is not always the case. Individuals who are more informed or experienced than the learners may be peers or youngsters considerably younger than the learners. The scaffolding model of instruction is built on the Zone of Proximal Development and the More Knowledgeable Other.

Scaffolding is a key concept linked with Vygotsky's social theory of learning, particularly in the setting of interaction between a less knowledgeable and a more knowledgeable other. Learning activities, according to Vygotsky, must be pitched at the proper ZPD level to ensure that the child's ZPD becomes her real development. As a result, his perspective on scaffolding is that "learning should be aligned in some way with the child's developmental stage" (Vygotsky 1978:85). Scaffolding, in other terms, is the process of tailoring the intensity or complexity of a work to the child's degree of intellectual aptitude. Thus, scaffolding is defined as "how an expert can aid the learner's transition."

The diagram below paints a better picture.

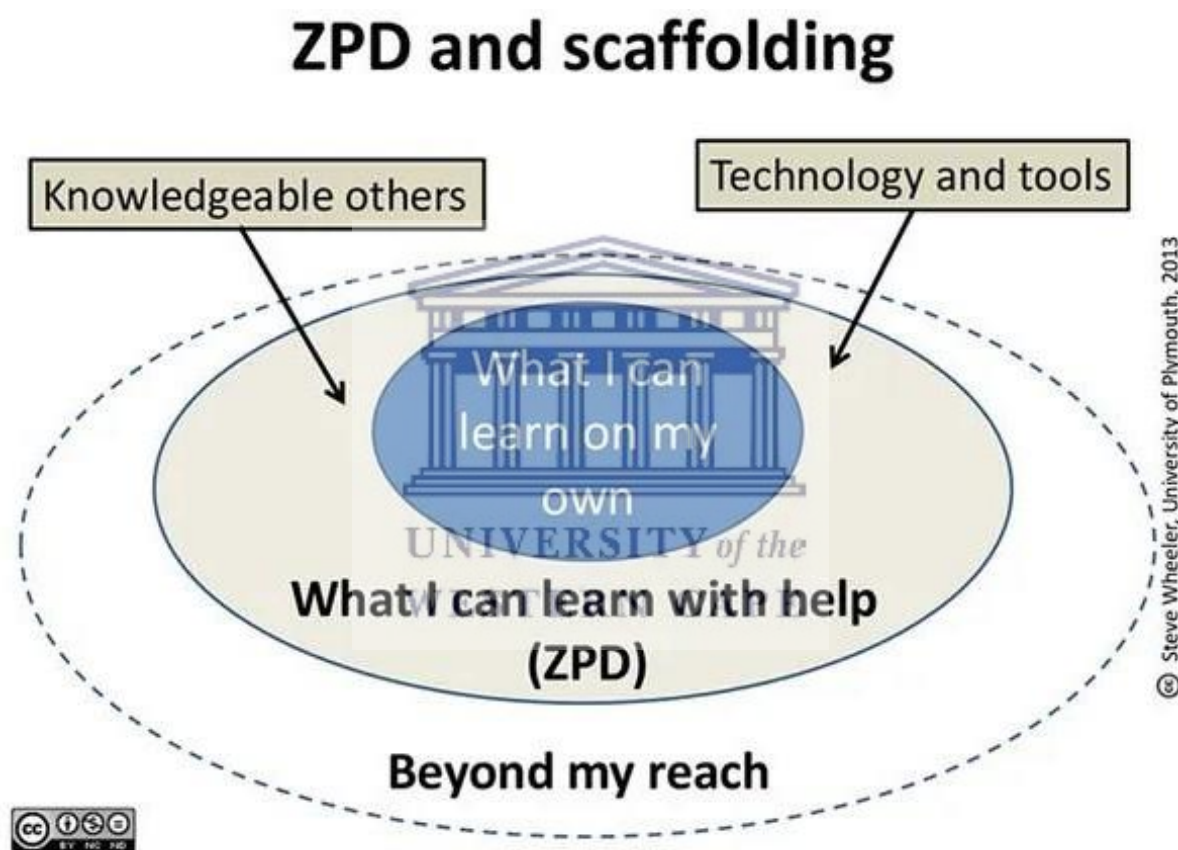


Figure 1. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development

In my study, the concept of the ZPD was critically important to understand the development of academic English proficiency. Students need to interact with their lecturers and instructors which results in cognition being stimulated, and thus learning is made possible.

2.8.4 Archer's Structure and Agency

Archer (2003) is interested in the topic, "How does structure affect agency?" The relationship between the two has been theorized by social theorists. Is there a method or mechanism that connects the two? According to Archer (2003), the traits and powers of agents must be assessed within the cultural and social environment in which they find themselves. Critical realists, such as Bhaskar, use the term "conditioning" to describe the relationships between structure and agency, but Archer contends that this is insufficient because the emphasis has been on "how structural and cultural powers impinge on agents," rather than on the interplay that includes "how agents use their powers to act 'so' rather than otherwise" (Archer, 2003:3). Structure influences actors' activities by imposing limitations and enablements that either impede or facilitate pathways of activity (Archer, 2003). "Only when people envision a course of action can one speak of constraint and enablement," says the author (Archer, 2003:4). In other words, Archer observes that "constraints are encountered as situations that impede the realization of desirable results" (2007b:215).

According to Archer (2003), reflective debates serve as the intermediary phase between structure and agency. These are the subjective deliberations that are "always in interaction with the causal capabilities of objective social formations" (Archer, 2003:130). She emphasizes the need of understanding agential projects about the social setting. The agential project triggers a constraint or enablement, and the outcome depends on whether the influence is "evaded, endorsed, repudiated, or contravened" (Archer, 2003:132). Archer then considers how structural and cultural emergent features influence agents. It is the agents' projects, rather than the agents themselves, that interact directly with social powers.

Archer (2003) proposes three stages in the mediation process between structure and agency. In the first stage, the agent is presented with limits and enablements that occur objectively as part of the structural and cultural context. In the second stage, agents work reflectively and subjectively to monitor the three orders of reality in light of their concerns. Archer's three orders of reality are nature (physical well-being), practice (performative achievement required at work), and social (achievement of self-worth). In the third and final stage, agents develop a strategy or plan of action toward "non-reflexive social powers" (Archer, 2003: 135). As a result, Archer hypothesizes that "agents will perceive the identical events relatively differently, and their reactions will vary appropriately" (Archer, 2003:139). The outcome of the evaluation might be 'considered compliance' with existing limits or 'intelligent cooperation' with current enablements, depending on how agents perceive the circumstance and approach project

completion (2003:140). Emotions, according to Archer (2006), are part of all three orders of reality, and our emotions are part of our reflexive response to the universe.

Individuals are "active agents" who follow a path that begins with their "concerns" - "those internal goods that they care about the most" (Archer, 2007b:42). These issues lead to the development of a 'project,' which, if successful, is "transformed into a set of established procedures" (Archer, 2007b:42). What truly matters to a person, what they choose to invest in, determines their sense of self. Individuals have the ability to exercise free will, yet there are 'degrees of freedom' that are limited by the social system (Archer, 2010:234; Archer, 2003:6). Some decisions may be unselfish, but many will come at a cost that may go against the individual's pre-structured interests.

2.9. Conclusion

This chapter presented the literature review and explored the theoretical framework which frames the study. The frameworks used in this chapter serve as lenses through which the narratives and experiences of Somali students who study using a second language might be viewed and understood.



Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology and research design used in this study. It explores the approach, the site, and the instruments used to collect data. Ethical issues and the study's limitations are also addressed in this chapter.

Research methods focus on the research process and the researcher's decisions to execute the research project. Therefore, this empirical section of the study requires elucidation on several aspects.

A qualitative case study method was used to obtain data from Somali postgraduate students identified as suitable for the study. The students were selected as respondents from the University in the Western Cape to explore their narratives of the challenges and strategies used to navigate the acquisition of Academic English Proficiency. A total of five Somali postgraduate students took part in this case study. Each student presented a narrative and was interviewed using an electronic medium due to some of the students going back home and the lockdown limitations in line with South Africa's Covid-19 Disaster Management Act (2020).

3.2. Research Design: A qualitative Case Study Approach

In this research, a case study method was used in which Somali postgraduate students from UWC were identified and interviewed. Creswell et al. (2007: 75) define case study research “as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.” Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005: 193) define a case study as the method which takes “multiple perspectives into account and attempts to understand the influences of multi-level social systems on subjects’ perspectives and behaviour.” Thus, according to Creswell et al. (2007: 75), case studies offer a multi-perspective analysis in which the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of one or two participants in a situation but also the views of other relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them. Thus, it opens the possibility of giving the powerless and voiceless voice, like children or marginalized groups.

This study considered the voice of Somali migrant students who aspire to continue their tertiary education even though they struggle with Academic English Proficiency.

3.3. Research Process

Qualitative research “involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artefacts, and cultural texts and productions, along with observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives” (Denzin and Lincoln 2011: 3-4). This implies a qualitative rather than a quantitative model of doing research. Babbie and Mouton (2001: 278) describe qualitative research designs,

as the study, which emphasizes studying human action in its natural setting and through the eyes of the actors, together with an emphasis on detailed description and understanding of phenomena within the appropriate context, already suggests what type of designs will be methodologically acceptable.

Brynard and Hanekom (1997: 29) define qualitative research in terms of the description of research data. They claim that qualitative research “refers to research which produces descriptive data, generally people’s own written or spoken words. Usually, no numbers or counts are assigned to observations.” Hence, this study used interviews as a method to produce a detailed description and understanding of postgraduate Somali immigrant students.

3.4. Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry, one of the many methodologies in the interpretive paradigm, was used in this study. It has been used in educational research as early as the 1990s. This method continues to develop due to an increased interest by educational researchers and sociologists. Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Applied linguistics are many researchers who have turned to a narrative inquiry as a research method. These researchers have observed the importance of life stories told by students and language teachers.

Narrative Inquiry focuses on an individual's experience, and how environmental, social, and cultural factors shape and impact the individual’s experiences. It investigates and puts knowledge gained from experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). This method favours qualitative research that is concerned with individuality and the self, such that participants can draw upon the formation of their identities. It considers the relationship between participant

and researcher, making it a compassionate methodology. Story-telling becomes more of a personal affair with little participation on the researcher's part. The inclusion of environmental, social and cultural influences on migrant students makes narrative inquiry suitable for this education research. It incorporates all aspects that impact the Student's experience. This allowed experiences of past and imagined events to be freely narrated. It assists with analyzing how respondents situate themselves and their activities in the world. Narrative inquiry helps in the empowerment and participation of interviewees, particularly the voices of marginalised groups (Barkhuizen, 2016). The experiences will be captured in the living and telling of narratives and studied by listening, observing, reading, and interpreting data (Green, 2013). For these reasons, in exploring the experiences of Somali migrant students, a narrative inquiry was used. The choice of this method in this study is suitable as it intends to appreciate the narratives of Somali respondents, a minority group at the University of the Western Cape.

A limitation of narrative inquiry is that it works best for a small number of participants as it is time-consuming. Concerning this study, only 5 participants were interviewed due to time constraints. The participants' narrative and the data analysis cannot be fully clarified without a close connection with the respondents. This study seeks to overcome such a limitation since I, as the researcher and respondents, have a lot in common – we are of the same ethnic group, have common acquaintances and study at the same University.

3.5. Sampling: site and participants

Sampling is the “process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, to develop his theory as it emerges” (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 287).

For this study, I kindly requested the participation of Somali postgraduate students at UWC who completed their undergraduate studies in Somalia.

3.6 Profile of the participants

Data were obtained regarding the students' age, gender, home language, highest level of education, when they arrived and how long they lived in South Africa. Students were in the age group ranging from 26 – 32 years. All participants spoke Somali as their mother tongue and had obtained an undergraduate degree in one of the universities in Somalia. All students indicated that they arrived in South Africa after 2010. The majority of students went back after

completing their studies except for 20% who are still in South Africa for various reasons. Table 3.6 outlines the *students*’ profiles.

| Names of Students | Highest Qualification | Gender | Age | Arrival in SA | Higher institute of learning | Duration of study |
|-------------------|-----------------------|--------|-----|---------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Student A | Masters | Female | 26 | 2017 | UWC | 2 years |
| Student B | Masters | Female | 32 | 2015 | UWC | 3 years |
| Student C | Masters | Male | 27 | 2019 | UWC | 2 years |
| Student D | Honours | Female | 29 | 2012 | UWC | 1,5 years |
| Student E | Honours | Male | 30 | 2010 | UWC | 2 years |

Table 3.6: Identification of participants’ profiles.

3.7. Data Collection Tools: Semi-structured Interviews

This study used semi-structured in-depth interviews as an instrument to collect data. According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006: 21), semi-structured in-depth interviews “are conducted once only, with an individual or a group and generally cover 30 minutes to more than an hour”. Bloom and Crabtree further mention that Semi-structured interviews are based on a semi-structured interview guide (See Appendix A), a schematic presentation of questions or topics that need to be explored by the interviewer. To achieve optimum use of interview time, interview guides serve the valuable purpose of exploring many respondents more systematically and comprehensively and keeping the interview focused on the desired line of action (Corbin and Morse 2003: 54).

Interviews were conducted and recorded using applications like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google meets due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews were transcribed after close observation of data and repeated careful listening for accuracy. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with each respondent. Participants were allowed to use multilingualism and speak the language of their preference and mix them to extract rich data and gain access to their authentic perspectives and experiences which will provide valuable insights

into the research topic. Slight digression was permitted in these interviews, which will be pertinent to the topics offered for discussion (See Appendix A). These interviews of about 30 minutes highlighted the narratives of Somali migrant students regarding their challenges and strategies for acquiring Academic English Proficiency.

3.8. Data analysis

Based on the collection, capturing and analysis of such data, I identified, clustered, prioritised, described and critically analysed the narratives of Somali postgraduates regarding the challenges that play a role in their struggle with the English language as a medium of instruction. The study made use of qualitative analysis as it is exploratory. Therefore, it offered real-life experiences and opinions of immigrants in a more profound sense. This resulted in getting a glimpse into the lived experiences of the respondents (Henning, 2004). This was followed by thematic analysis, in which I identified, analysed, organised, described, and reported the themes found within the transcribed data (Braun & Clarke 2006: 2).

3.9. Quality, Validity and Reliability

In qualitative research, the issue of reliability and validity is very crucial. Validity occurs when the researcher thoroughly explains the participants' realities (Creswell, 2008). My presence as an interviewer did not impact the participants' opinion of a question or the answer given to ensure validity. When dealing with the participants' subjective realities, objectivity, neutrality, and professionalism were paramount. For the credibility and reliability of this study, the questions that guided my facilitation of the semi-structured interviews with every Student were identical. The questions were made unambiguous (Bush, 2007; Creswell, 2012).

The study additionally made use of triangulation to ensure the validity of the study. Triangulation is when various methods are used to source data to eliminate misrepresentation and doubt. It will allow me to see things from different perspectives and detect the respondents' worlds (Cohen et al., 2007). Hence, the study triangulated the information to establish and avoid inconsistency in the data collected from various sources.

I value my role as a researcher, how my work is perceived and my desire to be trusted and respected in the field. Because of this, I strived for valid, reliable, and accurate findings.

3.10. Ethics Statement

Resnik (2015:1) maintains that ethics concerns the principles of behaviours that distinguish between unacceptable and acceptable conduct. They apply to researchers who conduct scientific

or scholarly study. Ethical norms in academic research are of utmost importance, as ethical errors can significantly harm human subjects, students, animals, ecological systems, and the public. They endorse social responsibility, human rights, health, animal welfare and safety. Additionally, norms appeal to public support such that people are keener to fund research if they have the conviction that the project is of integrity and quality.

Moreover, ethical norms ensure that researchers can be held accountable for any misconduct by those involved and the public. Ethical standards also encourage the coordination and cooperation of researchers in diverse institutions and disciplines, assuring mutual respect, trust, and accountability. Moreover, they ensure the prevention of falsifying and fabricating research data and avoiding errors. Hence, every research study has to observe certain ethical norms, which is no different (Resnik, 2015).

The study was only conducted once the UWC Senate Research Ethics committee had granted permission. After that, the research followed the rules set by the Research Committee of the University of the Western Cape (See appendix B).

The following ethical considerations that are specific to this study were taken into consideration. The collaboration and permission of the student were solicited based on a letter informing them of the nature of this study. The participation of students in this study was based on informed consent (See appendix C). The attached information sheet provided students with basic information about the nature of the study. The information provided stressed that this study focuses on the narratives found in migrant Somali students linked to UWC regarding the challenges that play a role in their struggle with English as a medium of instruction even though they studied in English back in their country. It was stressed that the research seeks to understand the problem mentioned above in general. Such sensitivity was crucial for this research as any confusion in this regard could jeopardise the research results. Respondents were notified that they might withdraw from the research at any given time as their participation is voluntary. Respondents indicated their willingness to participate in the study by signing the attached consent form. Additionally, interviewees were also requested for approval of the recordings of such interviews for the sole intent of listening to them after the interview was completed to analyse, compare, and contrast with other interviews conducted.

The rights of confidentiality, privacy and anonymity of respondents were respected and safeguarded in the following manner:

The name of the University was indicated in all cases.

In addition, each Student was distinguished alphanumerically (e.g. student A, B, C etc.).

A brief description of each Student was provided, e.g. concerning academic English learning, multilingualism, migration, educational aspirations, family, if working part-time, the occupation of some of their family members (if any) (e.g. regarding those working in shops, fast food outlets, grocery etc.). Before the interview commenced, the respondents read this description for their approval.

Students were identified in terms of their acquisition of English as to whether they learnt English in SA when they came across academic English learning where need be (e.g. “StudentA, part-time trader; student B, female; Student C with no knowledge of academic English learning).

These descriptions were also read to the respondents for their consent.

The recordings were kept safe in electronic format during the research. However, once the research was completed, the records were deleted.

3.11. Conclusion

The research design, data collecting and analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and other ethical considerations were all covered in this chapter. The study used a qualitative approach and focused on a specific set of respondents: Somali postgraduate students at UWC. Comprehensive in-depth interviews were conducted using an interview guide with a series of semi-structured questions that allowed for self-expression and personal narrative.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I present and analyze data obtained from the respondents using in-depth semi-structured interviews. This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, I present the challenges of Academic English Proficiency of Somali postgraduate students at the University of the Western Cape. In the second section, I present and discuss the strategies Somali postgraduate students at the University of the Western Cape used to acquire Academic English Proficiency. In both sections, I thematically analyze according to the research questions and the study's objectives.

4.2. Challenges of Academic English Proficiency

Through thematic analysis, I present three main themes of the challenges of Academic English Proficiency. The themes that occurred the most and were seen as the main reason for the problem are presented first, followed by those that did not occur as often. Henceforth, I begin with the challenges of communication in English which entails speaking and listening competence. In the second theme, I present and discuss the student's challenges in Academic writing. And finally, in the third theme, I present and analyze the student's challenges of Academic reading.

All three themes were linked to research conducted in Epistemic access and sociocultural theory of human learning and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in education. I argue that society plays a significant role in students' language acquisition and learning in analyzing the data.

4.2.1. Challenges of Communication in English

The analysis of data indicated that all five participating Somali postgrad students at UWC experienced challenges in communication in English. The following extracts provide a more notable description:

My reading and writing were better off compared to my communication skills... but the conversations were conducted in Somali. Also, lecturers would use the companies and

organizations in the country as case studies and examples, so the curriculum was localized. Regarding explanations, it was based on what happens in the country, and the lectures were explained in Somali (Interview with Student A, June 2021)

The understanding was not a problem but returning and speaking back was the biggest problem, and with all honesty, I used to worry about it... I have to say postgrad studies were the most difficult in my academic journey, especially concerning language. The language was the most challenging part of this journey, especially communication...this is because back home, the explanations and translation were in Somali in the classroom, and the English language was not spoken. The discussions, lectures, and conversations were in Somali (Interview with Student B, June 2021)

Unlike my classmates who had been in this class for a month before I came, I could not converse with the teacher. Hence, we could not communicate except for sign language (Interview with Student C, June 2021)

My undergraduate program included an English module in which I was only taught English grammar and not conversational English (Interview with Student D, June 2021)

Although I was confident when reading and writing in English, I was worried about communicating and conversing. As a result, from high school up until undergrad, I never conversed in the English language...but the lecturer and students would communicate in Somali.... The lecturer would explain in Somali since all the students did not know English. ... presentations were in Somali because Institutions and companies speak the Somali language to run their administrative work, however, power points were written in English (Interview with Student E, June 2021)

In these extracts students interchangeably used references such as communication skills, communication and conversational English to describe the actual use of language in concrete situations (performance) and the speaker-hearer's language knowledge (Nordquist 2020). Students demonstrated their challenges with the lack of speaking practice and the tendency of using the Somali language for communication instead of English in a program that claims to use English as a medium of instruction, as stated by student B ... *the discussions, lectures, and conversations were in Somali.*

These findings illustrate Richard Ruiz (1984)'s theory of the three orientations: language as a 'problem', 'right', and a 'resource'. For instance, the interviewees showed that speaking English in Somalia was seen as a problem by both educators and students since it was associated with cognitive difficulties and the reduction of academic achievement as explained by one respondent ... *the lecturer would explain in Somali since all the students did not know English.* We also see in these findings that the Somali language was seen as a 'right' since it mediates access to society such as employment, as one participant motivated why English was not spoken in presentations, ... *presentations were in Somali because Institutions and companies speak the Somali language to run their administrative work.* Conversely, these findings show that the English language was valued as a personal and a national resource, as explained by student E ... *however power points were written in English.* Pennycook (1994) argued that the 'English language teaching industry is a response to the growth of English as a global language and the desire of people across the world to acquire a language perceived as having economic and social worth.

Concerning previous research, the findings of the current study are consistent with those of Keong et al., (2015) who in their investigation of the speaking competence of Iraqi EFL undergraduates of Garmiyah University, revealed that the main reasons leading to the students' speaking difficulties were due to the absence of speaking activities such as English speaking practice, in the course program. Another study conducted in Indonesia by Abrar et al., (2018) found that Indonesian EFL Students faced speaking challenges due to language barriers such as vocabulary, grammar, and fluency. Yet another study conducted in India by Ganesh et al., (2019) showed that students from a rural background were unable to speak English even after their schooling and intermediate education was in English. The study revealed that the failure to communicate in English was due to the little time allocated to the practice and learning of English in the classroom and the inadequate encouragement from teachers, family and friends.

In addition to the above challenges of speaking, students also expressed varying listening challenges as shown in the following extracts:

It was the worst; the pronunciation played a significant role. They did not understand me, and I did not understand them. This is because the way we pronounce words in Somalia and how they do it in South Africa is different (Interview with Student A, June 2021)

...but I did not understand what she was saying at that time. The language was a big problem. When I started the class, I struggled with the English language,

especially the accent; their accent differed from my British teacher at Scalabrini and my Zimbabwean teacher, who had experience helping Somali students(Interview with Student C, June 2021)

I struggled the first few days. I kept saying to the lecturer what does that mean, can you repeat, and she would reply, " Don't you understand? So basically, I would go to class and not know what the lecturer said, and I couldn't stop her every minute to ask a question. So I struggled with listening and understanding. That year I got stressed, but I could not drop out; I had to persist(Interview with Student D, June 2021)

My challenge was with the accent of the locals. I could not make out what the locals were saying to the point where I could not understand 60% of the lecturer's presentation. It was a huge challenge that I couldn't ask the lecturer a question because of the language barrier and out of fear. Also, when the lecturer would ask me questions, he would have to repeat them 3 to 4 times just so that I could understand. I would not also understand 100% what the question entailed. What's more, when am giving presentations; the challenge was, they would not understand my accent and my pronunciation of the words (Interview with Student E, June 2021)

According to the data, students had difficulties with listening to English competency when they enrolled in postgraduate studies. Students stated that their difficulties with listening and understanding stemmed from their inadequate English skills, pronunciation, and accent problems. As a result, students confirmed their difficulty with class participation such as asking and responding to questions and general listening comprehension. These findings demonstrate what Boughey (2003) refers to as societal attitudes toward accentedness. This encompasses the presence of stereotypical views and undesirable beliefs within the student- learner community. As explained by interviewee E... the challenge was that they would not understand my accent and *pronunciation of the words*. In support of this claim, Eisenchlas and Tsurutani (2011) argue that second language students' academic ability is often underestimated owing to their accented speech. This was explained by respondent D *I kept saying to the lecturer what does that mean, can you repeat, and she would reply, don't you understand?* Owing to the differential expectations of lecturers; second-language students may get fewer opportunities to participate than other students. Establishing social networks can be challenging due to the presence of accent stereotyping. Moreover, second-language students are often considered less educated, less trustworthy, and poor in intelligence (competence) in

comparison to native speakers of English (Park et al 2017; Boughey 2003, Boughey and McKenna, 2016). As a result, these differences, lead to lesser engagement in learning activities and may reflect in their results (Munro, Derwing, & Sato, 2006; Nakane, 2006). In addition, such language discrimination can delay the students' adjustment and interactions with other students which is important in forming friendships and becoming part of a supportive learning environment. (Lacina, 2002).

Therefore, it is safe to conclude that societal attitude is the factor that accounts for variation in the level of achievement in second language acquisition. This is because, in a typical language learning situation, there are a number of people whose attitudes to each other can be significant: the learner, the teacher, the learner's peers and parents, and the speakers of the language. Each relationship might well be shown to be a factor controlling the learner's motivation to acquire the language.

These results match those observed in earlier studies. Sicat (2011), for example, shows that Asian international students studying at a university in the Philippines faced difficulties not only because of their inability to understand a second language but also in understanding different accents; that is, the lecturer's accent as well as each other's accents. Another study conducted by Khawaja and Stallman (2011) in Australia reported that second-language tertiary students faced a major issue in the lack of understanding of Australian regional accents, which often hindered their studies and was a cause of embarrassment not only for them but also for the listeners who did not understand them. This is similar to Somali students struggling to understand South African regional accents and vice versa. The studies also show that the challenges caused by accented English for these students are twofold. Firstly, on the part of students, the accent causes communication difficulties and secondly on the part of other people such as lecturers and other pupils, the accent causes comprehension difficulties for the students (Campbell & Li, 2008; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Malau-Aduli, 2011; Sicat, 2011).

According to Hamouda (2013), Saudi students faced listening difficulties during their learning process. The findings highlighted issues with speech delivery, such as the speed of speech and diverse accents of the speakers, as well as issues with listeners, such as lack of concentration, nervousness, and a limited vocabulary. This is consistent with the present study in which Somali students expressed their challenges with dissimilar accents. Listening comprehension issues were addressed in another study conducted by Duong and Chau (2019) in Vietnam. Listening texts (i.e. new vocabulary, slang, idioms, colloquial phrases, and complicated sentence structures) were shown to be the most common cause of their poor listening

comprehension, according to the study. The study further found, speedy delivery, unclear pronunciation, different accents and anxiety encompass the multiple processes involved in understanding and making sense of spoken language. Duong and Chau's findings are consistent with the current study in which Somali students expressed their challenges in recognizing speech sounds, understanding the meaning of individual words, and/or understanding the syntax of sentences in which they are presented.

The Challenges of Communication in English confirm that students lacked epistemological access given that the form of education received back in Somalia did not enable them meaningful speaking and listening acquisition (Morrow 2007). The extracts further show that the learning environment in Somalia promoted the localisation of the curriculum, the leniency of lecturers and the preference of peers to learn and communicate in Somali in their undergraduate program. This substantiates epistemological access as a problem of an empiricist dominance in epistemology in education. This is because the student's epistemological access was not achievable if the English language was to be used in teaching and learning. It is for this reason, that Somali learners were instructed in Somali which they are familiar with, and were likely to achieve the intended outcomes of the curriculum and were able to make sense of the learning content.

The students' challenges in English communication further confirm Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which shows that social interaction plays a significant role in supporting the acquisition of English communication proficiency. It also shows that learning is a social process and originates from human intelligence in a culture or society. From the data presented we see that students had challenges with Academic English Proficiency. This is because their ability was limited to memorizing chunks of language for artificial planned experiences. Also as shown in the literature and theory, language is a social behaviour and not just language learning which requires learners to interact with other speakers, perform discrete-point tests of grammatical knowledge and make meaning which the respondents of this study lacked (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain 1980; Savignon 2002; Palloti 2010).

In this section, we see the students' challenges in English communication from as early high school to their undergraduate programs in Somalia up until their early enrolment in postgraduate studies. Richard Ruiz (1984)'s theory of the three orientations, Morrow (2007)'s theory of epistemological access, and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as well as previous research show that these challenges are not unique to Somali postgraduate students. In the next section, we will present and analyze the challenges of Academic writing faced by Somali postgraduate students.

4.2.2. Challenges of Academic Writing

The analysis of data indicated that all five Somali postgrad students at UWC experienced challenges of low proficiency in academic writing difficulties in their early exposure to academic English Writing at UWC. The following statements from the subjects offer a more vivid explanation:

Academic writing was one of the biggest challenges I faced during my honours program. I did not know much about academic writing. In South Africa, it is different; you are asked to do your research, collect your articles, study them and use your own words, but back home, that was not the case; you just copy and paste (Interview with Student A, June 2021)

During exams, we wrote the tests in English. (Interview with Student B, June 2021)

In Somalia, I couldn't write essays that I was able to in my honours program. We never used to write essays. I think we once had a writing class, and in that class, they taught us the writing structure. They taught us that we need an introduction, body and conclusion. But when it came to contents, it was copy and paste (Interview with Student C, June 2021)

The real challenge was when we were asked to write assignments. You have to understand and then paraphrase, unlike exams where you can write what you have memorized. With assignments, you are sitting in the library with no one examining you to answer questions; instead, there is a deadline waiting for you and Turnitin. That was the challenge! ...The challenges were many. It was one of fear and regret. I thought, how will you be able to write what you have never written before (Interview with Student D, June 2021)

The students would write in English including the Exam ... Also, if the student wrote in Somali, which was rare, he would get his marks. I personally never wrote in Somali. But I knew of a student from an Arab country who struggled with English, so he was a particular case. ...Instead of wrapping up, I would bring new ideas to a conclusion, and she would say just summarise what you have already written. And I thought I could write my stuff. However, I didn't

understand the conclusion concept, which was challenging. For example, there was a module I struggled to understand, and I was already struggling with the writing, so I dropped it and took it the following semester. As a result, my honours took 1.5 years instead of a year. However, by the time I took that module, my writing skills had improved, and I had written my 26 pages. Although writing long pages was a difficult task, I would sigh with relief at every page I wrote (Interview with Student E, June 2021)

In undergrad, everything that is expected from you is written in the textbook. And so, the way to survive academically is through rote learning... My other teachers did not tell me to write essays; it was only about reading from textbooks (Interview with Student A, June 2021)

With regard to writing exams, I employ the memorization technique. In my undergraduate programme, I memorized even if I did not understand. However, I would memorize what I understood and write in my Honour's program... In my Honour's program, I wrote three exams. One of the lecturers instructed us to write what we understood. She gave us practical examples and made sure we understood, which I did, but still, I couldn't use my own English, but I managed to put something together. I was still using the memorization technique because it had become a habit, and also, I was not confident enough. (Interview with Student B, June 2021)

In undergrad, you just memorize what's in the textbook and write as is. I remember once we were told to write an essay. I memorized it from the textbook, wrote it and got full marks, and I didn't even understand it (Interview with Student C, June 2021)

In my undergrad, I could only write what I had prepared. What I mean is before the Exam, I would copy and paste the info I need for the Exam, read and memorize it and write it down. So I memorized the information (Interview with Student D, June 2021)

...so they would have to memorize beforehand. We made use of rote learning. The lecture would encourage us to use our own words, which was hard on us, so even if we memorized, he would mark.... As students we understood the English we memorized because the teacher explained it in Somali. But we could not construct our paragraphs and essays (Interview with Student E, June 2021)

Students in these statements indicate key challenges faced in writing English concerning grammar and vocabulary, style guide use, organization and flow of information, critical thinking, understanding of plagiarism, and assignment completion time; some of these challenges surfaced due to the differences in these areas compared to the expectations in their home country. Ravichandran et al. (2017) and Park (2003) show that South African universities regarding writing quality, vocabulary, and academic honesty were much higher than what these students were used to at their former universities in their home country. As explained by student A, ...*In South Africa, it is different; you are asked to do your research, collect your articles, study them, and use your own words.* All the participants commented that the writing expectations were very high leading to feelings of uncertainty about improving their academic performance.

Moreover, this data shows that memorization and rote learning was the most common method of teaching and learning among the interview participants in their previously attended institutions in Somalia. This caused students difficulties in transferring knowledge into academic writing. Also, students lacked critical thinking and a lack of understanding of how to express original ideas which is a key component of South African university education, and which is expected that all students can engage deeply in the process through reading, reflection, synthesis, analysis, and writing upon entrance to graduate programs (Paul, 2005).

In support of these narratives, Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006) in their case study of a Brazilian PhD student at the University of Manchester found that the students faced challenges at the sentence level which in turn led to a breakdown of meaning: overlong, complex sentences; faulty referencing; lexical difficulties associated with specialized vocabulary; and signposting weaknesses. This is consistent with the current study in which students faced challenges at the sentence level. As one student maintained, ... *I couldn't use my own English, but I managed to put something together...* In two studies conducted by Cooley and Lewkowicz (1995; 1997), they found that 26% of the L2 students had serious difficulties in organizing ideas and arguments, using the appropriate style of writing, and expressing their thoughts clearly in English. These challenges were echoed in the current study as one student stated, ... *we couldnot construct our paragraphs and essays.* Yet in another study conducted by Yeh, (2010), all the L2 students said that although vocabulary choice was particularly important for expressing ideas and arguments, they had challenges with vocabulary choice. Yeh further explains that half of the students had difficulties with grammar and mechanics. Yeh's study is consistent with the present study were students stated that their initial use of rote learning left them with

poor vocabulary. As explained by one student, ... *I couldn't use my own English...* Furthermore, Bitchener and Bastrukmen (2006) show that students have difficulties with sequencing propositions, making transitions, and achieving overall unity in academic writing. Bitchener and Bastrukmen's findings are consistent with the present study in which Somali students struggled with academic writing structure. As explained by one student ... *Instead of wrapping up, I would bring new ideas to a conclusion... I didn't understand the conclusion concept, which was challenging.*

The writing challenges articulated by Somali postgraduate students confirm the lack of epistemic access in their undergraduate studies. This can be seen in their cognitive inability to achieve academic writing proficiency in their enrolment in postgraduate studies. The data further shows that students lacked collaborative writing in their undergraduate studies. This means students did not have access to lecturers who effectively taught them academic writing proficiency. The data also shows the inaccessibility of reflective learning, the construction of knowledge, as well as the inability to apply knowledge in practical situations (Morrow, 2009; Lonka, Ketonen & Vermunt, 2021).

The students' challenges in academic English writing further confirm Vygotsky's idea on sociocultural perspective which has much influence on the process of teaching and learning writing as a social process. The scaffolding in teaching writing, collaborative work activity in writing a lesson, as well as teacher reflection on teaching and learning activities in the classroom are all mainly grounded in his perspective. Teachers and learners, both as social agents in a wider schooling and educational context, play a significant role in situating constructive learning contexts which could facilitate others to learn and reflect more from experiences (Nurfaidah, 2018).

This sub-section presented the data and analysis of the challenges of academic English writing faced by Somali postgraduate students. Morrow (2007)'s theory of epistemological access and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as well as the previous research presented show that these challenges are a result of the quality of education and are not unique to Somali postgraduate students. In the next section, we will present and analyze the challenges of Academic reading faced by Somali postgraduate students.

4.2.3. Challenges of Academic Reading

With regards to challenges of reading English postgrad at UWC, all five Somali postgrad students at UWC maintained that it was less of a challenge in comparison to communicative and writing competence. In this study a small percentage of students claimed to have difficulty reading. The following excerpts provide a more detailed account:

The curriculum was in English... Sitting for an extended period to read was a huge challenge for me so I would take energy drinks (Interview with Student A, June 2021)

The textbooks were written in English from primary school until my undergraduate studies... I had no challenges in reading in English, as explained by my schooling, and undergrad was in English, and everything was written in English. So from a young age, we were trained to read what was written in textbooks. There were no challenges involved with reading. Once the session was over, I would engage in self-teaching. I would do lots of research and lots of reading; that's what helped me to be on the same page with the other students. I had no trouble understanding the essay questions; for example, they would ask what is your understanding of modernization and give an account of it (Interview with Student B, June 2021)

I saw that students from other English-speaking countries whose writing was good still read a lot. My reading was terrible, and I never used to read, even back home. I am more practical. Sitting down is a challenge and getting down to read. Personally, reading was a challenge. I did understand what I was reading, and I lacked the habit to read (Interview with Student D, June 2021)

The curriculum was technically in English, with the textbooks being in English... Even our lecturer told us that the more you read, the easier the writing will be for you (Interview with Student E, June 2021).

These extracts show that students were exposed to reading in English from as early as primary school. As a result, these Students reported a higher level of performance in reading than in the other three skills. This is because the skill of reading necessitates very minimum requirements compared to writing which needs a lot of time to practice and guidance, or speaking, which requires opportunities to interact with sparring partners; reading requires only a text and

motivation. This data is in accordance with previous research. For instance, Madhumathi & Ghosh (2017), Pardede (2008), and Omaggio (1993) show that students were able to perform at a higher level in reading than the other three language skills. For instance, some students could accurately understand written materials that they could not write with equivalent accuracy or thoroughness or discuss orally. Additionally, their background knowledge played a major role in acquiring some proficiency in academic reading. Hence, we can conclude from the data that there was a focus on the cognitive aspect of reading while the social context of learning was overlooked to a great extent. This is because the main areas of inquiry were memory, information processing approaches, attention and noticing (Ghafar and Dehqan, 2013).

The lack of focus on the social factors in the process of reading drawn upon from the sociocultural theory of learning is seen in the present data in which some students pointed out their poor reading habits which resulted in challenges with reading and understanding academic texts. As stated by one student, ... *I did understand what I was reading, and I lacked the habit to read.* The lack of the habit of reading which leads to the challenges of academic reading competence stems from the fact that reading was viewed as a purely individualistic skill. However, from the viewpoint of the sociocultural theory of learning (Lantolf, 2006; Salem, 2017), reading is a social skill that requires active participation and interaction of the learners involved in it.

In this sub-section, the data and analysis presented show that there was a higher level of competence in reading compared to the other three skills. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory was used as a theoretical lens in understanding the students' absence of the social context of reading, which resulted in bad reading habits. In the next section, we will detail the strategies these students used to acquire Academic English Proficiency to overcome these challenges in their host country in pursuing their postgraduate degree.

4.3. Strategies for Acquiring Academic English Proficiency

Despite the difficulties that Somali postgrad students at UWC experienced in their early exposure to Academic English, they developed strategies that assisted them in acquiring competence through agency, social environment, access to more knowledgeable others (MKO) and academic resources.

4.3.1- Student Agency

From the data, it can be seen that all students used their agency as a strategy to Acquire Academic English Proficiency.

I would spend extra hours understanding what he said; I would also use a voice recorder and listen to what he repeatedly said until I understood it.... It took me four months to understand what the lecturer and my peers said. However, at this point, I could understand 85% of the lecture and ask questions that they could understand and explain (Interview with Student A, June 2021).

I had the confidence to go to google scholar and other search engines and try to write something about it. (Interview with Student A, June 2021).

What I realized is I lacked the style of writing. So I did a lot of practice. Every week we were given one page. My marks were average, but I was improving with every assignment slowly. As a result, once I got to the Master's level, I became confident in writing. For example, the first assignment was 2500 words, and it got easy, but I always kept in the back of my mind that Turnitin was waiting for me so I had to be extra cautious. So, copy and paste were out of the question and I had to write my own work (Interview with Student B, June 2021).

I would come home straight and work on my studies or go to the library. Since Academic writing was my main problem, I would go to the reference area and immerse myself in books that explain and teach academic writing and grammar. These books are self-study; once you read them, the tests and the answers are at the back. So you can evaluate your progress and are easy to follow the guidelines. They helped me (Interview with Student B, June 2021).

I also lacked the confidence to write, but I tried to learn from how other students wrote. To the point that in my final essay, I got an A... What helped me with Academic writing is I followed instructions lecturers gave me during assignments and was committed to doing what was expected of me. I always did my best to deliver (Interview with Student C, June 2021).

I also went to the writing centre. Although it was for undergraduate students, it helped me, for example, referencing and paragraphs (Interview with Student C, June 2021).

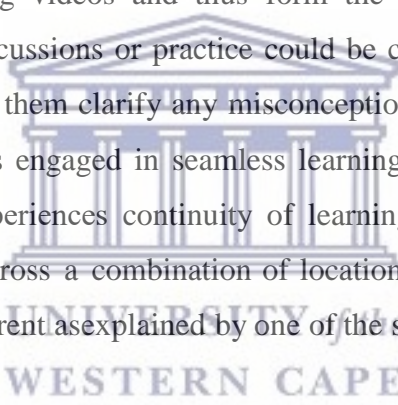
It was only after some time that I did self-study to understand it.... I proceeded to my Master's with confidence. I believe at my Master's; I was at the same level as the other students regarding Academic English Proficiency. In South Africa, say, for example, I was doing project management, and the lecturer asked us to do a project on food security that I had never seen. I remember the first essay in my honours program was ten pages and the lecturer gave us one month to complete it, and I struggled. I utilized every day of the month just to deliver those ten pages. I would also use the latest textbooks because they tend to have English easier to follow. I would also use the latest articles that I could find. My support system came from school, the library and the internet. My most significant support came from the teachers because I would also express myself and remind them that I had a language problem. If I didn't know something, I wouldn't rest that day until I figured it out. I would go to the teachers and students (Interview with Student D, June 2021).

To show my progress in my Master's program we were given an assignment that was 30 pages in a week, and I did it with no struggle. I would score As Bs in my assignments (Interview with Student D, June 2021).

The first assignment I expected in my honours program was one page. I couldn't get past the introduction; I thought and thought, looked at it, and wondered what is this. ... I was missing Academic English Writing skills and proficiency. So I tried one more time after studying the student's sample and used Turnitin for the first time. The percentage required of me was 15, but I got 26%. I got nervous, and I kept reworking it and redoing it; I remember it was just one page I struggled with, and finally, I sent it.... People learn when they are under pressure, and I could not procrastinate. What plays a significant role is being in an environment where you are pressured to deliver on a specific date and follow

the rules of academic writing or otherwise fail (Interview with Student E, June 2021).

In these extracts, students demonstrate their agency in acquiring Academic English Proficiency. Concerning acquiring communicative competence, students used a recording device during lectures. Students explained that they would repetitively listen to this audio until they understood the materials. These findings illustrate the flipped classroom: a concept coined by Bergmann and Sams (2012). While there are diverse definitions of the flipped classroom, one of the most common definitions is “Recording in-class activities to convey a course: Students watch the video before the class and use the class time to solve complex concepts, answer questions, and students are encouraged to learn actively as well as create bonds with daily lives” (Hwang et al. 2015: 450). As stated by one student ... *I would also use a voice recorder and listen to what he repeatedly said until I understood it....* With such a strategy, significant results were obtained, which inspired them to further employ it (i.e., instructing via online videos) before classes. In this way, students prepare for classes by watching videos and thus form the basic knowledge before class. Consequently, more in-class discussions or practice could be conducted to engage students in more in-depth learning and help them clarify any misconceptions (Bergmann and Sams 2012). This further shows that students engaged in seamless learning a term Wong et al. (2015:10) defines as “when a person experiences continuity of learning, and consciously bridges the multifaceted learning efforts, across a combination of locations, times, technologies or social settings. This was seen in the current as explained by one of the students ... *I utilized every day of the month just to deliver....*



About acquiring academic writing competence students explained that they engaged in a lot of self-practice writing; a process of writing, revising and rewriting. It can be argued that this strategy helped students because writing is a process of 'exploring one's thoughts and learning from the act of writing itself what these thoughts are' (Bouhey, 1997). As explained by the students... *I utilized every day of the month just to deliver those ten pages.* Another student added, ... *I kept reworking it and redoing it.* Hence, this process succeeds in giving thoughts a permanence that students would not have in their unwritten state. By externalizing and giving permanence to thoughts, the act of writing allows these students to reconsider, clarify, and revise their thoughts more readily than if they had not been written down. Also, all texts are written for an audience as a result students need to pay attention to the audience of the text in this case their lecturers. In turn, these prompt Somali students into anticipating and considering

viewpoints other than their own. As maintained by a student, ..., *I always kept in the back of my mind that Turnitin was waiting for me, so I had to be extra cautious. So, copy and pasting was out of the question, and I had to write my work.* The result of this is that propositions contained in the content of the text are likely to be more rigorously scrutinized than if they were simply thought about.

In contrast to speaking, writing is a lonely process requiring writers to explore, oppose, and make connections between propositions for themselves, a process that is conducive to learning. As explained by one of the students, ... *I thought and thought, looked at it, and wondered....* In support of this strategy (Cummins 1986) states that in contrast to speaking, writing is produced and received in a context that is devoid of support for the communication of meanings. The result of this is that, in writing, meanings must be explicit. Understanding the need to be explicit forces writers to engage with the propositions contained in their text more than in speaking. Moreover, the linear form of a finished piece of writing requires that thoughts be ordered and organized. The process of organizing and ordering these thoughts means that the writer must examine and manipulate those thoughts thoroughly. These reasons provide justification for the students' agency of self-practice writing as a strategy for Acquiring Academic English Writing Skills (Boughey, 2013).

As for acquiring academic reading students maintained that acquiring the habit of reading assisted them in acquiring Academic reading competence. as stated by one student, ...*I utilized every day of the month just to deliver those ten pages ...to show you my progress in my Master we were given an assignment that was 30 pages in a week, and I did it with no struggle.* This shows that effective reading is a well-planned habit and a deliberate pattern of study. Hence attaining it is a form of consistency on the part of students in understanding academic subjects and passing examinations. Moreover, reading habits determine the academic performance of students to a great extent.

The data further shows that reading and academic performances are interrelated and interdependent. As explained by one student... *I did it with no struggle. I would score As Bs in my assignments. While* students often come from different levels of academic performance like the students in the present study (Suhana and Haryudin, 2007). Reading pushes you ahead of others (Lawal, 2021). You become a leader among your mates when you know more than they do. The mental distinction is a function of volumes of information gathered and stored up there. Furthermore, Hinkel (2006) views that learners need to know the language of the text to succeed at reading; otherwise, they will not be able to process any of the information they are

reading. Successful reading necessitates the student's ability in determining the meaning and the form of the word first, then put it together with the sentence all within a few seconds. learners struggle with this because they cannot process at the speed necessary for success.

The success of the students' agency confirms the resilience theory (Themane & Mabasa 2022). As a process, the resilience theory refers to the student's ability to cope well with adversity in this case Academic English Proficiency (Theron, 2016). As an end result, it refers to the ability to maintain or regain strength in the face of severe stress or adversity (Kalisch et al., 2017). In this case, Somali students were able to maintain strength in their challenges with writing and communicating. In essence, resilience is an individual's ability to succeed in difficult situations. This is accomplished through the ability to draw on one's resources, such as religious beliefs or self-efficacy. In some cases, the ability to overcome adversity can be attributed to one's connections with other people or societal structures such as family, friends, and the community. In this case, Somali students were able to connect with their academic environment, fellow peers, and instructors. This is referred to as social capital (Themane, & Mabasa 2022).

In broad terms, it encapsulates how some people, through self-agency, can recover from adversity in life. When examined more closely, however, it carries multiple meanings. Rutter (2013) defines it as an individual's adaptation to a situation when provided with the necessary resources and a socially supportive environment. This was seen in the current in which Somali students were able to overcome their challenges once they had epistemological access at the University of the Western Cape in comparison to their undergraduate institutions in Somalia

This section has looked at student agency as a strategy and the role it plays in acquiring Academic English proficiency. The resilient theory was used as a theoretical lens in understanding the students' epistemic access and success. In the next section, we will look at how the student's new social environment played a role in their acquisition of Academic English Proficiency.

4.3.2 Social environment

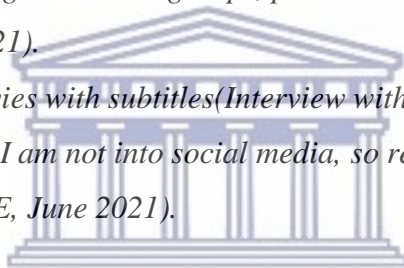
From the data below we can see that all students utilized their social environment through engagement with the community, and social media and exposing themselves to English movies.

Also, I had lots of friends whom we explored the city with, both local and international, and the language used was English(Interview with Student A, June 2021).

It was only in South Africa that I was able to listen to people speaking English, and this helped(Interview with Student B, June 2021).

The academic environment also helped me because I was on campus Monday to Friday. However, when it came to students, it was a bit tricky. The majority of students were coloured and Xhosa, so during the break, the coloured students would mingle and speak Afrikaans together. The Xhosa students would do likewise, so I was stuck in the middle since I didn't know any languages. Hence, when I sit with them, they speak their mother tongue as they are comfortable expressing themselves in that language. So it was only the teachers who were helpful in that regard when speaking in English. However, the good thing was students would talk in English during lessons so everyone could understand. Hence, I benefitted during discussion groups, presentations and so on(Interview with Student C, June 2021).

I would watch many movies with subtitles(Interview with Student D, June 2021). Movies helped a bit, but I am not into social media, so reading books helped me (Interview with Student E, June 2021).



In these extracts, students document the role of their social environment in acquiring Academic English Proficiency. Students maintained that their new social environment enabled them to listen to English, mix with English-speaking colleagues and friends, watch English movies, and exposed to English materials. This shows that students experienced a continuity of learning, and consciously bridging the multifaceted learning efforts, across a combination of locations, times, technologies, or social settings, a concept Wong et al. (2015; 10) refer to as ‘seamless learning. The extracts also show that students were exposed to Cross-contextual learning which enabled a continuous learning experience across the different settings of home and university (Hwang et al, 2015.). Moreover, technologies such as mobile devices and wireless networks enabled students to learn continuously across different contexts. Hence in seamless learning and Cross-contextual learning students were able to connect between formal and informal learning.

The impact of the social environment confirms Vygotsky's social-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). This is because Somali students' conscious language learning ability developed in their new social environment as well as subconscious language acquisition. As explained by one participant, *...It was only in South Africa that I was able to listen to people speaking English, and this helped.* Additionally, the new social environment's impact on the student's academic English confirms Vygotsky's social-cultural theory. This is because the students were pushed toward the delivery of academic English that is not only conveyed, but is conveyed precisely, coherently, and appropriately. This was explained by one student, *... the helpful teachers... when speaking in English.* The sociocultural theory highlights meaning as the central aspect of any teaching and insists that skills or knowledge must be taught in all its complex forms, rather than presented as isolated, discrete concepts (Shiweda, 2021). *This was explained by one respondent, ... I would watch many movies with subtitles, ... reading books helped me.* Based on the central tenets of these theoretical frameworks, learning is a product of the experiences learners as well as students encounter in their environments, being their communities or their school grounds.

These sentiments concur with the literature; for example, research conducted by Al Ansari (2000) on Bahraini university students showed that those students that were exposed to English outside the academic environment exerted a beneficial influence on the development of academic proficiency in comparison to those students who were not exposed to English outside the formal setting. As explained by one student, *... I had lots of friends whom we explored the city with, both local and international, and the language used was English.* Another study conducted by Al Zoubi (2018) at Jordanian University showed a strong correlation between exposure to the English language and Language Acquisition and the development of the four language skills. Therefore, Al Zoubi believes that students should be exposed to the English language daily by watching English movies and programs, surfing the internet, listening to the radio, reading English books, magazines, and newspapers, and practising English with native speakers to help them overcome their weaknesses and improve their fluency and proficiency in learning the language.

This sub-section has looked at the role of the social environment in acquiring Academic English proficiency. Vygotsky's social-cultural theory was used as a theoretical lens for understanding the students' epistemic access and success. In the next sub-section, we will look at the supportive role of the MKO in the acquisition of Academic English Proficiency.

4.3.3 Supportive role of the MKO

All students explained that they got assistance from lecturers and fellow students in and out of academic situations as seen in the following extracts:

Thanks to my fellow students and lecturers after my first year of honours, communicating in English became easy. I would pay attention to the way students spoke and imitate them when I had to present and give an explanation in class... I also lacked the confidence to write, but I tried to learn from how other students wrote. To the point that in my final essay, I got an A Could this be the yardstick to determine improvement? Whose quality assurance count? (Interview with Student B, June 2021)

The teacher offered to give extra lessons regarding speaking so that I could catch up. ... My teacher suggested that I take myself to drama class because of the fear and lack of confidence she picked up The lecturers were very helpful. They gave us a module that focused on research... I would seek help from the students ahead of me. I would ask what is expected of me and how should I deliver and reference (Interview with Student C, June 2021).

Even our lecturer told us that the more you read, the easier the writing will be for you... With all the confusion, I approached a student who was doing his Master's at the time and asked him to show me his honours assignments as a sample. Once I got the sample, I looked at it and looked at the writing style. What I realised is that there was nothing hard in this (Interview with Student D, June 2021)

My lecturer understood my struggles and was my most effective support system. For example, she would go on google and show me the images so I could get a better understanding. She would explain more if there was a new word in the work we were reading. Also, whenever I struggled with the other work, I would come to her. I would be like, what is this, what does this mean, and how do I go about it? She also helped me with academic writing, basically everything. I would go to her during breaks (Interview with Student E, June 2021).

The extracts stress the dialogic approach coined by Robin Alexander (2000) which is used by peers and lecturers to generate knowledge, acquire understanding, and convey meaning while acting as more knowledgeable others (MKOs) in this developmental zone. This was explained by one participant, ... *With all the tips from the lecturers and endless questions to my fellow students,*

I proceeded to my Master's with confidence. The data further shows that peers and lecturers used to talk, prompting, Socratic questioning, and other mediation techniques to ensure that Somali students acquire Academic English Proficiency. As stated by one student, *... whenever I struggled with the other works, I would come to her. I would be like, what is this, what does this mean, and how do I go about it? She also helped me with academic writing, basically everything.* As a result, students retained ownership of their work and oversaw their learning. Moreover, students internalized critical thinking and the writing processes that bring together their subject knowledge and academic literacies and skills.

In this context of the interaction between Somali students who are less knowledgeable and the lecturers and peers who are MKOs, there is scaffolding which is an important notion associated with Vygotsky's social theory of learning. This is because, For Vygotsky, learning activities need to be pitched at the appropriate ZPD level to ensure that the student's ZPD becomes an actual development. This was indicated by one respondent, *... the lecturers were very helpful. They gave us a module that focused on research.* Hence, his view of scaffolding is such that "learning should be matched in some manner with the student's developmental level" (Vygotsky 1978:85). In other words, scaffolding consists in adjusting the intensity or complexity of a task to the student's level of intellectual ability. This implies a progressive reduction of the assistance provided to Somali by lecturers and peers. Thus, the role of the MKO is to take the less knowledgeable others towards the level of independent performance.

From a sociocultural perspective on learning (Littleton & Mercer, 2010; Mercer & Howe, 2012; Tynjälä, Mason, & Lonka, 2001), cooperative work is understood to be beneficial for learning, in which students are (increasingly) oriented toward knowledge of others both within and outside the classroom. As explained by one student, *... I would seek help from the students ahead of me. I would ask what is expected of me and how should I deliver and reference.* Hence, dialogic practices (Alexander, 2008; Kim & Wilkinson, 2019; Vrikki et al. 2019; Wegerif, 2011) aimed at these intersubjective orientations are distinguished by meaningful activities with a focus on reaching a shared understanding of a task, sharing ideas, and supporting and encouraging each other to contribute and value all contributions. This is in accordance with data as stated by one participant, *... I approached a student who was doing his Master's at the time and asked him to show me his honours assignments as a sample.* Education and cognitive development are viewed as cultural processes in which a student's learning means progressing to full participation in cultural practice (Bereiter, 2002), and meaning and knowledge are 'co constructed' as joint interactional achievements (Rojas-Drummond, Littleton, Hernández, & Ziga, 2010). This is consistent with Vygotsky's fundamental ideas, according to which the zone of proximal development is an

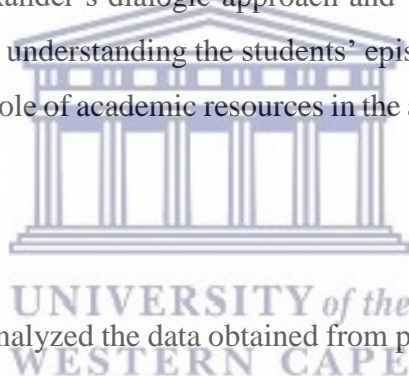
essential feature of learning in which the role of social interaction is indispensable: "learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that can operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and cooperating with his peers" (Vygotsky, 1978: 40).

In support of these statements, Abbas et al. (2021:14) show that foreign Students in Germany enrolled in language and prep courses to prepare for degree courses. This is in accordance with the current study in which one participant explained... *my teacher suggested that I take myself to drama class because of the fear and lack of confidence she picked up.* According to educators, this trend signifies the importance of scaffolding/support programmes during degree courses and pre-study preparation and counselling. These sentiments concur with the current study in which most students indicated that they enrolled in preparatory language courses before the commencement of their graduate studies. While a few explained that they did part-time work to get exposure. Others mentioned that time did not permit them to enrol in such classes. As a result, they planted themselves in an environment that helped them acquire the language more quickly.

This sub-section has looked at the supportive role of the MKO in the acquisition of Academic English Proficiency. Robin Alexander's dialogic approach and Vygotsky social-cultural theory were used as a theoretical lens in understanding the students' epistemic access and success. In the next section, we will look at the role of academic resources in the acquisition of Academic English Proficiency.

4.1. Conclusion

This chapter has presented and analyzed the data obtained from participants using in-depth semi-structured interviews. This chapter was divided into two sections. In the first section, I presented and analyzed three main themes of the challenges of Academic English Proficiency of Somali postgraduate students at the University of the Western Cape. In the second section, I presented and discussed four main themes of the strategies of Somali postgraduate students at the University of the Western Cape used to acquire Academic English Proficiency. In both sections, I thematically analyze the research questions and the objectives of the study. The study of Vygotsky's social-cultural theory and epistemological access as a theoretical lens in understanding the students' challenges and strategies in acquiring academic English proficiency. In the next chapter, I will conclude the study.



CHAPTER 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Introduction

The main goal of this chapter is to answer the study's research questions and demonstrate what contribution the study makes to the field of academic English proficiency in terms of determining whether challenges of academic English proficiency can be overcome and what strategies can be used to acquire academic English proficiency. This chapter also attempts to answer the research questions, so the study's findings are discussed here. Following that, a summary, recommendations, and the contribution of this study to the field of language education are presented, followed by limitations of the study and future research possibilities,

5.2 Responses to Research Questions

The discussion of the results begins by exploring the relationship between challenges of academic English proficiency, epistemological access, and Vygotsky's social constructivism as evident in the narrative inquiry. Secondly, the relationship between the strategies for acquiring academic English proficiency and Vygotsky's sociocultural framework and Archer's framework are explored. Thirdly, findings on how participants developed their academic language proficiency are also discussed.

5.2.1 Challenges and Strategies for acquiring academic English proficiency through narrative inquiry

While a narrative inquiry was merely used as a point of departure to document the participants of this study according to their challenges and strategies for acquiring academic English proficiency was concerned, their responses were analyzed. Therefore, the raw data was, narrative, thematically and discourse analysed. Thus, the results from those analyses are discussed here, based on the topic of the participants' academic English proficiency journeys. This topic was given taking into consideration that all these participants were postgraduate Somali student migrants who had challenges with academic English proficiency in their postgraduate studies in South Africa. The study is framed on Morrow's "epistemological theory, Vygotsky constructivism, theory, social cultural theory, and Archer's structure and agency framework, which the students lacked. This task was viewed given Morrow's "epistemological

(lack) access” view to disciplinary knowledge (academic English proficiency) and the ways of knowing within a discipline (academic English proficiency) on which the study is framed (Morrow 2009). The task was also viewed given Vygotsky’s social-cultural theory of human learning describes learning as a social process and the origination of human intelligence in society or culture. Which the students lacked before coming to their new environment.

Also, these postgraduate students through their new social environment in South Africa and different strategies were able to acquire academic English proficiency. This infers that students also have a responsibility to commit to Epistemological Access they found in South Africa. As argued by Morrow (2009: 6) that “in the same way in which no one else can do my running for me, no one else can do my learning for me”, This task was given with the presence of Vygotsky’s theory of learning and development the “Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)” on which the study is framed, which was used in view was a key construct in Lev Vygotsky's. The Zone of Proximal Development allowed us to tap into the space between what Somali students could do without assistance and what they could do with adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

5.2.1.1 Academic English Proficiency in Somalia

Results from the narratives that participants produced indicate that it had not been easy for them to acquire academic English proficiency in their undergraduate program in Somalia. This was due to the quality of education which participants characterized to be of poor quality, insufficient numbers of qualified teachers, and inadequate resources, caused by decades of conflict.

Although all participants studied at institutions where English was used as a medium of instruction in their undergraduate studies, it is worrying that these students, who were going to enrol in postgraduate studies at the university of the Western Cape where English is the medium of instruction, still had major challenges in Academic English Proficiency. The students had challenges in all four core skills of academic English proficiency. According to Themane & Mabasa (2022), a physical entry into an institution of learning does not automatically translate into an enabling environment through the provision of resources such as academic, administrative, and support staff. Similarly, Morrow (2009) explains that an institution of learning requires the provision of tutorials and academic development support services to students. This is the view of epistemological access theory. In the case of this study, Somali

undergraduate students had access to institutions however due to the poor quality of institutions these students did not have access to qualified teachers, adequate resources, and an enabling environment to acquire academic English proficiency. Similarly, according to Gauden (2011), language is a fluid, lively, and individualistic entity that is constantly changing and evolving. It is not constrained by set limits, but rather consists of a diverse range of hybrids and infinite variations that arise from its imaginative, communicative, interactive, dialogic, contested, mediated, and negotiated nature. This is the view of a socio-cultural theory and, that students are assisted to reach their ZPD through the process of mediation by the MKO. Again, in the case of this study Somali undergraduate students, were in a social environment that did not support their learning capabilities and had no access to MKOs.

5.2.1.2 Academic English Proficiency in South Africa

Results from the narratives that participants produced indicate a great concern regarding the transition they needed to make when using academic English proficiency at the postgraduate level. The participants' apprehension of not having academic English proficiency can be seen in the following response from a participant:

The challenges were many. It was one of fear and regret. ... *I was very worried about communication.*

Although students at this stage did not start their postgraduate programs at UWC and had just come to South Africa we can see their apprehension at the thought of adjusting to the demands of English-medium higher education in South Africa. In the above sentence, we also see that the students were more concerned about communicating in comparison to the other three core skills of academic English proficiency. This is because as mentioned above these students are aware of the different societal, educational, and disciplinary backgrounds they have come from. Evans and Morrison (2011) state that international students experience linguistic, cognitive, and cultural difficulties when undertaking degree programs through the medium of a second language. Evans and Morrison further state that understanding technical vocabulary, comprehending lectures, achieving an appropriate academic style, and meeting institutional and disciplinary requirements is a challenge in itself.

While international students face limited competence and confidence in academic English proficiency as in the case of Somali students, interestingly local students encounter the same kinds of problems as their international counterparts notes Andrade (2009). This phenomenon also applies to South Africa the host country in which there is a sizable body of literature that

indicates that the academic performance of locals is a cause for concern at South African universities mainly due to Academic English proficiency (Van Rooy, 2015). For instance, Tanga and Maphosa, (2018), maintain that South African students face problems with writing, referencing, plagiarism, and English. Tanga and Maphosa concluded that students at university face a myriad of academic challenges, due to poor socio-economic backgrounds and the low level of education that they received from the apartheid- influenced system, which some schools still use. Furthermore, Letseka and Maile (2008) and Scott (2009) through output rates at universities also continue to reflect historical inequalities, with white and Indian students performing much better than black and coloured students, which like the Somali students' factors epistemological access to the part of black and coloured students.

However, Andrade, (2009) also maintains that these challenges are unsurprisingly magnified concerning international students often by their limited competence and confidence in English, unlike their local counterparts, which I agree with when it comes to Somali students and black and coloured students. What this research also suggests, however, is that international students generally rise to these challenges, and through diligence, determination and the deployment of effective learning strategies are able to accomplish their personal and educational goals during their sojourn abroad. The evidence from the narratives that participants produced indicates that students were able to overcome these and other problems through a combination of strong motivation, hard work, effective learning strategies, and supportive peer networks. For instance, most of the students took it upon themselves to enrol in short courses, take lessons or do a part-time job while waiting for admission (see Participants in Section 4.2). Students referred to different ways in which they tried to improve their academic English. Learning English the student is tied to three of this study's frameworks: Archer's framework as well as Vygotsky's sociocultural framework and social constructivism framework. Once students came to South Africa It was up to their willingness to learn English just as much as being provided with the knowledge that they require to learn, by being assisted by the MKOs and their new social environment.

Coley (1999:62) states that to ensure that international postgraduate students are competent in academic English proficiency language, it is worthwhile to consider that they have competence and performance in the:

- Language of academic readings
- Content of academic readings

- Language of instructors
- Content of instructors
- Language of other students
- Taking notes in lectures
- Taking part in class discussions
- Asking questions
- Assignments, content
- Assignments, language

It is interesting to note that most of this study also alluded to the challenges of those dimensions while figuring out whether students through agency, MKO, and social environment could promote their academic English language proficiency. For example, participants are proud that the strategies they used to acquire academic English proficiency worked despite the challenges they faced.

Also, this is where Vygotsky's concept of mediation comes into play, emphasizing the function of human and symbolic intermediates placed between the particular learner, in this case, Somali postgraduate students and the content to be acquired i.e. academic English proficiency. Psychological tools are culturally distinctive symbolic systems that, when internalized by individual learners, constitute their inner cognitive tools. In this case, Somali students were able to internalize the dos and don'ts of Academic English proficiency for instance the rules of academic writing. Beyond their theoretical role, mediation and psychological tools serve an important applied function by serving as the foundation for several applied programs that offer new techniques for improving students' cognitive functions, developing meta-cognition, and integrating cognitive elements into instructional practice in the case of this study Somali students were able to use their acquired academic English theories practically through the demands of their university modules, for instance, essay writing and presentations

The role that Somalia's history and language policy play in this regard also has to be noted. According to Seife (2021) with the arrival of the colonizers, the system is in a fragmented manner. However, internal rivalry and geopolitics could not allow any colonial attempt to sync European education systems into society. As a result, the Indigenous system aborted, and Eurocentric education systems have not succeeded in shaping the nations as required. Participants referred to their education where different languages were used in the classroom. Besides, Somalia was and still is the most volatile country because of its geopolitics and historical controversies over colonial boundaries. Somalia is among the countries that are

affected by the disruption of education systems. Consequently, exposure to and opportunity to use English is minimal, and English has not become a useful means of communication.

5.2.2 Research question 1: What challenges do Somali postgraduate students at UWC face with Academic English Proficiency?

The data from the participants regarding the challenges of academic English proficiency before and during their enrolment in postgraduate studies at the University of the western cape show that all participants experienced low academic English proficiency. It was possible to understand their challenges with academic English proficiency as they focused separately on each of the four skills of language, speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Findings regarding the students' challenges in language proficiency were analysed from their language biography, their education in Somalia, English courses taken in Somalia and South Africa, part-time jobs in South Africa, and their postgraduate studies at the University of the Western Cape. The answer to this research question is complex, with data showing epistemic challenges determination, resilience and improvements to overcome challenges of speaking, listening, writing and reading.

A narrative inquiry was used as a baseline to understand the challenges these students faced in their journey of acquiring academic English proficiency. This was done through semi-structured interviews over Zoom due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The narratives were recorded to repeatedly listen to the interviews and transcribe to analyze the participants' challenges with academic English Proficiency. After this, the thematic method was administered.

Below, I discuss the data collected on the challenges of academic English proficiency under three headings: data showing communication (speaking and listening) challenges, data showing writing challenges and data showing challenges with academic reading proficiency.

5.2.2.1 Challenges with Communication

The most rampant challenge to emerge from the findings among students was communication. Participants seemed to think that communication challenges consisted of possessing little knowledge of listening and speaking English. This emerged from their experiences in South Africa when they were unable to communicate effectively in English a requirement in their new social and academic environment. Participants were able to refer to their learning journeys where they indicated that there was little communication in English from primary school to

undergraduate studies in Somalia. Alharbi (2015) explains that learning communicative English in a country where English is not an official language or widely spoken results in the absence of authentic language learning situations outside the classroom and presents a significant challenge to improving students' English communication skills. Alharbi further explains that specific obstacles in the learning environment can also result in students' limited use of English inside the classroom. These issues ultimately affect students' English-speaking capacity. It is therefore not surprising that participants had challenges with communicating in English.

According to Gullberg (2011), the process of learning how to communicate in a second language is complex, gradual, nonlinear as well as dynamic. In this study, the narrative inquiry showed that some students went to schools where English was the medium of instruction as early as primary school, others as early as secondary school and all went to undergraduate institutions in which English was the medium of instruction. As a result, the analysis of the narrative inquiry showed that some students struggled more with communicating in English than others. However, all students believed there was a lot of room for improvement in their communication skills. Consequently, some participants after completing their undergraduate studies enrolled in short courses in Somalia with foreign instructors with the hope of improving their communication skills. While others enrolled in short courses in South Africa while they waited for their enrolment at UWC. Yet others decided to seek out work once they came to South Africa in the hope of improving their communication English before beginning their postgraduate studies (see 4.2.1).

Firstly it should be noted that the participants are individuals who came from the same educational background and same linguistic backgrounds, which suggests that their communication learning difficulties are grounded in weaknesses in their prior learning experiences which focused on grammar and reading skills in teacher-centred classrooms, not conversational skills. Hence they were exposed to poor-quality education, and unqualified teachers as they have stated in their narratives. It is no surprise that Sawyer (2005) argues that most recent research studies of international students, identify their problems in coping with academic English and especially with speaking. He argues that this is especially made clear in the evidence of students themselves. Chappell (2018) further states, "Of all the social and academic issues and problems facing international students that are cited in recent studies – differences in learning style, culture shock, homesickness, social difficulties – the problem they most often refer to is difficulties with English. Especially their incomplete understanding of

lecturers' spoken English, and feel unhappy with their oral performances. "It is evident that most participants lacked the lexicon to speak English in their new social and academic environment, and struggled to articulate themselves accurately when formulating complex sentences (see section 4.2.1).

Although the participants in their motivation to acquire communication did short courses in Somalia and South Africa it is evident that there was no significant improvement in terms of their ability to communicate fluently once they began their postgraduate studies as was pointed out in section 4.2.1. It was noted that participants received poor-quality English Instruction which lacked coaching, training, practice, or scaffolding due to the lack of epistemological access and MKO.

5.2.2.2 Challenges with Academic writing

This discussion first focuses on the findings about the challenges of Academic English writing among Somali students. Participants seemed to think that academic writing challenges consisted of their inability to construct meaningful paragraphs. This emerged from their experiences in their postgraduate studies in South Africa when they were unable to write effectively, as they were lacking in orthography, morphology, lexicon, and syntax, as well as the discourse and rhetorical conventions of academic English writing. Participants were able to refer to their learning journeys where they indicated that there were only able to write what they had memorized beforehand from primary school to their undergraduate studies in Somalia as shown in section 4.2.3. Cennetkuşu (2017) explains that the foremost difficulty international students face is their lack of familiarity with the conventions of academic writing as what they were taught and what was expected from them were quite different. Thus, the students were reported to seek help from friends, writing tutors and/or instructors, and academic texts to meet the writing demands of their degree programs. It is therefore not surprising that participants had challenges with communicating in English.

According to Bordonaro (2008) information literacy and acquiring academic writing proficiency take place simultaneously for both graduate and undergraduate students who speak English as a Second language. In this study, the narrative inquiry showed that Somali students in their undergraduate studies although they wrote in English did not have access to information literacy. For instance, they did not engage in library practices that could be viewed as language learning experiences Hence, for these students, there was no connection between the two processes and were unable to write research essays when they enrolled in their graduate studies

in South Africa. As a result, the writing process exerted the strongest challenges initially, with most students saying that they were stuck and all over the place trying to fit the most useful or relevant sources into appropriate sections in their essays (see 4.2.3).

Some of the students' comments at this juncture also opened the door to the challenge of their ignorance regarding academic integrity and plagiarism. Participants noted that plagiarism issues were a source of much confusion for many of the students. Fatemi and Saito (2020) explain that the transition from one educational system to another and a lack of familiarity with new academic integrity standards and instructions can create some challenges for international students and lead them to intentionally or unintentionally demonstrate some form of academic dishonesty (that is, plagiarism) while completing their studies. Hence implications from these results shed a strong light on the need to research plagiarism issues in more depth with international students.

In conclusion, the participants' challenges were a result of the lack of epistemological access that stemmed from the quality of education in Somalia. In turn, these students could not reach their ZPD, from an educational system that produced instructors that could not provide the correct guidance and mentorship. As a result, there was no scaffolding took place when corrective feedback was given to the participants by the MKO.

5.2.2.3 Challenges with Academic Reading

This discussion first focuses on the findings about the challenges of Academic English reading among Somali postgraduate students. The majority of participants seemed to be comfortable with reading in comparison with the other three language skills (see 4.2.3). However, for these students' academic reading challenges consisted of their inability to spend long hours reading. This emerged from their experiences in their postgraduate studies in South Africa when they were unable to sit for long hours in the library for research purposes. It can be argued that this is because participants lacked the combination of attention, memory, perceptual processes, and comprehension processes. Gökhan (2012) explains that reading involves both comprehension and interpretation of a text by using questions formulated by the reader and various levels of cognitive processes are required for an efficient reading process. It is clear that the students saw reading as a set of mechanical skills to be learned once and for all, and not a complex process of making meaning from a text, for a variety of purposes and in a wide range of contexts, which in the case of these participants' was for academic purposes. It is therefore not surprising that participants had challenges with academic reading in English (see 4.2.3).

According to Demiröz (2017), reading is a complex and multifaceted activity and a complicated skill for students. In this study, the narrative inquiry showed that Somali students in their undergraduate studies in Somalia while all their textbooks were written in English from as early as their primary education there was no essential interaction between the language and thought in reading. Goodman (1984) explains that reading is a psycholinguistic process in that it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning that the reader constructs. Hence it can be argued that in the reading process, readers use their background knowledge about the text's topic and structure along with their linguistic knowledge and reading strategies to achieve their purpose for reading in postgraduate studies (Peregoy and Boyle, 2001). In this sense, reading not only includes encoding the language or the written word, but it also goes beyond the information in relation to the world (Freire and Macedo, 1998).

The students' narratives also highlight the direct correlation between the reading habits of students and the educational system they are exposed to (Sanacore, J., 2002). What is clear here is that it seems not possible to improve students' reading habits in the Somali educational system that promotes rote learning and leads students to memorize things that are taught to them see section 4.2.4. As a result, Somali students in their undergraduate studies did not have the epistemological access to develop their research skills through reading and to approach events critically dealing both with themselves and their environment. Additionally, the participants' poor reading habits highlight the close relationship between economic development as well as social development. This is because due to poor economic development students were stuck with a poor quality education that did not promote reading habits in a student-centred education system. Gökhan, (2012) explains that economic development is a natural process that makes social change and development faster and the importance of reading can be felt very closely in developed societies.

According to Demiröz (2017), success in reading skills is closely correlated to the attitude towards reading. This is because attitude is an emotional and mental readiness, or a preliminary tendency based on experience, knowledge, emotion or motivation on any subject, social topic or event. McKenna and Kear (1990) explain that students' attitudes toward reading are the leading factor that directly affects their reading performances. Hence it is clear that for these students there was a negative attitude towards reading before their postgraduate studies at UWC. This in turn affected the time devoted to reading and their academic success

As a result, participants had varying challenges with all four skills of academic English proficiency. A consequence of the lack of epistemological access stemmed from the quality of education in Somalia. In turn, these students could not reach their ZPD, from an educational system that produced instructors that could not provide the correct guidance and mentorship. This means there was no scaffolding taking and corrective feedback from the MKO. Additionally, the students' social-cultural environment did not contribute to achieving the required proficiency to succeed

However when students found themselves in a new social environment (South Africa) that provided epistemological access, in which they could reach their ZPD and get corrective feedback from the MKO these students through agency sort strategies to acquire academic English proficiency will be discussed in the second research question.

In conclusion, in analysing the first question of the study that is the challenges of the students in acquiring academic English proficiency were made possible by five theoretical interlinked frameworks. Firstly, Epistemological access presented itself in the form of Educational institutions that are of global standards and offer successful pedagogies in South Africa. Secondly, it was possible due to the students' social-cultural environment which promoted a learning environment that allowed them to overcome their disadvantages of poor English language skills. Thirdly, it was through social constructivism that Somali postgraduate students were able to acquire academic English proficiency with the role of (MKOs) and with the student's zone of proximal development (ZPD). Finally and most importantly without the students' agency beginning from their decision to be migrant students to taking the initiative to master academic English proficiency irrespective of all the structural constraints they faced along the way in succeeding in their postgraduate studies.

5.2.3 What strategies do Somali postgraduate students at UWC students use to overcome such challenges?

The data from the participants regarding the strategies they used to acquire academic English proficiency during their graduate journey shows that all students were determined and resilient in making an effort to improve their language proficiency. Findings regarding the students' challenges in language proficiency were analysed from the narrative inquiry. The answer to this research question is complex, with data showing the positive impact of epistemic access, agency, and the social-cultural environment in overcoming the challenges of speaking, listening, writing, and reading.

Below, I discuss the data collected on the strategies of academic English proficiency under three headings: data showing student agency, data showing social environment and data showing MKO.

5.2.3.1 Student Agency as a Strategy.

In this sub-section, we will discuss the findings in terms of Archer's first notion of agency. The most recurring strategy to emerge from the findings among participants was student agency. Participants seemed to think that it was mostly through their agency that they were able to acquire academic English proficiency. For these participants agency involves persistence and decision-making, such as how to acquire academic proficiency, finish tasks and act on opportunities, regardless of all the challenges. Agency also refers to as the mediating factor linking intentionality, self-reflection, and self-efficacy (Bandura 2006) which materialized from their efforts and attempts to effectively master academic English before and during their postgraduate studies. For instance, some participants enrolled in short English courses in Somalia to improve their communication skills. In South Africa before their enrolment in postgraduate studies, they were persistent to make an effort in improving their language skills through short English courses and part-time jobs. During their postgraduate studies, participants continued their intentionality, self-reflection, and self-efficacy in achieving academic English proficiency. According to Tavares (2021), agency is fundamental for multilingual international students to grow and succeed in English-medium higher education. The academic experience presents the students with novel, and oftentimes challenging, situations which require them to exercise contextualized forms of agency. Tran and Vu (2018) explain that international students' agency may be "revealed through how they think they are expected to respond... and how they want to respond" to the situations around them (168). In this study, it is clear that participants continued to plan, strategize, reflect, and negotiated their needs and as a result, their agentic behaviour translated into successful outcomes.

Participants in this study referred to enabling factors that made it easy for them to acquire academic English proficiency. The findings show that participants demonstrated agency when they used recording devices, engaged in self-practice writing, accessed the internet, and visited the libraries to read and improve their language proficiencies. Some of them even went as far as going to the writing centres designated for undergraduate students. These are qualities of students who are willing to acquire academic English proficiency to be successful in the language of instruction and succeed academically. Additionally most participants in their

decision-making to improve their language proficiency. A striking observation made from the results is the fact that participants were determined to be at the same level linguistically as their fellow postgraduate students and even outperform them irrespective of their backgrounds and their challenges. This for me is having the power to change one's life, given the realization that one needs to change for the better.

The results of this study also shed light on Archer's second notion of structural constraints in acquiring academic English proficiency. Participants referred to a number of impediments in their journey of taking charge in acquiring language skills both in Somalia and South Africa. One of the points from the results that can be considered as a structural constraint is that although students took it upon themselves to enrol in short English courses the programs had failed them in the sense that they did not teach them communicative English. Providing learning grammar only took place in the final year of their teacher training. Another structural constraint is that the University western cape accepted these students with the impression that they had the language skills to proceed with graduate studies. Other revelations from the findings worth mentioning are the cases where participants felt that they did not find the writing centre for postgraduate students helpful. As a researcher and lecturer, I share the concerns of the participants because this needs to be addressed, as I suggest in the recommendations.

Structurally, South African universities accommodate first-year students with regards to academic language skills in the form of a writing centre and English language modules in order to cover for the lack of epistemological access these students were faced with due to their social-economic background. In conclusion, it can be said that students did improve their academic English proficiency through agency despite the structural constraints.

In addition to the student, agency participants were able to improve their language skills as a result of their social environment

5.2.3.2 The Impact of the Social-Cultural Environment

In this sub-section, we will discuss the findings in terms of Vygotsky's social-cultural theory. A common strategy that emerged from the findings among students was the impact of the social environment. Participants seemed to think that it was mostly through their new social environment (South Africa) that they were able to drastically improve their academic English proficiency (see 4.3.2). For these participants this new social-cultural environment was essential and a determining factor in the development of higher mental activities including voluntary attention, intentional memory, logical thought, planning, and problem-solving in their acquisition of

academic English proficiency. According to Fahim and Haghani, (2012) learning is a product of the experiences learners as well as students encounter in their environments, being their communities or their school grounds. Hence it is clear that these participants had access to a strong relationship between culturally organized experiences and their acquisition of academic English language skills. This is because once they arrived in South Africa English language skills were positively impacted informally and formally. This is because Somali students in their new communities had to communicate in English in their day-to-day activities, they had to complete forms in English and overall engage with their new community which required using all the English language skills which was not the case in Somalia. About the students' formal academic settings students had to use English in their classrooms, conferences, and meetings. Hence it is clear that participants were in an environment that was conducive to acquiring academic English proficiency unlike their social environment in Somalia as previously alluded to, in which participants found themselves in an environment that was not conducive to learning English as there was no exposure to it and in which most cases, teachers used codeswitching indiscriminately in lessons meant to develop English language proficiency. In conclusion, this study is in agreement with the sociocultural theory, that learning is thought of as a social event taking place as a result of interaction between the learner and the environment (Fahim and Haghani, 2012:693).

According to Nurfaidah (2018), the social-cultural environment is very useful in teaching and learning a language since it emphasizes how interactions between people become the most important mechanism by which learning and development occur. For instance, participants in their new social environment were exposed to listening to English, mixing with English-speaking colleagues and friends, watching English movies, and being exposed to English materials (see section 4.2.3). It is argued that the intellectual skills acquired by language learners are directly related to their interaction with teachers and peers in specific problem-solving environments. In other words, students internalize any help adults or other more capable people give to them which sooner or later they make use of in directing their subsequent problem-solving behaviours. In this sense, the interaction between people and individual psychological processes relies on an explicit and direct connection. Therefore, the role of South African teachers, peers, and others in the teaching and learning process was of a pivotal point since these students' development can be driven by their assistance in social bonds (Samana, 2013).

5.2.3.3 The Supportive Role of The MKOs

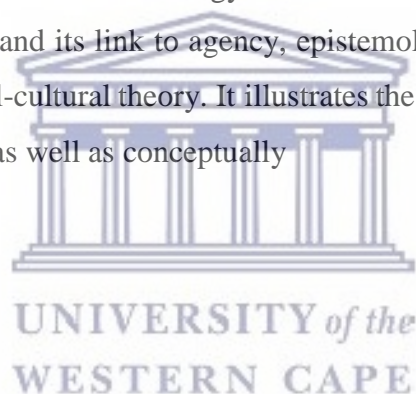
In this section, we will discuss the findings in terms of Vygotsky's social-constructivism theory. Another common strategy among students that emerged from the findings was the impact of the MKOs and how participants framed their knowledge using the notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (see 4.3.3). Participants seemed to think that it was mostly through the MKOs in South Africa that they were able to drastically improve their academic English proficiency. For these participants the MKOs were essential and a determining factor in the development of all four language skills required to cope with the intensity and requirements of postgraduate studies. According to Mitoumba-Tindy (2017) MKOs work with students to generate knowledge, acquire understanding, and convey meaning, acting as more knowledgeable others MKOs in this developmental zone. Hence it is clear that these participants had access to MKOs who used talk, prompting, Socratic questioning, and other meditation techniques to ensure that they retained ownership of their academic English proficiency and in turn in charge of their academic success in their postgraduate studies. As a result, Somali students internalized the critical thinking, communication techniques, writing processes, and reading techniques that bring together their subject knowledge and academic literacies and skills, which will, hopefully, follow them in the future, with or without assistance and coaching.

MKOs played a major supportive role as a zone of proximal academic English proficiency development during their postgraduate. These MKOs consisted of in-class and out-of-class academic support such as Lecturers, peers, and writing centres. The in-class work environment in which lecturers assess is useful and is required for the accountability of the participants in their academic language proficiency development. For instance, Lecturers require that students don't repeat the same mistakes that were corrected for example in written assignments, presentations and tasks which all require development in all four language skills. With regards to the 'out-of-class' work environment such as peers and writing centres it's informal, non-judgemental, non-grading, and friendly. This makes it a learning-conducive space where students can "develop their confidence and ability" Hence it is clear that participants had access MKOs that helped them improve their academic English proficiency both in class and out of class, unlike the MKOs in Somalia as previously alluded to, that did not have the correct training and materials to help their students achieve academic English proficiency. In conclusion, this study is in agreement with the socio-constructivist theory, that MKOs play a major supportive role as a zone of proximal development.

In analysing the second question of the study that is the strategies of the students in acquiring academic English proficiency were made possible by five theoretical interlinked frameworks. Firstly, by Epistemological access presented itself in the form of educational institutions that are of global standards and offer successful pedagogies in South Africa. Secondly, it was possible due to the students' social-cultural environment which promoted a learning environment that allowed them to overcome their disadvantages of poor English language skills. Thirdly, it was through social constructivism that Somali postgraduate students were able to acquire academic English proficiency with the role of MKOs and with the student's zone of proximal development (ZPD). Finally, and most importantly without the students' agency beginning from their decision to be migrant students to taking the initiative to master academic English proficiency irrespective of all the structural constraints they faced along the way in succeeding in their postgraduate studies.

5.2.5 Contribution of The Study

The diagram below illustrates the methodology as well as the complexity of Acquiring Academic English proficiency and its link to agency, epistemological access, agency, social-constructivist theory, and social-cultural theory. It illustrates the contribution my study makes: methodologically, empirically as well as conceptually



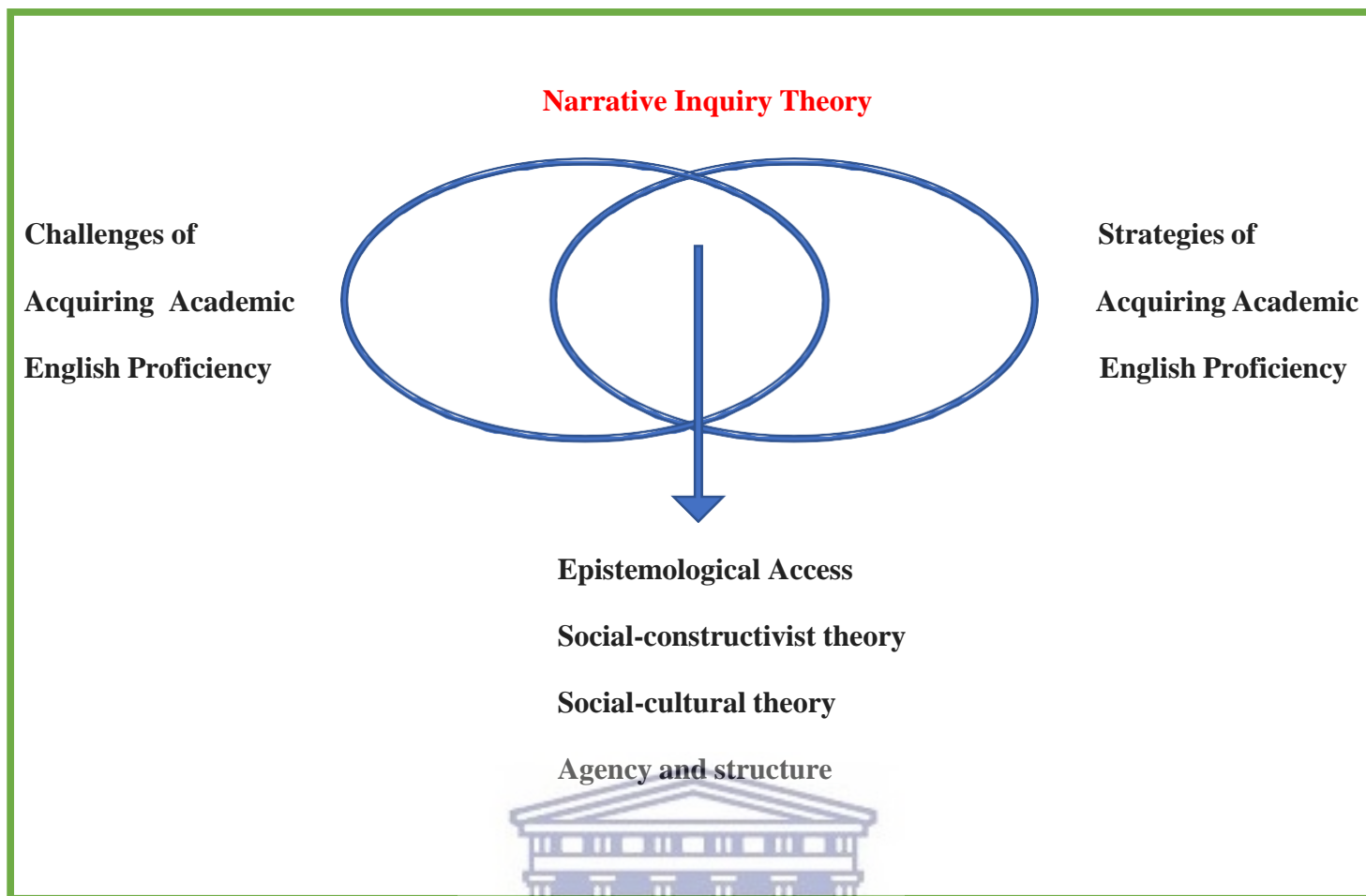


Figure 2: Contribution of the study

The initial contribution this study is making is by demonstrating how narrative inquiry theory served two purposes – as a methodological approach as well as a data collection method. Narrative inquiry as a theory (the green square) encompasses the challenges and strategies of acquiring Academic English proficiency. Data was collected through narratives, thus narrative inquiry informed how the data were to be collected.

The second contribution which is conceptual is illustrated by how both the challenges and strategies of acquiring Academic English proficiency are driven by epistemological access, students' agency despite structural constraints, social constructivist theory, and social-cultural theory. Firstly the study makes the contribution that with regards to the challenges of acquiring Academic English proficiency, it is due to the lack of epistemological access. This is because Somali students did not have access to the disciplinary knowledge of Academic English Proficiency and the ways of knowing within this discipline. The second contribution it makes

concerning the challenges of acquiring Academic English proficiency is that the lack of epistemological access was exasperated by MKOs that could not develop the student's proximal zone. This is because they did not have the right pedagogical training or the right curriculum. The third contribution to the challenges of Academic English Proficiency is due to the hindrance of the social environment of these students. This is because in Somalia English is spoken as a third language and hence there is no way that these students could acquire English language skills from their social environment. Finally, the study concludes that the cause of these challenges is a direct result of the political state of the country.

As for the strategies for acquiring Academic English proficiency, the study firstly contributes that it was through the students' agency that they were able to acquire Academic English proficiency. This is because it was through their intentionality that they decided to be student migrants. Once they arrived in South Africa it was also through their power and will to acquire academic English proficiency to succeed academically. that made them academically successful. Although they faced the structural constraint of being perceived to be proficient in academic English proficiency like other international postgraduate students hosted at UWC. As a result, the university did not put a structure to assist these students. The study also contributes that once these students got epistemological access, MKOs provided all the necessary input needed to acquire academic English proficiency, and the social-cultural environment allowed these students to acquire proficiency in all four language skills and successfully completed their postgraduate programs.

Narrative inquiry enabled me to find out how students navigated through their lives which I derived from their narratives because they were telling stories about their educational journeys, particularly their challenges with academic English proficiency teaching and the strategies they used to acquire proficiency. Thus, there is also knowledge contribution in a form of firstly, testing a theory and secondly developing and implementing a model that other researchers can emulate and utilise in their contexts.

Additionally, this study has also contributed to a call to review the language policies of Somalia's private and public educational institutions. Additionally, the study calls for quality education assurance bodies in Somalis to make sure that these educational institutions are delivering on the claims that they are making. For instance, if these universities are marketed as institutions where English is the medium of instruction then code-switching should not be tolerated. Moreover, only qualified lecturers and instructors should be employed to achieve quality education.

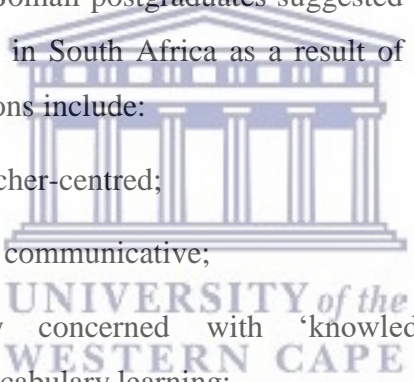
Lastly, the study has also contributed to a call that South African students should accommodate postgraduate students that do not come from countries where English is not correctly used as a medium of instruction like Somalia or where another language is used for instance Libya where Arabic is used a medium of instruction in undergraduate studies.

Therefore the findings of this study may add to the literature by other authors who are calling for an alternative language policy as this current one is not beneficial to everyone.

5.3 Conclusion

This study set out to determine the narratives around the challenges of academic English proficiency as well as the strategies for acquiring academic English proficiency through a narrative inquiry. It is important to note that narrative inquiry can serve as an effective tool in understanding students' journeys in terms of acquiring information about their challenges and strategies in acquiring academics. Hence a wealth of information can be derived through its usage, as in the case of this study.

Research on the challenges of Somali postgraduates suggested the students are generally ill-prepared linguistically to study in South Africa as a result of their experience of language learning in Somalia. Other reasons include:

- 
- classes are generally teacher-centred;
 - classes are generally not communicative;
 - classes are generally concerned with 'knowledge about the language' grammar/translation/vocabulary learning;
 - classes have an insufficient focus on oral/aural skills;
 - students are insufficiently prepared in Somalia in study skills.
 - essay writing and researching skills are not well developed;
 - library skills and use are poorly developed;
 - programmes are heavily teacher-centred;
 - students are unprepared for Western lifestyles, attitudes and ways of learning.

- Transitioning to South African higher education is a serious difficulty for Somali students. It seems reasonable to conclude that:
- students do indeed suffer a culture shock relating to learning styles and methods;
- students have considerable uncertainty over what is required for learning in South Africa.
- students lacked confidence

Research shows that once Somali postgraduates came to South Africa they were able to acquire academic English proficiency. This is because

- classes are generally student-centred;
- classes are generally communicative;
- classes are generally concerned with the practical use of the language
- classes have a sufficient focus on oral/aural skills;
- students' study skills are sufficiently improved by the MKO.
- essay writing and researching skills are developed;
- library skills and use are developed;
- programmes are heavily student-centred;
- students are made aware of Western lifestyles, attitudes and ways of learning.
- The transition to South African higher education is a serious difficulty for Somali students. It seems reasonable to conclude that:
- students eased into their new environment relating to learning styles and methods;
- students considerably improved and were more knowledgeable of what was required of them.
- students had gained confidence

The study found several determinants of the educational migration of Somali postgraduate students to South Africa namely Increased Earning Potential, Career Development, family migration, the global reputation of South African institutions and that these institutions are English-taught. However, due to the educational state of Somalia, students still faced challenges of various levels in Academic English proficiency even after enrolling in English

courses both in Somalia and South Africa namely. To overcome such challenges Somali postgraduate students employed several strategies namely, scaffolding from lecturers and peers, academic and social environment, writing centres, library, the internet and social media. These findings respond directly to Epistemic access as well as Vygotsky's and Archer's assertions that learning and knowledge creation are social constructs that require one's initiative (Vygotsky, 1978; Archer, 1995).

5.4 Recommendations

The recommendations of this study are twofold. Firstly, recommendations emerging from this study are presented here. Secondly, the results of this study exposed several recommendations from participants regarding academic English language proficiency from their host countries

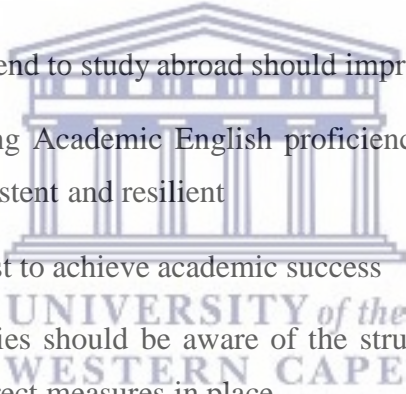
The value of narrative writing was demonstrated, albeit to a limited extent. The first recommendation is therefore that a verbal narrative of this kind is introduced much earlier in students. This will allow some insight into the student's academic journeys which will then allow the involved parties to improve the educational system and policies.

The recommendations of the study include:

- Curriculum developers, educators, and the government in Somalia should agree on one curriculum and one language to avoid code-switching which results in language challenges.
- Teachers in Somalia should be regulated by an official governmental body to check for quality assurance.
- Academic resources such as libraries and computer labs play a huge role in teaching and should be invested in
- Social environments should be created in which the language of instruction is practised
- The usage of multiple languages at different stages of schooling has resulted in confusion and a breakdown of coordination and should be brought to a stop.
- During the rapid educational expansion in the 1970s, Somali language instructional materials were quickly prepared and lacked systemic planning, hence these materials should be revisited and brought to global standards.

- Higher education in Somalia suffers from a lack of data collecting relevant data to the country's educational needs, hence this should be dealt with by all parties involved.
- A shortage of adequately trained workers exists.
- The country's higher education and research have suffered due to the brain drain and this should be reversed and made a top priority
- Aside from providing law and order, one of the essential roles of the state that is noticeably lacking in Somali public life is its regulatory authority. This is evident
- in all aspects of life, including education, as private individuals and groups initially established schools without cooperation.
- The requirement for a single authority to handle matters of administration, examination, curriculum, certification, and training

These recommendations for the students include:

- 
- Somali students who intend to study abroad should improve their language skills.
 - Acquiring and improving Academic English proficiency is an ongoing process and students should be consistent and resilient
 - Student agency is a must to achieve academic success
 - Finally, the host countries should be aware of the struggles and challenges of such students and put the correct measures in place.
 - use our induction period to concentrate on study patterns;
 - spend more class time on directing students' outside-class learning, especially in the use of the Resources Centre;
 - find ways of increasing students' confidence in their autonomous learning skills;

5.5 Limitations Of The Study

This study aimed to investigate what challenges students faced and what strategies they used to overcome these challenges. Although the study aimed to have a case of 5 participants only, it was hoped that all 10 participants would take part in the first part of the study. However, this did not materialize because all these students repeated the same narrative. This is because these students went to the same universities and had the same experiences.

Based on the findings of this study, participants struggled with academic English proficiency in Somalia and once they came to South Africa they were able to acquire Academic English proficiency. Taking into account the current situation of the Somali Educational system and language policy, it is no surprise that Somali students were not proficient in academic English proficiency even though they went to institutions that claimed to use English as a medium of instruction. Somalia after independence did not agree on what language to use at all levels of Education. As a result:

- Most teachers were trained in Arabic, Italian, Somali and English thus their English proficiency was not sufficient;
- Some teachers did not receive training and just took up teaching as a career
- The implementation and interpretation of the language policy were not decided on by the time the civil war broke which left teachers and institutions directors to decide what languages and curriculums should be used
- The indigenous languages are not developed to the level that they can assist in the facilitation of mother tongue acquisition; as well as
- The lack of English exposure to the general Somali community did not allow for English skills growth.

5.6 Future Research Possibilities

A comparative study could be carried out which will look at international postgraduate students who speak the language of instruction as a second language, and explore how they navigate their new challenges at those particular universities and host countries.

Another research possibility is to replicate this study in terms of its methodology because the usage of narrative inquiry to study the challenges and strategies of acquiring academic English

proficiency has not been done on Somali students or students who come from troubled countries.

Another possible study could be a similar but longitudinal study, for a much longer period than I had in this study. Having more time for a similar study would yield different results as, instead of carrying out the study only in the final year of study, it could be conducted from the third year, and in this way, students would have more time and be willing to participate in the study. With the current study, students felt that they had no time to partake in any other activities as they felt that they were overloaded with too many academic responsibilities.



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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Main question: What are the narratives of Somali immigrant students at UWC where English is the medium of instruction?

Specifically, this study will respond to the following subsidiary questions:

1. Biographical Details

- 1.1 What is your age, gender, home language and the highest level of education attained?
- 1.2. When did you arrive in South Africa and why did you leave Somalia?
- 1.3. Would you give reasons why you left Somalia and came to South Africa?

2. General exposure to English

- 2.1. Where did you do your undergrad and what was the language of instruction? What were your experiences of being taught in that language?
- 2.2 Can you detail your previous exposure to the English language before enrolment in higher education?
- 2.3 Can you detail your exposure to the English language away from your academic environment during their academic period?

3. English as a medium of instruction at the University

- 3.1 What challenges do Somali postgraduate students at University face with Academic English Proficiency?

(explain to them AEP and how studies show that students who speak English as a second language irrespective of their background and nationality struggle with AEP)

- 3.2 What strategies do Somali postgraduate students at UWC use to overcome such challenges?
- 3.3 What do you think should be done to improve the situation for you concerning academic English Proficiency to support Somali students at UWC?

Use both languages freely

LANGUAGE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (LED)
Education Building, University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X 17, Bellville, 7530, South Africa
Tel: 021 959 4088 Email:
mdayimani@uwc.ac.za
Fax: 021 959 2647/3358 Website:
www.uwc.ac.za

Appendix B: Letter seeking permission to conduct research/Information sheet.

University of the Western Cape
Robert Sobukwe Road
Bellville, 7535

13 June 2021

Dear Student,

Title of the research project

The title of my research is “Challenges and Strategies of Academic English Learning: A case study of Somali Students at UWC”.

Research aims

The primary aim of this study is to explore the challenges Somali postgraduate students face at UWC and the strategies they employ to overcome such challenges. For that reason, the main aim is to understand if postgraduate students are given enough opportunities to engage in Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) in English as a second language.

Data Collection

Data will be collected using Semi-structured in-depth interviews. I will record and transcribe these interviews, and examine and analyse them.

Ethical issues

Students will be informed about the purpose and nature of the research project. The research project will not interfere in any way with their studies. Students will be assured that their identity will be protected and that all the data collected will be kept confidential in a safe place. Participation is voluntary, and you may wish to withdraw at any time

Yours truly,

Sumaya Hassan

LANGUAGE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (LED)
Education Building, University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X 17, Bellville, 7530, South Africa
Tel: 021 959 4088 Email:
mdayimani@uwc.ac.za
Fax: 021 959 2647/3358 Website:
www.uwc.ac.za

Appendix C: Letter of Consent

Study: Challenges and Strategies of Academic English Learning: A case study of Somali Students at UWC

I hereby consent to be interviewed by Sumaya Hassan to contribute to the above-mentioned study. The study has been described to me in a language that I understand, it is voluntary and in case I no longer wish to participate at any time, I may withdraw without giving reasons. I also understand that my data will be kept confidential and that I will not be personally identified in any report or other written products that may come from the research. I'm also aware I may also refuse to respond to any question if I feel I do not wish to answer it. As a participant in this study, I hereby acknowledge the following:

- The researcher has explained to me the purpose of this study. She also gave the undertaking to keep anything said in this group confidential. I understand that information received as part of the study will be used for research purposes only.
- I understand that audio recordings will not be used in any public forum such as a conference without my permission for the extract/s to be used.
- All potential risks have been explained to me.
- What I say will be confidential and my name will not be used anywhere in the research.
- Should the information I have given be used, a pseudonym will be used.
- The interview will be audio recorded.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature..... **Date**.....

LANGUAGE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (LED)
Education Building, University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X 17, Bellville, 7530, South Africa
Tel: 021 959 4088 Email:
mdayimani@uwc.ac.za
Fax: 021 959 2647/3358 Website:
www.uwc.ac.za

Appendix D: Letter seeking permission to conduct research from the registrar.

University of the Western Cape
Robert Sobukwe Road
Bellville, 7535

13 June 2021

Dear Registrar,



I am Ms Sumaya Hassan, a student at the University of the Western Cape, registered for the master's programme. The title of my research is "Challenges and Strategies of Academic English Learning: A case study of Somali Students at UWC". I seek your permission to conduct this research, in which the identity of the students who choose to partake in the study will be protected and all the data collected will be kept confidential in a safe place.

Yours truly,

Sumaya Hassan.



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